

C O M M E N T A R I E S O N T H E P E N T A T E U C H



DEUTERONOMY

ROUSAS JOHN RUSHDOONY



V A L L E C I T O , C A L I F O R N I A

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by Mark R. Rushdoony

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This volume is dedicated to
Dr. Ellsworth McIntyre
and the staff members of
Grace Community Schools, Naples, Florida
in great appreciation
for their generous support
of the work of my father.

Rev. Mark R. Rushdoony
President, Chalcedon Foundation

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Chapter One

The Covenant Prologue (Deuteronomy 1:1-4)

1. These be the words which Moses spake unto all Israel on this side Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain over against the Red sea, between Paran, and Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth, and Dizahab.
2. (There are eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of mount Seir unto Kadesh-barnea.)
3. And it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moses spake unto the children of Israel, according unto all that the LORD had given him in commandment unto them;
4. After he had slain Sihon the king of the Amorites, which dwelt in Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, which dwelt at Astaroth in Edrei: (Deuteronomy 1:1-4)

The editors and the publishers of the *Layman's Bible Commentary* prefaced Deuteronomy with the statement that the Bible is the Word "of good news for the whole world." It is not "the property of a special group," nor merely for the church, but for all mankind.¹

Deuteronomy, together with Genesis, the Psalms, and Isaiah, is the most quoted book of the Old Testament by the New. Our Lord, in the temptation in the wilderness, answered Satan three times, and each time from Deuteronomy. "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4; Deut. 8:3); "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matt. 4:7; Deut. 6:16); and, "Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:10; Deut. 6:13).

Among the four Mosaic books giving God's law, Deuteronomy has been the most widely used by Jews and Christians. The meaning of the word *Deuteronomy* is second, or repeated, law for many people, because this is in effect what the book is, but in Hebrew the name is taken from the opening statement, "These be the words" (Deut. 1:1). The Hebrew form is legal, because the law is a covenant, a treaty between God and Israel. It was a law given as an act of grace.

¹ Edward P. Blair, *The Book of Deuteronomy* and *The Book of Joshua*, Layman's Bible Commentary (London, England: SCM Press, [1964] 1997), 5.

Its meaning was very ably summed up by P. C. Craigie in these words:

In summary, the covenant was the constitution of a theocracy. God was king and had claimed his people for himself out of Egypt; the people, who owed everything to God, were required to submit to him in a covenant which was based on love.²

There was no merit or worth in Israel that led God to establish His covenant with them, *nor is there any merit or worth in the church*. All is God's sovereign grace.

Various scholars have analyzed the constituent parts of covenants in antiquity, all of which are similar. Craigie summarized this in reducing covenants to their component parts: (1) preamble, "These are the words," etc.; (2) historical prologue; (3) *general* stipulations; (4) *specific* stipulations; (5) Divine witness; (6) blessings and curses for the maintenance or breach of the covenant.

It is an amazing fact that so many people *insist* that God's covenant and His love are *unconditional*. When I wrote against this in early 1991, I received many letters calling my statement heresy, and even now (March 1992) I get such mail. What such people do is to bind God unconditionally once they "accept" Him, while feeling free to go their way. This is *not* Christianity; it transfers sovereignty from God to man. It is the essence of Phariseism, whether in Judaism or in the church. I have often cited a classic example of this kind of ungodliness, and it must be repeated again and again to arouse people to this evil. In Arend ten Pas's words:

... R. B. Theime: "You can even become an atheist; but if you once accepted Christ as your Saviour, you can't lose your salvation" (*Apes and Peacocks*, p. 22). "Do you know that if you were a genius, you couldn't figure out a way to go to hell?... You can blaspheme, you can deny the Lord, you can commit every sin in the Bible, plus all the others; but there is just NO WAY!" (*A New Species*, p. 9). Theime is not alone in teaching this view.³

A covenant is conditional, but God's covenant is all-encompassing. No area of life and thought can be outside God's covenant and law.⁴

² P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 19.

³ Arend J. ten Pas, *The Lordship of Christ* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1978), 19-20.

⁴ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 42.

There is a difference between Deuteronomy on the one hand and Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers on the other. Instead of reading, “And the LORD spake unto Moses” (Num. 15:1; etc.), we read, “These be the words which Moses spake unto all Israel” (Deut. 1:1). What Moses says is no less inspired; the difference is that here he speaks directly to the *families* of Israel to summarize and amplify God’s covenant law.

As Blair pointed out, “the central notes of Deuteronomy” are three: *remember* God’s grace and providential care; *obey* God’s law-word without hesitation and fully; and *behold* what His promises are to you if you are faithful.⁵ We can add a fourth: v. 1 makes it clear that Moses is speaking to “*all* Israel.” Old and young are alike addressed. None are exempted from hearing Moses recount the requirements of God the King; it is their only safeguard against apostasy and judgment. The neglect of God’s law today invokes the same judgment as it did then, and over and over again in history.

In v. 4, God through Moses reminds one and all of what He did for them in defeating Sihon, the king of the Amorites, and Og, the king of Bashan. What He did to their enemies, He could do to Israel, *and to us*. I have referred to the *heresy* and evil belief in an unconditional covenant and unconditional love. Unconditional love and covenant are confused with the doctrine of eternal security. Eternal security has reference to the fact that those whom God has truly saved can never be lost because their salvation is God’s work through Christ, not man’s work. To believe in an unconditional covenant and love shifts the entire power of security from God to man. Our children are by blood our seed, but, for apostasy and sin, we should cut them off. They are then by blood still our children, but not by faith; the relationship is ended. We do not love them unconditionally without sinning. God could call Israel “my son” in Exodus 4:22, but He could and did cut them off as dead branches in John 15:1-6. When God speaks of the destruction of Og, King of Bashan, and Sihon, King of the Amorites, He is reminding Israel of what He does to His enemies: let Israel beware. Deuteronomy stresses the fact that God is the covenant Lord, the Sovereign who in His grace and mercy gives His law to a people without merit. He promises to bless them for faithfulness, and to curse them for their lawlessness. He is the *redeeming* God and therefore the great *Judge* over all. Redemption cannot be separated

⁵. Blair, *Deuteronomy*, 9.

from judgment. Redemption is from sin and death, and it requires a death penalty for liberation from the death penalty upon us. In the Old Testament, this freedom came by the sacrificial system, the unblemished animal signifying the Christ to come. In v. 4, we see that this was the fortieth year since the departure from Egypt. God's *conditional* love and covenant had sentenced a generation to die in the wilderness (except for Caleb and Joshua).

The covenant God requires a full and uncompromising allegiance. The churches have too often preferred a bastard culture, one deeply in debt to humanism and its world, with a smattering of the Bible, and much larded with sentimental pietism.

In Deuteronomy 27-28, we have God's promises of blessings and curses for covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking. Immediately thereafter, God, in Deuteronomy 29:1, declares Himself to be the author of all the words in this book:

These are the words of the covenant, which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb.

According to Schneider, the journey from Sinai or Horeb to the border of Canaan could indeed have been made precisely as we are told in v. 2, *in eleven days*, but it took forty years (v. 3) because of their rebellion, and Schneider called this fact a "bombshell."⁶

It was that in fact, a very obvious fact evidencing God's displeasure. The usual division of Deuteronomy is into five sections:

1. *Chaps. 1:1-4:40*. Moses reviews Israel's journeys and urges them to be faithful to the covenant and its law.
2. *Chapter 4:41-31*. Moses sets aside three cities of refuge.
3. *Chaps. 4:44-26:1ff*. We are given a summary of the law, with special emphasis on worship (12:1-16:17); government (16:1-18:1ff.); criminal law (19:1-21:1-9); domestic life (21:10-25:1ff.); and sanctuary rituals (26:1ff.).
4. *Chaps. 27:1-30:1ff*. are concerned with the enforcement of the law and the renewal of the covenant, with its curses and blessings declared.

⁶ Bernard N. Schneider, *Deuteronomy* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1970), 27.

5. *Chaps. 31-34* describe the last days of Moses, the charge to Joshua, the delivery of the law to the priesthood, and Moses's final words, and his death.⁷

It is interesting to note that Henry H. Shires and Pierson Parker, both modernists, still called Deuteronomy "one of the most decisive books of history."⁸ Whatever their reason for so writing, we can better understand Deuteronomy's decisive character in Calvin's words. Calvin saw the thrust of the book thus: "God's discharging of us from the hands and tyranny of our enemies, was to the end that we should serve him in holiness and righteousness all our life long. And this is a doctrine very common throughout the whole holy scripture."⁹ Calvin said further: "Had the people had one drop of wisdom, they should have yielded themselves with all humanity, to receive the doctrine that was preached to them by Moses."¹⁰ Israel's problem, said Calvin, was "the scant and slender hearing" of God's law.¹¹ However, Calvin added, "we be more blameworthy than the Jews for giving so slender ears to our God," given our very great blessings and knowledge.¹² The blessings we enjoy, Calvin noted, are not the product of our own power, and we should therefore never forget the grace and power of God. "Moreover, we must note, that the doctrine which is set forth in the name of God, serveth not for one age only, but for all ever, and keepeth his force and strength continually."¹³ God did not speak "to the end that his doctrine should be buried after an age or twain, but that it should be set before us to the end of the world."¹⁴ As Lange noted, "Obedience is the principal thing in every household of God."¹⁵

⁷ J. H. Hertz, ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London, England: Soncino Press, [1936] 1962), 735.

⁸ Henry H. Shires and Pierson Parker, "Deuteronomy, Exposition," in George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1953), 331.

⁹ John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth Trust, [1583] 1987), 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, spelling modernized here and elsewhere.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ John Peter Lange, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, reprint, n.d.), 52.

It is interesting that Deuteronomy came to be known among the Jews as “the book of reproof,” because God spoke of their waywardness.¹⁶ It should serve the same purpose today.

¹⁶ T. E. Espin, “Deuteronomy,” in T. C. Cook, ed., *The Holy Bible with an Explanatory and Critical Commentary*, vol. 1, Part 2 (London, England: John Murray, 1871), 801.

Chapter Two

God and Government (Deuteronomy 1:5-18)

5. On this side Jordan, in the land of Moab, began Moses to declare this law, saying,
6. The LORD our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount:
7. Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the plain, in the hills, and in the vale, and in the south, and by the sea side, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, unto the great river, the river Euphrates.
8. Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them.
9. And I spake unto you at that time, saying, I am not able to bear you myself alone:
10. The LORD your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude.
11. (The LORD God of your fathers make you a thousand times so many more as ye are, and bless you, as he hath promised you!)
12. How can I myself alone bear your cumbrance, and your burden, and your strife?
13. Take you wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you.
14. And ye answered me, and said, The thing which thou hast spoken is good for us to do.
15. So I took the chief of your tribes, wise men, and known, and made them heads over you, captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens, and officers among your tribes.
16. And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him.
17. Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it.
18. And I commanded you at that time all the things which ye should do. (Deuteronomy 1:5-18)

According to Richard Clifford, "In no book of the Bible is exclusive fidelity to the Lord held up so insistently to Israel as it is in Deu-

teronomy.”¹ This may be an overstatement, since all the Bible stresses faithfulness, but, because these are Moses’s farewell words to Israel, they do have a strong and insistent character.

Our text is in two parts. In vv. 1-8, we have a summons to possess the land. This is a commandment from God, and it carries with it promises for faithfulness. Then, in vv. 9-18, Moses prepares the people for his death and he requires that they follow God’s ordained pattern of government.

Deuteronomy was the most influential book in Old Testament history because of the use of it by the prophets. Its stress on *possession* of the land had a powerful effect, and it is an emphasis needed now, because we have separated faith and the land, faith and possession of the earth. God having done certain things for His people requires therefore certain things of them. True faith must have works: faith means vision and action. A static faith is dead. God told His people at Sinai, “Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount” (v. 6). God’s alternatives are moving forward or death.

In v. 11, Moses, with intensity, wishes that, with God’s blessing and the people’s faithfulness, they might grow a thousandfold.

Where God commands us, He empowers us to do His will. As Davies observed, “Human power is formal — God’s power real.”² Throughout Deuteronomy, Moses insistently relates God to the people: “the LORD our God” (v. 6), “the LORD your God” (v. 10), and so on. Failure to act in terms of God’s promises had thirty-eight years earlier led to defeat. As the marginal comment in the Geneva Bible reads, “the fault was in themselves, that they did not sooner possess the inheritance promised.”³ The old term applied in Judaism to Deuteronomy was correct: it is “a book of reproofs.”

In vv. 9-16, the required form of government in church and state is set forth. What God requires is the reverse of the normal or usual form, which is from the top down. Rule by an elite at the top is an ancient pattern as well as a modern one. In Plato’s *Republic*, it is held to be the only valid form, i.e., rule by philosopher-kings. These men are an unelected elite; they are under no law: their will determines all things. This is, of course, the pattern of Marxism and Fascism,

¹ Richard Clifford, S. J., *Deuteronomy, with an Excursus on Covenant and Law* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier Inc., [1982] 1989), 1.

² D. Davies, in H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 11.

³ *Geneva Bible*, 1599 ed., note on 1:20.

and also of the so-called European Community, which is governed by unelected rulers and whose law is their will.

God's requirement is government from the bottom up in terms of His law. It begins with the self-government of the Christian man, with the family as a government, the church, the school, a person's vocation, society and its various voluntary groups and agencies, and, finally, *civil* government, one government among many.

God's way places responsibility on every man, whereas all humanistic patterns remove government from God and man to the state, or to the autonomous individual. God's law in every sphere limits the powers of man, church, state, family, and all human agencies. Its basic thrust is man's responsibility: "Thou art the man" (2 Sam. 12:7). Statism assumes a caretaker role which denies implicitly that man is created in God's image and has a calling to govern himself and his spheres of responsibility.

Where the law of God is set aside, man's law, which is anti-law from before Plato's day to ours, replaces it. The Christian is a man empowered by God's grace and by His Spirit because he has a clean conscience before God (Heb. 10:22). Where God's law and grace are rejected, the systems of government devised by man rest on sin, guilt, and injustice. The power of guilt to cripple and limit man is very great. We see it widely used today to make men feel guilty because they are successful, or white, or almost anything. We are held to be polluters of the air and earth and an accursed race of exploiters. The effects of this on millions is very severe. People are afraid to state obvious facts lest they be accused of racism, cultural imperialism, ideological oppression, and so on and on. Guilt is a very powerful means of controlling and castrating peoples.

This guilt is created by manufacturing sins which have no place in God's sight but are very important in man's plans to govern over men and nations, and the earth as well. If we are held to be guilty because of our race and national past, there is no way of removing that ostensible sin and its guilt.

One of the most evil ideas about sin is a product of the Darwinian and Freudian worldviews. Sin and guilt are then *metaphysical* conditions, aspects of being human, and they are ineradicable. Man is thus perpetually guilty.

In Scripture, sin and guilt are *moral* facts and conditions. Christ came to remove them from His people and to start them on the way

of sanctification: obedience to God's law-word. In this freedom from sin and guilt, the Christian is God's free man, the only truly free man.

Where, however, sin and guilt are metaphysical facts, there is no escaping them, and the best possible role for the state is not a remedial but a custodial one. The caretaker state becomes a keeper of the human zoo. Injustice becomes a natural and inescapable fact of the human scene, and man has no escape from tyranny and injustice. Humanistic "liberation" is from freedom to a custodial slavery.

Men will either live in terms of God's grace and law, or they will live under sin, guilt, and injustice. Sin, guilt, and injustice are used to control man, and the term given to this is the System. The System is a linkage of state, capital, labor, the criminal groups, and churches, all allied in the control of men. It was described in detail by Franklin Hichborn in *"The System" as Uncovered by the San Francisco Graft Prosecution* (1915); the sociologist Edwin H. Sutherland documented a specific case in detail in *The Professional Thief* (1937); Sam and Chuck Giancana, in *Double Cross* (1992), saw the System as controlling the presidency, interlocked with city, state, and federal agencies, and so on and on. Many other works can be cited.

What is clear is that in a world which denies God's covenantal grace and law, of necessity, sin, guilt, and injustice, as endemic to the human scene, will be used by men to control peoples and institutions.

No plan of government for fallen man can evade the forces of sin, guilt, and injustice. Those who know God's grace and law are required to live by His requirements, and, for government, this means a highly decentralized structure.

In earlier times, both in England and in the American colonies, the hundred-courts were basic in government, and they were patterned after the requirements of Deuteronomy 1:9-18.

Calvin, in commenting on Numbers 15:39, where God condemns men and nations for going "a-whoring," i.e., seeking their own will and way, wrote:

And, first of all, by contrasting "the hearts and eyes" of men with His Law, He shews that He would have His people contented with that one rule which He prescribes, without the admixture of any of their own imaginations; and again, He denounces the vanity of whatever men invent for themselves, and however pleasing any human scheme may appear to them,

He still repudiates and condemns it. And this is still more clearly expressed in the last word, when he says that men “go a whoring” whenever they are governed by their own counsels. This declaration is deserving of our especial observation, for whilst they have much self-satisfaction who worship God according to their own will, and whilst they account their zeal to be very good and very right, they do nothing else but pollute themselves to spiritual adultery. For what by the world is considered to be the holiest devotion, God with his own mouth pronounces to be fornication.⁴

⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950, reprint), 365.

Chapter Three

History as Instruction (Deuteronomy 1:19-46)

19. And when we departed from Horeb, we went through all that great and terrible wilderness, which ye saw by the way of the mountain of the Amorites, as the LORD our God commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea.

20. And I said unto you, Ye are come unto the mountain of the Amorites, which the LORD our God doth give unto us.

21. Behold, the LORD thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged.

22. And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come.

23. And the saying pleased me well: and I took twelve men of you, one of a tribe:

24. And they turned and went up into the mountain, and came unto the valley of Eshcol, and searched it out.

25. And they took of the fruit of the land in their hands, and brought it down unto us, and brought us word again, and said, It is a good land which the LORD our God doth give us.

26. Notwithstanding ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God:

27. And ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.

28. Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there.

29. Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them.

30. The LORD your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes;

31. And in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the LORD thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place.

32. Yet in this thing ye did not believe the LORD your God,

33. Who went in the way before you, to search you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to shew you by what way ye should go, and in a cloud by day.

34. And the LORD heard the voice of your words, and was

wroth, and sware, saying,

35. Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I sware to give unto your fathers,
 36. Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him will I give the land that he hath trodden upon, and to his children, because he hath wholly followed the LORD.

37. Also the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, saying, Thou also shalt not go in thither.

38. But Joshua the son of Nun, which standeth before thee, he shall go in thither: encourage him: for he shall cause Israel to inherit it.

39. Moreover your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it.

40. But as for you, turn you, and take your journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea.

41. Then ye answered and said unto me, We have sinned against the LORD, we will go up and fight, according to all that the LORD our God commanded us. And when ye had girded on every man his weapons of war, ye were ready to go up into the hill.

42. And the LORD said unto me, Say unto them, Go not up, neither fight; for I am not among you; lest ye be smitten before your enemies.

43. So I spake unto you; and ye would not hear, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD, and went presumptuously up into the hill.

44. And the Amorites, which dwelt in that mountain, came out against you, and chased you, as bees do, and destroyed you in Seir, even unto Hormah.

45. And ye returned and wept before the LORD; but the LORD would not hearken to your voice, nor give ear unto you.

46. So ye abode in Kadesh many days, according unto the days that ye abode there. (Deuteronomy 1:19-46)

Historiography has to do with the understanding and use of history as a branch of knowledge. To all practical intent, most historians deny this meaning and refuse to see an objective meaning to history. The Marxists insist on their meaning, and our modern leftists, with their insistence on politically correct stances, demand a meaning, but their meaning is humanistic and existentialist. They are not interested in establishing the validity of the religious foundations of history, only its present political frame of reference. James Anthony Froude wrote, in 1899, "Religion, once the foundation of the laws and rule

of personal conduct, has subsided into opinion.”¹ Instead of being the source of law, religion is now mainly personal opinion and socially irrelevant. History is cut loose from any religious and transcendent meaning to become determined by and for the moment. History has become a form of political propaganda.

This degradation of history has very important repercussions. It reduces man from a creature made in the image of God to a social animal. The animal-rights people have equated the lives of laboratory mice with the lives of scientists. Their idea is to revere all forms of life, as did Schweitzer, but in reality they are debasing all kinds of living things by separating them from their place under God and His law.

The Bible is the most important of all history books, and the only infallible one. Deny the Bible as history, and the end conclusion will be to say that, no more than mice and bats, does man have a history. Some historians, in their university classrooms, are openly making such a conclusion. The Hegelian “end of history” schools hope to reduce man to the level of the anthill or the beehive.

A biblical faith initiates against this. Thus, when Moses reviews Israel’s history in the wilderness, it is because history has for God and man an inescapable meaning. It is not chance nor happenstance: it is God’s law-word manifested in the faithfulness or unfaithfulness of men.

Our text has been variously divided by scholars, but perhaps Bernard N. Schneider’s division is the best. His division is as follows: (1) the sin of rebellion, vv. 19-26; (2) the sin of unbelief, vv. 27-33; (3) the sin of presumption, vv. 41-46; (4) the judgment of God, vv. 34-40.²

All these merge into one another, but the distinctions are still valid and important. *First*, (vv. 19-26), the sin of rebellion was a flagrant one. God’s revealed will was an open and public order to go into Canaan and to occupy it. The promise of victory by God meant little against the reports of the ten spies (Caleb and Joshua dissenting), and human calculations and assessments weighed far more than God’s assurances. This is humanism, the trust in one’s

¹James Anthony Froude, *Caesar: A Sketch* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1899), 5.

²Bernard N. Schneider, *Deuteronomy* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1970), 28-31.

own evaluations rather than in the power and promises of God. God's word is seen as valid *only* if confirmed and substantiated by man's word. This is very accurately called the sin of rebellion because it is a rejection of God's word in favor of man's word. Antinomianism is a common form of such rebellions, as is a belief that pietism and religious exercises can replace God's requirement of obedience. Isaiah tells us of God's revulsion against the outward forms of sacrifice when the heart of man is apostate.

10. Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ears unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

11. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.

12. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?

13. Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

14. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.

15. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

16. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil.

17. Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. (Isa. 1:10-17)

God expresses His contempt for formally correct but religiously empty worship. He equates this as a sin comparable to the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. *True worship is from the heart and has consequences in the form of justice.* All sin is a rejection of God and His law-word in favor of man-made devices or purely empty forms.

Then, *second*, all such rebellion rests in unbelief (vv. 27-33). God declares, in v. 32, that even while He was miraculously caring for Israel, "Yet in this thing ye did not believe in the LORD your God." James Moffatt paraphrased this with these words: "But for all I said, you would not trust the Eternal your God." Like modern churchmen, they heard only what pleased them.

A popular current school of thought in the church is evidentialism: it believes it can prove God to man's satisfaction and offers

evidences requiring belief. In all this, man plays god; he insists on being the judge and arbiter over God.

If I accept God's word *only* when I can verify it, I am distrusting God, and I am also declaring that I am the judge as to whether or not God is telling the truth or is a liar. This is not only extremely presumptuous but is also a form of unbelief.

We live in a day when the words of evil men in the media are accepted as gospel, while God's word is viewed with suspicion, or else it is only accepted insofar as it agrees with our reasoning.

Third, Israel was guilty of the sin of presumption (vv. 41-46). Presumption means to assume a position or attitude without permission and on no authority save our own will. Presumption is an act of defiance of God's authority. "Presumption is going on without God's promise" or authority.³

Israel, having disobeyed God, then marched against Canaan against God's judgment and will. They intended to prove to God how faithful they were by disobeying Him. God having pronounced judgment against them (vv. 34-40), they now chose to reject the judgment and to claim the promise. In their presumption, they insisted that God take them on their own terms.

In v. 31, God, Moses says, cared for Israel "as a man doth bear his son," a remarkable image. The reaction of Israel was that of an evil and presumptuous child. They sulked in their tents and said, "Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us" (v. 27).

Because of their unbelief, the people of Israel lacked the courage to take God at His word and to conquer Canaan years before. In Lange's words,

Cowardice and pride go together (Gen. xi. 4), but never faith, to which God in heaven is all (Ps. lxxiii. 25), and nothing on earth reaches to heaven.⁴

Fourth, we have the judgment of God (vv. 34-40; cf. 2:14-15). Numbers 14 tells us that when this judgment was pronounced, the people organized a lynch mob to kill both Moses and Aaron, and only God's intervention prevented it (Num. 14:10). God's patience

³ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴ John Peter Lange, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.), 61.

with man's stubbornness, unbelief, presumption, and evil is amazing, but it is not endless.

The response of Israel to God's judgment, namely, that the older generation would not enter Canaan except for Caleb and Joshua, was to "weep before the LORD" (v. 45). This was a false piety: they assumed that tears and prayers could wipe out their unbelief and presumption. As Schneider observed,

Evidently Israel was sorry only because she was now in trouble, and the Lord who knows the heart, was not taken in by their tears. The Bible warns: "Be not deceived, God is not mocked." No one has ever made a fool out of God, though many have tried it.⁵

In the modern church, no attention is paid to this. The worst reprobate can shed a few tears, and the parents, husband, or wife is expected to forgive all their sins without the slightest evidence of a changed life.

This takes us back to our starting point, the meaning of historiography, the understanding and use of history. The modern rejection of history and historiography for social studies has destroyed and nullified an important area of sound learning and wisdom. The medievalist, Gordon Leff, has written,

It used to be believed that we could learn from the past, and this belief provided history with its justification. Sixty years ago, history, together with classics, was considered the most suitable subject for training statesmen.... Today history has become another discipline and the social studies have become increasingly ahistorical....

The reasons for this change are obvious enough. On the one hand, we have largely lost any firm sense of the future, so that we no longer turn to the past for guidance or comfort. The age of belief in historical destiny, whether as the working of God's providence or as the realisation of a secular ideal such as progress or nationhood, itself belongs to history. Its passing has left a void that history as traditionally conceived cannot fill, just because we do not have a sense of direction.⁶

⁵ Schneider, *Deuteronomy*, 32.

⁶ Gordon Leff, "The Past and the New," in Stephen Vaughn, ed., *The Vital Past: Writings on the Uses of History* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 58-56.

Leff's conclusion then is a very meager one: "history is indispensable to understanding what is indispensable to men."⁷ We could add with equal authority that gossip columnists are important and indispensable to understanding what is indispensable to important people!

This is why non-Christian historiographies become exercises in futility. This, too, is why biblical history is so important. To regard the Bible as a book to be mined for spiritual nuggets is to deny biblical faith. The indifference of Christians to history and historiography is thus a grim fact, and one that assures the churches of God's judgment because they despise His handiwork.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

Chapter Four
God and Justice
(Deuteronomy 2:1-15)

1. Then we turned, and took our journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea, as the LORD spake unto me: and we compassed mount Seir many days.
2. And the LORD spake unto me, saying,
3. Ye have compassed this mountain long enough: turn you northward.
4. And command thou the people, saying, Ye are to pass through the coast of your brethren the children of Esau, which dwell in Seir; and they shall be afraid of you: take ye good heed unto yourselves therefore:
5. Meddle not with them; for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a footbreadth; because I have given mount Seir unto Esau for a possession.
6. Ye shall buy meat of them for money, that ye may eat; and ye shall also buy water of them for money, that ye may drink.
7. For the LORD thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand: he knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing.
8. And when we passed by from our brethren the children of Esau, which dwelt in Seir, through the way of the plain from Elath, and from Ezion-gaber, we turned and passed by the way of the wilderness of Moab.
9. And the LORD said unto me, Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle: for I will not give thee of their land for a possession; because I have given Ar unto the children of Lot for a possession.
10. The Emims dwelt therein in times past, a people great, and many, and tall, as the Anakims;
11. Which also were accounted giants, as the Anakims; but the Moabites call them Emims.
12. The Horims also dwelt in Seir beforetime; but the children of Esau succeeded them, when they had destroyed them from before them, and dwelt in their stead; as Israel did unto the land of his possession, which the LORD gave unto them.
13. Now rise up, said I, and get you over the brook Zered. And we went over the brook Zered.
14. And the space in which we came from Kadesh-barnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the LORD sware unto them.
15. For indeed the hand of the LORD was against them, to

destroy them from among the host, until they were consumed. (Deuteronomy 2:1-15)

These verses, an historical summary, raise a very serious question which is too often bypassed. Two things are very clearly set forth. *First*, God forbids Israel from attacking and seizing any territories belonging to either Edom (later Idumea), where the descendants of Esau dwelt, or Moab, descending from Lot. God was by His sovereign grace allowing both peoples to continue their existence; they were related to the Hebrews, although without faith. *Second*, God reminds Israel of His judgment on Israel, thirty-eight years in the wilderness until all the older generation of “men of war” (v. 14) were dead and gone, except for Caleb and Joshua.

The problem is this: Edom and Moab were both godless and evil. Why were they spared, when Israel went through judgment? Again and again, various prophets raised this question of evil. One psalmist cries out, in Psalm 94:1-14, with these words:

1. O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself.
2. Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud.
3. LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?
4. How long shall they utter and speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?
5. They break in pieces thy people, O LORD, and afflict thine heritage.
6. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless.
7. Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the Lord of Jacob regard it.
8. Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise?
9. He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?
10. He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?
11. The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.
12. Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law;
13. That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked.

14. For the LORD will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance.

The psalmist walks by faith, not by sight. He knows that God is the all-righteous Judge, and that He will in His time (or in eternity) settle all accounts. Meanwhile, the rest of the righteous is in the infallible justice and law of God (vv. 12ff.). Meanwhile, we know that, although God's forbearance with evil is great, and His chastening of His people often sore, God's purposes are altogether righteous and holy.

In this instance, what made God's forbearance with Edom and Moab galling was the fact that both were hostile to Israel, in spite of their announced friendliness. Moab in particular paid a heavy price for their hostility and for their efforts to destroy Israel. However, as vv. 14-16 make clear, God's real judgment was against Israel; Clifford was right in seeing the wilderness journey as in part God's war against Israel.¹ A generation was wiped out. As Peter centuries later pointed out, "judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Pet. 4:17). Our Lord stresses this:

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:48)

Behind all these events described by Moses, and behind all events, is the government of God. Moses does not attempt to justify it or to explain it. He simply declares God to be the absolute Lord and determiner of all things, of men, nations, events, and other things. Against that government, no man can rebel successfully.

It is interesting to see how specific God is. He mentions nations and peoples who were once powerful in that area: the Emims, giants who were like the Anakim; the Rephaim, other tall peoples; and the Horites, or Hurrians, who moved into Mesopotamia and Syria from the east in the second millennium BC, somewhat earlier than the Exodus, perhaps. The mention of these, and later, of other peoples, makes it clear that God's concerns are greater than ours. One of the evils of the false "chosen people" mentality into which Israel, and later, many churches have fallen into, is to limit God's concerns and providence to themselves. God's vast providence transcends anything that we are able to understand comprehensively or exhaustively.

¹ Richard Clifford, S. J., *Deuteronomy, with an Excursus on Covenant and Law* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier Inc., [1982] 1989), 20-21.

The “chosen people” perspective is false when it sees itself as the purpose of God’s activities and thereby makes God’s work in history serve a humanistic end. God’s references to such peoples as the Hurrians is an archeological note, as it were, to indicate the breadth of God’s work.

God mentions the Emims, a people of great height, and the fact that the Moabites had conquered and displaced them, as a rebuke to Israel. The ungodly Moabites had been ready to fight and conquer the Emims, but Israel, in spite of God’s promises, had shown no comparable courage in facing the Canaanites.

To remind Israel of its unfaithfulness and ingratitude, in v. 7 the people are reminded, you have lacked nothing. God’s promise to Israel had not been equivocal. He had clearly said, as Caleb and Joshua had reminded them, that He would give them Canaan. Jude refers to Israel’s unbelief: he cites some false believers in the church, the fallen angels, Sodom and Gomorrah, *and* the Israelites in the wilderness as alike guilty of a common sin: they “despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities” (v. 8), i.e., they hated and despised all godly authority.

God in v. 7 stresses the forty years of schooling in the wilderness. Joseph Parker summed up its meaning tellingly: it had taken time to develop character in Israel.

Time has a good deal to do with testimony; time enters very subtly into all things human and mundane. Men may make a ladder in a very short time, but who can make a tree? — and how constantly we are mistaking a tree for a ladder, or a ladder for a tree! Time makes the tree; time makes character; time makes practical theology.²

We sometimes forget this factor of time, of history, as we work with our children. As Lange noted, “Everything has its time with God.”³ Too commonly, God shows more respect for time than men do, who want the end result at the beginning.

Moses says of God, in v. 7 that He has known your walking, i.e., your daily life. The Greek emphasis is on the *heart* of man divorced from his *body* or daily life. God knows us by our walking, our daily

² Joseph Parker, *The People’s Bible*, vol.4, *Numbers 27–Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 85.

³ John Peter Lange, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, reprint, n.d.), 79.

life. As our Lord says, “by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20). God’s judgments are very practical and time-oriented.

Our text is faithful to the ancient treaty or covenant pattern of law. The superior power declares what land grants have been made to the covenant vassal; the land and its boundaries are then described. This review is thus a matter of law, of covenantal status, a contract.

The references therefore to Edom and Moab are *legal* statements. Whatever His purpose, God makes it very clear that these two ungodly powers are granted certain things. Their ancestry from Abraham and Lot are referred to, but, in time, this heritage protected neither country, so we must say that it was God’s sovereign will at work.

Near the conclusion of Deuteronomy, Moses returns to the subject of God’s sovereign power, and the mystery of evil, to declare:

The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. (Deut. 29:29)

In other words, God’s purpose for us is not our abstract knowledge of all things, but the knowledge of His revelation, and for a specific purpose, “that we may do all the words of this law.” As Ethan says of God in Psalm 89:14,

Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.

Chapter Five
The Ban
(Deuteronomy 2:16-37)

16. So it came to pass, when all the men of war were consumed and dead from among the people,
17. That the LORD spake unto me, saying,
18. Thou art to pass over through Ar, the coast of Moab, this day:
19. And when thou comest nigh over against the children of Ammon, distress them not, nor meddle with them: for I will not give thee of the land of the children of Ammon any possession; because I have given it unto the children of Lot for a possession.
20. (That also was accounted a land of giants: giants dwelt therein in old time; and the Ammonites call them Zamzummims;
21. A people great, and many, and tall, as the Anakims; but the LORD destroyed them before them; and they succeeded them, and dwelt in their stead:
22. As he did to the children of Esau, which dwelt in Seir, when he destroyed the Horims from before them; and they succeeded them, and dwelt in their stead even unto this day:
23. And the Avims which dwelt in Hazerim, even unto Azzah, the Caphtorims, which came forth out of Caphtor, destroyed them, and dwelt in their stead.)
24. Rise ye up, take your journey, and pass over the river Arnon: behold, I have given into thine hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land: begin to possess it, and contend with him in battle.
25. This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee.
26. And I sent messengers out of the wilderness of Kedemoth unto Sihon king of Heshbon with words of peace, saying,
27. Let me pass through thy land: I will go along by the high way, I will neither turn unto the right hand nor to the left.
28. Thou shalt sell me meat for money, that I may eat; and give me water for money, that I may drink: only I will pass through on my feet;
29. (As the children of Esau which dwell in Seir, and the Moabites which dwell in Ar, did unto me;) until I shall pass over Jordan into the land which the LORD our God giveth us.
30. But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart

obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day.

31. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have begun to give Sihon and his land before thee: begin to possess, that thou mayest inherit his land.

32. Then Sihon came out against us, he and all his people, to fight at Jahaz.

33. And the LORD our God delivered him before us; and we smote him, and his sons, and all his people.

34. And we took all his cities at that time, and utterly destroyed the men, and the women, and the little ones, of every city, we left none to remain:

35. Only the cattle we took for a prey unto ourselves, and the spoil of the cities which we took.

36. From Aroer, which is by the brink of the river of Arnon, and from the city that is by the river, even unto Gilead, there was not one city too strong for us: the LORD our God delivered all unto us:

37. Only unto the land of the children of Ammon thou camest not, nor unto any place of the river Jabbok, nor unto the cities in the mountains, nor unto whatsoever the LORD our God forbad us. (Deuteronomy 2:16-37)

Our text now deals with the encounters of Israel with several nations; these conflicts are detailed in Numbers and are now cited as a part of the covenant, i.e., as items in a treaty or contract which require the response of faithfulness. The states mentioned are the Ammonites, the Amorites (which means *Westerners*), and, in chapter 3, the Bashanites. Ammon, also descended from Lot, was not to be attacked. We have also two ethnological notes, the references to the Zamzummim and to the Avims. The Zamzummim are in Genesis 14:5 called the Zuzims, and they were another very tall people. It is a curious fact that, of the various peoples of great height, only the Watusis of Africa have survived into the twentieth century, and they may not outlive it long, according to some. Size and survival, and size and ability, are not to be equated.

The Avims lived in southwestern Palestine "as far as Gaza" and were destroyed by the Caphtorims, probably the Cretans or Philistines (v. 23). The reference to Ar is beyond our present state of knowledge (v. 9). Aroer (v. 36) is mentioned on the Moabite Stone, as is Jahoz (v. 32).

This text is regarded as infamous and shocking by many because of v. 34, *the ban*. The biblical ban is emphatically not the province

of men and nations but only of God. God can, in His sovereign knowledge and wisdom, devote entire peoples to destruction when their sins and rebellion render them totally derelict. God's bans take effect in various ways. *First*, it can come by "natural" disasters. In Genesis, we have three examples of this, if not four. We have the Flood (Gen. 7:1 - 8:14), whereby all save Noah and his family were destroyed. The worldwide evidence for the Flood is clear to all but the wilful. Next, there is the confusion of tongues and the scattering of the peoples in the Tower of Babel episode (Gen. 11:1-9). Then, there is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:1-25). Finally, there is the great famine referred to in Genesis 41:53-57. These were all bans which, however supernatural in origin, were also accomplished through natural forces. Such bans can be seen throughout history, and in our own time. They include not only judgment by weather but also by diseases. Plagues and epidemics usually precede the collapse of a civilization. We should see such things as God's interdicts at work.

Second, God's bans can sometimes be *publicly* proclaimed in advance by His orders. Those cited in Genesis were not so public, except for Noah and his preaching in the form of building an ark. Prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, however, *openly* declared God's judgment on the nations. The same was true of Ezekiel, as in Ezekiel 21:26-27, where God declares that He will overturn all things to prepare for the coming of the Messiah, to whom the right to govern and possess belongs. The nations are used to effect the interdict or ban of God, but the cause behind the events is our God.

Third, God's law is a form of interdict or ban. For example, the death penalty for certain crimes is required, and if nations set aside God's ban, then they fall under God's ban. In such instances, i.e., crimes of people, the ban is personal and specific, not general. Heedlessness, where specific bans and interdicts are required, leads to God's general ban, to the destruction of a country or a civilization.

It should be apparent by now that all law and all warfare is a form of banning, and the bans of men and nations are usually evil and ungodly. The ungodly state reserves the right to ban but denies it to God.

Scripture makes it clear that the person or community which forsakes the Lord for false worship is an abomination to Him and under His ban (Ex. 32:19; Deut. 7:25-26; 13:13-18; Josh. 7:24-25, i.e., Achan

and his family). Seven Canaanite nations were proscribed by God: the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites (Deut. 7:1-2; 20:17). Jericho was placed under a ban (Josh. 6:17ff.). Amalek was also banned (1 Sam. 15:1-5; 1 Chron. 10:13). The ban was a radical form of excommunication.

The banned nations cited by Moses were not only faithless but militantly hostile to God and His law order. Their temple rituals included and/or required a variety of perversions as a part of worship. The Canaanites reserved the term “holy one” for cult prostitutes, and both male and female prostitutes were a part of sanctuaries, as were animals as well. God’s ban on the Canaanites is grounded in part on all the sexual transgressions listed in Leviticus 18:1-30 (cf. vv. 26-28). These things *defiled* a people, and defilement means death. The main biblical word translated from the Hebrew as *defile* is *tamé*, which means to be contaminated or foul, and totally so. The peoples of Canaan had defiled themselves. They had reversed all moral standards to call good evil, and evil good.

We come now, *fourth*, to the kind of ban God required against Canaan. Here God required Israel to execute the ban. No nonbiblical example of such a ban by God exists, nor is it a law but rather a *revealed* command. There are variations in this type of biblical ban: (a) a total destruction of all persons and property (Deut. 20:16-18; 1 Sam. 15:3); (b) a total destruction of all persons but not property (Deut. 2:34-35, 3:6-7); and (c) the destruction of all males only (Deut. 20:10-15).

This type of ban no longer exists. The other types, God’s bans operating through “natural” and historical events, are very much with us, and men and nations need to be aware of this.

As God decrees His bans in history, He does so as the only Lord and sovereign over all nations. It is His justice and judgment at work. We are told that “God is love” (1 John 4:8,16), but we are also told, “The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is his name” (Ex. 15:3). The goal of His warfare, judgments, and bans is to destroy the enemies of God and to cause “wars to cease unto the ends of the earth” (Ps. 46:8-9).

Calvin observed, on Deuteronomy 2:24,

From whence again it appears how poor is the sophistry of those who imagine that God idly regards from heaven what men are about to do. They dare not, indeed, despoil Him of

foreknowledge; but what can be more absurd than that He foreknows nothing except what men please? But Scripture, as we see, has not placed God in a watch tower, from which He may behold at a distance what things are about to be; but teaches that He is the director (*moderatore*) of all things and designs and affections of men also.¹

We should also note, as Calvin did in his *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (1583; preached in 1555-1556), that God in vv. 5-6 forbids any meddling in the affairs of Edom, for example, and requires them to buy their food and even their water. There was to be a careful regard for the possessions of these peoples. Only where God's ban applied was there a difference. God still is patient with Edom and Ammon (vv. 5, 19). God's purposes are not limited to His chosen people, neither with respect to His blessings nor His judgments.

In v. 25, God promises,

This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee.

The marginal note on this in the *Geneva Bible* reads, "This declar-eth that the hearts of men are in God's hands either to be made faint or bold."

Men can neither understand the Bible nor history when they approach either of them with the presuppositions of the modern mind. We must remember that a barbarian is a rootless man who has no regard for the past nor the future and who, like an existentialist, lives for the moment. We can add that our modern existentialist temperament has created history's deadliest barbarians. These new barbarians feel free to judge God and man, to overturn all morality and order, and to demonstrate or riot in the streets if their will is not done. Such a culture soon places itself under God's ban. We have a great task ahead of us.

¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint), 171-72.

Chapter Six
Fear and Law
(*Deuteronomy 3:1-29*)

1. Then we turned, and went up the way to Bashan: and Og the king of Bashan came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei.
2. And the LORD said unto me, Fear him not: for I will deliver him, and all his people, and his land, into thy hand; and thou shalt do unto him as thou didst unto Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon.
3. So the LORD our God delivered into our hands Og also, the king of Bashan, and all his people: and we smote him until none was left to him remaining.
4. And we took all his cities at that time, there was not a city which we took not from them, threescore cities, all the region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan.
5. All these cities were fenced with high walls, gates, and bars; beside unwall'd towns a great many.
6. And we utterly destroyed them, as we did unto Sihon king of Heshbon, utterly destroying the men, women, and children, of every city.
7. But all the cattle, and the spoil of the cities, we took for a prey to ourselves.
8. And we took at that time out of the hand of the two kings of the Amorites the land that was on this side Jordan, from the river of Arnon unto mount Hermon;
9. (Which Hermon the Sidonians call Sirion; and the Amorites call it Shenir;)
10. All the cities of the plain, and all Gilead, and all Bashan, unto Salchah and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan.
11. For only Og king of Bashan remained of the remnant of giants; behold, his bedstead was a bedstead of iron; is it not in Rabbath of the children of Ammon? nine cubits was the length thereof, and four cubits the breadth of it, after the cubit of a man.
12. And this land, which we possessed at that time, from Aroer, which is by the river Arnon, and half mount Gilead, and the cities thereof, gave I unto the Reubenites and to the Gadites.
13. And the rest of Gilead, and all Bashan, being the kingdom of Og, gave I unto the half tribe of Manasseh; all the region of Argob, with all Bashan, which was called the land of giants.
14. Jair the son of Manasseh took all the country of Argob unto the coasts of Geshuri and Maachathi; and called them after his own name, Bashan-havoth-jair, unto this day.
15. And I gave Gilead unto Machir.

16. And unto the Reubenites and unto the Gadites I gave from Gilead even unto the river Arnon half the valley, and the border even unto the river Jabbok, which is the border of the children of Ammon;

17. The plain also, and Jordan, and the coast thereof, from Chinnereth even unto the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, under Ashdodh-pisgah eastward.

18. And I commanded you at that time, saying, The LORD your God hath given you this land to possess it: ye shall pass over armed before your brethren the children of Israel, all that are meet for the war.

19. But your wives, and your little ones, and your cattle, (for I know that ye have much cattle,) shall abide in your cities which I have given you;

20. Until the LORD have given rest unto your brethren, as well as unto you, and until they also possess the land which the LORD your God hath given them beyond Jordan: and then shall ye return every man unto his possession, which I have given you.

21. And I commanded Joshua at that time, saying, Thine eyes have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto these two kings: so shall the LORD do unto all the kingdoms whither thou passest.

22. Ye shall not fear them: for the LORD your God he shall fight for you.

23. And I besought the LORD at that time, saying,

24. O LORD God, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might?

25. I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon.

26. But the LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter.

27. Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan.

28. But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him: for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see.

29. So we abode in the valley over against Beth-peor.

(Deuteronomy 3:1-29)

Deuteronomy is a legal covenant, a document which attests to God's grant to Israel, and His requirements of them. God as the Sovereign in His grace and mercy gives His covenant law to Israel. He

reviews also what He has given to them and done for them against their enemies.

Moreover, Canaan was to become legally theirs by this covenant, until their actions disannulled the grant. Moses, as the leader of Israel, had a responsibility in this negotiation. He was to *receive* the land legally. The recipient of a property in any transaction had the duty to look it over. While Moses was not allowed to enter Canaan, he was required to see it from the mountaintop, in Anthony Phillip's words,

...for the legal transfer of property took place when the purchaser looked it over (cp. Gen. 13:14-17). Thus the similar passage in Deut. 34 records the actual conveyance to Israel of the land of Canaan, which is then immediately confirmed by the account of the conquest. The same method of transferring land is found in the New Testament both in the story of Jesus' temptation by the devil (Matt. 4:8f), and in the parable of the guests who refused to come to the dinner party (Luke 14:8), where the man who goes to inspect his land is not to be understood as engaged in some idle activity, but as actually taking legal possession. This method of transfer of land is also found in Roman law.¹

Thus, to understand the Bible, we must begin with the fact that it is a covenant book, and that, at one and the same time, the covenant is grace and law, given as an act of saving grace, and a law for the redeemed to live by. One aspect of grace given to the people, a redeeming, saving grace, is the gift of the land. The land is the locale where the life of grace is lived and the covenant law is kept. This fact of victory and possession is celebrated in Israel's liturgy, the Psalms. Thus, we read,

1. Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the name of the LORD; praise him, O ye servants of the LORD. (Ps. 135:1)

10. Who smote great nations, and slew mighty kings;

11. Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan:

12. And gave their land for an heritage, an heritage unto Israel his people. (Ps. 135:10-12)

1. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. (Ps. 136:1)

¹. Anthony Phillips, *Deuteronomy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 30.

16. To him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy endureth for ever.
17. To him which smote great kings: for his mercy endureth for ever:
18. And slew famous kings: for his mercy endureth for ever:
19. Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy endureth for ever:
20. And Og the king of Bashan: for his mercy endureth for ever:
21. And gave their land for an heritage; for his mercy endureth for ever:
22. Even an heritage unto Israel his servant: for his mercy endureth for ever. (Ps. 136:16-22)

God's covenant purpose, says the psalmist, was to create a covenant possession and inheritance. Clearly, the covenant means more than spiritual blessings. When our Lord declares, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5; Ps. 37:11), He has in mind the covenant promise of land, which is now expanded to include all the earth (Matt. 28:18-20).

We have a very interesting historical statement in v. 11 concerning Og, king of Bashan. Bashan was north and northeast of Galilee. In that era, it was heavily forested, with good streams, and excellent pastures. The whole area was overrun and conquered by the Amorites or westerners, about 2,000 BC. The Rephaim, the tall people, were replaced, but their ruling family continued as the Amorite rulers. The Druzes now live in this area.² All over the world, successive waves of conquerors have over the millennia replaced previous powers and sometimes have obliterated them. The Bible, for the areas it covers, is a very accurate record of the past.

When the spies gave their fear-filled report, God through Joshua told them,

21. ...Thine eyes have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto these two kings: so shall the LORD do unto all the kingdoms whither thou passest.
22. Ye shall not fear them: for the LORD your God he shall fight for you. (Deut. 3:21-22)

God forbids them to fear their enemies. In v. 2, we have a similar statement concerning Og: "Fear him not...for I will deliver him...in-to thy hand." Concerning *fear*, we are told, among other things,

The fear of the LORD tendeth to life. (Prov. 19:23)

² J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, [1974] 1978), 97-98

The fear of man bringeth a snare. (Prov. 29:25)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge [*beginning* means the principal part]. (Prov. 1:7)

Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh. For the LORD shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy feet from being taken. (Prov. 3:25-26)

The fear of God can be necessary and healthy, and the fear of man a snare and an evil. Since no man can fight God, it is suicidal to fear man more than the Lord.

In vv. 9 and 10, there is a reference to Mount Hermon, also known as Zion, and, in great antiquity, as Sirion and Shenir. Mount Hermon rises to about 9,500 feet and is often snow-capped.

Turning again to the command in v. 2, and 21-22, not to fear their enemy, Lange made a very important point: "The first judicial qualification therefore is the *fear of God* (Luke xviii.2) which is the beginning of *wisdom* (Prov. i.7; iii.7; ix.10; Ps. cxi. 10)."³ The reference in Luke 18:2 is to "a judge which feared not God, neither regarded man." The point made by Lange is that the fear of God is a legal requirement for justice, both by the judge, the witnesses, and all the people. Without the fear of God, the legal system soon deteriorates, and justice gives way to tyranny.

Fear is now seen simply as an emotion and divorced from law and the justice system. Lange's statement reminds us that a *healthy* fear of offending God's justice has been in history the major factor in keeping a society law-abiding. If men believe that they can with impunity break laws and lay claim to rights to vindicate their lawlessness, then they are fully outlaws, and an outlaw society is in the process of developing. I have been told by men in law enforcement that at times veteran criminals have openly mocked them and made it clear that they have more "rights" than an arresting officer.

Fear and *justice* are clearly related when understood in this sense. It is one thing to believe that one can commit crimes with little fear of consequences, and another to know that God and all creation work against the lawless man. The strength of Deborah as against the weakness of the men of war was her answering assurance: "They

³. John Peter Lange, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, reprint, n.d.), 75.

fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera" (Judges 5:20). Men now fight alone, and justice bleeds out of society.

Having divorced fear from justice, and having reduced fear to an emotion, humanists have appealed to reason, experience, and science as the foundations for social order. In doing so, they fail to recognize that men are not rational animals but creatures made in the image of God, religious creatures. To build on any other foundation is to destroy law and order.

Lange is therefore right: fear is the first judicial qualification for justice in a society.

In our time, the fear of God has been replaced by the fear of the totalitarian state, the Internal Revenue Service, men in the streets, and more. Fear has not been removed from the social order: it has merely been transferred.

Psalm 19:9 links fear and justice. "The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether." The psalmist, David, then compares the consequences of fear and justice to gold and honey (Ps. 19:10), because by them a society is preserved from "presumptuous sins" (Ps. 19:13). Apart from godly fear, we have presumptuousness and a lawless arrogance ruling society.

No society in a fallen world can exist without fear as an aspect of government. Without the fear of God, the fear of the state prevails. Since the French Revolution especially, the fear of the state has prevailed. It provides no order; it furthers tyranny, and it is the companion of moral anarchy. Modern man regards the fear of God as obsolete and primitive, but he is increasingly governed by a variety of humanistic fears and terrors that are reducing his life to misery; he is haunted by the fear of both man and the state.

Chapter Seven

Life and Obedience (Deuteronomy 4:1-4)

1. Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you.
2. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.
3. Your eyes have seen what the LORD did because of Baal-peor: for all the men that followed Baal-peor, the LORD thy God hath destroyed them from among you.
4. But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day. (Deuteronomy 4:1-4)

In Numbers 6:22-27, we have the priestly blessing on Israel, and on God's people of every generation:

22. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
23. Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them,
24. The LORD bless thee, and keep thee:
25. The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:
26. The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.
27. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.

The expression, "make his face shine," is a synonym for "save," as in Psalm 31:16; it is also a synonym for "restore" in Psalm 80:3, 7, 19; and for "redeem" in Psalm 119:134-135. To "lift up his countenance upon thee" means to "show favor" in Genesis 19:21; 32:20; Deuteronomy 10:17; 28:50; Malachi 1:8-9; 2:9.¹ What Moses does here in Deuteronomy is to remind Israel that God has put His Name upon them, and they have an obligation to obey God's covenant law.

Because of Israel's disobedience and Moses's weariness with them, Moses was deprived of the privilege of entering the Promised Land. He was, however, permitted to view it from the top of Mount Pisgah (Deut. 3:23-29).

¹ Foster R. McCurley, *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979), 120.

In Deuteronomy 4:1-4, Moses reminds Israel that they must be faithful to the covenant God and His law.

Verse 2 makes it very clear the Lord God Who sees the beginning and the end, has from all eternity decreed and established His canon of His law-word:

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

It is idiocy to assume that it is accidental that the Bible closes with Revelation, and that almost its concluding words make the same declaration:

18. For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

19. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. (Rev. 22:18-19)

This is legal, covenantal language, and in both Deuteronomy and Revelation it is clear that it has a binding and permanent application. Modernism, dispensationalism, and antinomianism are all guilty: they either subtract from or add to God's covenant word.

As Hoppe stated, "Obedience, then, is the foundation of Israel's relationship with God, since it brings Israel closer to God than is thought humanly possible (v. 6)."² The result and proof of faith is *obedience*. Verse 1 is emphatic about this:

Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you.

Theologically, we can see that *works*, or the keeping of the law, is the result of *faith* (Matt. 7:15-20; Rom. 3:31; James 2:12-26). In v. 1 of our text they are closely identified as different sides of God's grace in His people. To *live* is to *hearken* or to believe and to obey, to *do* what God commands.

² Leslie J. Hoppe, O.F.M., *Deuteronomy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1985), 20.

The whole premise of covenantalism is that of clear and immutable legal obligations. To assume that covenantal laws in the Bible are culturally conditioned, or apply only to their time, is a denial of the covenant. Scholars tell us that biblical covenants reproduce the covenant law patterns of antiquity. A better analysis would be to recognize that, from the beginning, God established the covenant patterns and various peoples reproduced it. Thus, the ancient law code of King Lipid-Ishtar asserted it to be an enduring covenant of justice and invoked the Gods to sustain it.³

The basic premise of a covenant is that, while it can be broken, it cannot be altered. The terms of the relationship remain unalterable. Applying this to the marriage covenant, for example, we can see what this means. The marriage covenant can be broken by a variety of offenses, and hence God, who ordains marriage, provides for divorce whereby the *brokenness* is publicly declared. At the same time, the covenant requirements for marriage cannot be altered: they are always the same.

Failure to recognize this distinction leads to serious errors. God's covenant with the nation of Israel is held by some to be an eternal one, so that, despite the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, God's covenant with Israel still stands, it is claimed. Similarly, others hold that a marriage cannot be broken, and that all divorce is sin. Such thinking confuses the covenant as God decrees it and as man practices it. With respect to marriage, our Lord makes it clear in Matthew 19:3-9 that God ordained marriage to be a life-long covenant but also made provision for divorce because men are sinners. The *terms* of marriage remain unalterable; the specific union can be broken by sin.

In vv. 3-4, Moses makes it clear that disobedience to God's law brings death and destruction because God's covenant requires this judgment on offenders. Man cannot trifle with God's law. To demand that God's law apply against others but not against us is sin. Israel wanted judgment against its enemies, and those who violate the marriage covenant want to hold the innocent party captive. God, however, renounced Israel and declared the relationship broken; so, too, He provided means for severing ties with an ungodly spouse. From start to finish, the Bible is covenantal in all its laws.

³. James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, trans. Theophile J. Meek (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, [1950] 1955), 159-61.

In vv. 3-4, Moses refers to the events at Baal-peor, when the men of Israel gave themselves over to ritual prostitution with Midianite women (Num. 25). Judgment follows. The generation that left Egypt is further destroyed at this time, and again, later. They had broken God's covenant, and He broke with them, and He killed them.

Moshe Weinfeld sees in Deuteronomy, beginning in these verses, the theology of repentance.⁴ This may be an over-statement, but it is clear that Moses, throughout Deuteronomy, seeks to instill a humility and a repentant spirit in the covenant people. He does *not* allow them to forget the sins of their fathers but rather to learn from them.

Craigie said, with respect to v. 1,

The law here is not simply a written code; rather it is a presentation of law in the context of *education* ("to teach you") and *application* ("to Do").... Moses then states the purpose of his teaching of the law; it is *so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land*. The life of the Hebrews as a nation would depend on the law, not in a totally legalistic sense, but in that the law was the basis of the covenant, and in the covenant rested their close relationship to their God.⁵

While Craigie's statement is vague at points, he was fully accurate in concluding that Moses told Israel that "their greatness would lie in the wisdom and discernment that was the fruit of obedience to the law."⁶

Moses refers in v. 1 to "statutes" and "judgments." *Statutes* are literally "engraved decrees," and *judgments* or *ordinances* refer to judicial decisions applying God's law, and they refer to those given by Moses. An example of this is Numbers 36, where Moses clarifies the law of inheritance. The reference is thus limited to Moses, even though rabbis and Christian thinkers have claimed it.

C. Clemance summed up the meaning of these four verses succinctly and ably: "Life and prosperity [are] dependent on obedience to God."⁷ Obedience is not a popular subject these days. Charles Buck (1771-1815), in his *Theological Dictionary*, defined it

⁴ Moshe Weinfeld, *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 5, *Deuteronomy 1-11* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 21ff.

⁵ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 129.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁷ C. Clemance, in H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 61.

very simply as “the performance of the commands of a superior.” Since God is the superior over all creation, obedience to Him is the duty of all. It is strange that some regard obedience to God as legalism rather than the loving faithfulness of His people. Since we are doubly God’s creatures, by the fact of creation and regeneration, we are all the more bound to love and obey Him. There is no conflict between love and obedience but rather a strict obedience and congruity. The church’s failure to stress obedience evidences active disobedience.

To return to the fact that God’s covenants cannot be altered but can be broken, we find that churchmen have radically subverted this fact. On two counts at least, they have added and subtracted from God’s word. *First*, they have become antinomian and thus abandoned the very terms of God’s covenant. The covenant with the new humanity in Christ is in terms of God’s law. By means of God’s atoning grace and regenerating power, we are made a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) and empowered to live in faithfulness to the covenant. To subtract the law from the covenant is to fall under the judgment of Revelation 22:19. *Second*, whenever people subtract from God’s word, they do so in order to add to it, and they thereby fall under the judgment of Revelation 22:18. We can see what this means by looking at the question of divorce. By setting aside such texts as Leviticus 21:14; 22:13; Exodus 21:7-11; Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Matthew 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; and 1 Corinthians 7:10-15, these churchmen bind people by their own traditions and render God’s law of none effect. They have thereby added to God’s word.

Chapter Eight
“Last Words”
(*Deuteronomy 4:5-13*)

5. Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it.

6. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

7. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for?

8. And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?

9. Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons;

10. Specially the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb, when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children.

11. And ye came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness.

12. And the LORD spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice.

13. And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone. (*Deuteronomy 4:5-13*)

Scholars in this century have very ably demonstrated the covenantal character of the Bible, and, in particular, of the law. The legal form and structure of covenants is carefully followed. We can contend that the covenantal form was adopted by the nations of antiquity from God's covenants with men, but, in any case, it is clear that we have in Deuteronomy, for example, the legal form of a covenant.

This, however, should not lead us to limit Deuteronomy to a covenant form. It is also a series of statements by a man facing death. We

are familiar with the *idea* of a dying man's last words, but we are *not* familiar with the actuality. A man's "last words" were common facts over the centuries and into my lifetime. They do not necessarily refer to statements made as a man lay dying; they were often made early in illness, in anticipation of death, and to as many children, grandchildren, and kinfolk as possible. The family came from near and far; the dying man's words were a blessing, a warning, a passing on of the wisdom of years of living, and also a bequest. The bequest aspect disappeared as statist power grew, and paper authority ousted other forms of willing properties.

The *warning* aspect is perhaps the least remembered, although we see it in Genesis 48:1 - 49:33, as in Jacob's "last words." The *warning* aspect of a man's "last words" called attention to a person's weaknesses and sins. In our thinking, we all usually stress the positive aspects of our nature *and* of our genetic inheritance. We overlook our sins and shortcomings, i.e., our laziness, our bad temper, our selfishness, and so on and on. This leads to the "chosen people" mentality, i.e., I am God's chosen because I am superior, *not* because of His amazing sovereign grace. Both Israel and the church are prone to this. Again, in our thinking we either excuse or separate ourselves from those in our near family or ancestry who remind us of the "bad seed" in our line of descent.

What Moses does, in his "last words," a rite that has been common in Christian history, is to remind Israel of their aptitude for sin and rebellion. Israel stupidly and immorally assumed its virtue, but, Moses says, "*this* is your wisdom and understanding" to "keep" and "do" what God's law commands (v. 6). Towards the end of blessing Israel, Moses teaches Israel "statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me" (v. 5).

The bequests made by a dying man were not limited to property. *A moral bequest could be made.* Such bequests often had a preface, most commonly, "my son." This tells us a great deal at once about a man's "last words." They had as a central object of address the son who was the main heir. The book of Proverbs again and again speaks to "my son" (Prov. 1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; etc.); it is not only a commentary on the law but a moral bequest of the law and wisdom to an heir.

The *warning* and the *moral bequest* were closely linked. The person making the bequest would warn the person, saying, this is what you are, and then, this is what you should be. A man's dying or "last

words" were thus a final reminder of a person's besetting sin or sins, and at the same time a reminder that "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1:7).

It should be apparent now that a man's "last words" were in part a repetition of warnings made over a lifetime which now, in the presence of death, are given a moral urgency.

The moral urgency of Moses's "last words" is heightened by the fact that Moses can remind them that he has the authority of God and His covenant behind his every word. Israel had seen God's amazing revelations of Himself, so they were without excuse (vv. 8-13). Moses therefore says, "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life" (v. 9). They were a privileged people because God had given them His law, according to vv. 10-13. The same applies to the church: its privilege is God's law, and to abandon God's law is to abandon God and His covenant. In the words of Louis Goldberg,

Moses announces that he will teach the decrees and law to the second generation (4:1). The request to follow the law did not ask for blind obedience to it, but rather the people needed to be willing to understand the Word and know what they were to do. These decrees and laws were the very life of the people as they sought to take the land which the God of their fathers was about to give them.¹

According to v. 9, the law was to be taught to the sons, and their son's sons. This was Moses's key bequest, the God-given law. The life of the people *and* of the nation depended on this knowledge and obedience. For this reason, at every celebration of the Passover, the youngest male child capable of understanding asked the question about the meaning of the rite (Ex. 12:26-27). The significance of their moral inheritance had to be kept alive.

This stress on the moral bequest became a part of a man's last words into our time. Some generations ago, an eloquent moral and religious bequest was made by the dying Patrick Henry.

Throughout Deuteronomy, Moses makes a simple correlation: obedience to God's covenant law means life and blessings, whereas

¹ Louis Goldberg, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, Lamplighter Books, 1986), 46.

disobedience means curses and death. This is set forth powerfully in Deuteronomy 28 in particular. Obedience means survival and prosperity.

In vv. 7-8, Moses stresses two things. *First*, God has established a close relationship with Israel by giving them His law. This is an act of grace, with no merit on Israel's part. No other nation had been so favored. *Second*, Israel's pride should be in God's law, not in themselves. Their advantage over the nations was not in themselves but in the fact of God's law, of which by grace they were custodians.²

While many faults can be found with the nations of great antiquity, one fact is clear, their high regard for law. As Mayes pointed out,

The idea that the collection and promulgation of law is a proof of wisdom is, however, ancient, and is to be found in the prologues and epilogues of ancient Near Eastern law codes; cf. for example, the Code of Hammurabi.³

Moses tells Israel in vv. 6-8 that their greatness would lie in the fact of their possession of and obedience to the law of the living God, not in themselves. Apart from God's grace, they were nothing. If they obey God, the nations will find themselves compelled to say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (v. 6). Several times Moses promises them that other nations will envy them *if* they are faithful.

7. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for?

8. And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deuteronomy 4:7-8)

33. Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live?

34. Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty stretched out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? (Deut. 4:33-34)

² J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, [1974] 1978), 103.

³ A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, [1979] 1981), 150.

The grace of God gave Israel grounds for joy, not pride, but they took no joy in the Lord, but pride in their status. They thus turned a blessing into a curse.

Once we recognize the fact of "last words," we encounter it repeatedly in the Bible, and we understand Scripture better. Supremely, of course, the great example of "last words" is our Lord's words at the Last Supper: here also the Greater Prophet or Moses speaks of the law, saying, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15; cf. 15:14).

Chapter Nine

The Vision of God (Deuteronomy 4:14-24)

14. And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it.

15. Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire:

16. Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female,

17. The likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air,

18. The likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth:

19. And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.

20. But the LORD hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day.

21. Furthermore the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, and sware that I should not go over Jordan, and that I should not go in unto that good land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance:

22. But I must die in this land, I must not go over Jordan: but ye shall go over, and possess that good land.

23. Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, which the LORD thy God hath forbidden thee.

24. For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God. (Deuteronomy 4:14-24)

These verses strictly forbid any worship, any religious images of wild or tame animals, and religious adoration of the sun, moon, and stars, or any and all ascriptions of sacredness to things of the natural order. What is forbidden is called by modern scholars *totemism*. In totemism, it is held that there is a kinship, an affinity, and a communion between men and the natural order. The word *totem* comes from the Ojibur (and cognate of Algonquian dialects), the Indian word being *ototeman*. The stem of the word is *ote*, and it refers to

brothers and sisters from the same mother. Totemism thus means a belief in the continuity of men with the natural order; certain tribes or groups were held to be especially close in a mystical way with something in the natural order. Some scholars find evidences of totemism all over the world while others disagree. Ancient Egypt is said to have been strongly totemistic. Totemism was not a religion, according to some scholars, but a theory of origins.

It was closely akin to pantheism. It was greatly akin also in its essential ideas to Darwin and his theory of evolution. While God treats it as a form of false worship, the totemists saw it as their scientific knowledge. In the sight of God, totemism is a denial of the fact of creation.

The environmental or “green” movement, and the Gaia worship of our time, have essential ties to totemism. As a result, the warnings of these verses are not antiquated. They speak to a tendency on the part of fallen man to exalt the natural order and to eliminate God, the Creator. A true faith must acknowledge God as the Maker of heaven and earth, and all things therein.

Israel at Mt. Sinai had been given a *vision of God*. It was not, however, a visual image they saw, nor “the similitude of any figure” (v. 16). Moses is emphatic on this point. The vision of God given to Israel was of “statutes and judgments, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it” (v. 14).

To seek the vision of God in any totems, or graven images, is false and evil. The same applies to quests for the mystical image of God; such quests are common to Oriental religions and to medieval mystics. *The true vision of God is to understand His law-word*. This means that a truly Christian lawyer or judge will have a true image of God, as will all who see God in His incarnate Son and the law-word He came to fulfill.

In v. 16, the prohibition against any image of God specifies that, among other things, God cannot be depicted as either male or female. He transcends both categories. While in His word God speaks of Himself in the masculine gender, this is simply because by His ordination the masculine symbolizes authority, and therefore it represents one aspect of God’s being, authority.

Only those terms which God uses concerning Himself can be applied to Him; we cannot conflate or expand His language, because He is “a jealous God” (v. 24); He demands exclusive allegiance and

service. He saved Israel from Egypt to be His own inheritance or possession (v. 20).

God limits man; man cannot limit God, and all idolatry limits God by setting physical boundaries on His being and existence.

Egypt is called in v. 20 an "iron furnace," a term also applied to Egypt in 1 Kings 8:51; Jeremiah 11:4; and possibly referred to in Isaiah 48:10. A furnace in that part of the world referred then not to a heating device but to a refining instrument. God used Egypt to test and purify Israel and to burn out the dross, and Israel came out badly in this testing.

The true vision of God is a summons to duty. We understand who God is, and what He requires of us. This is not a pietistic experience but a matter of faith, understanding, and obedience. If men want a vision of God, they should know and obey His laws. Verses 23-24 are a warning that their lives and their futures depend on faithfulness.

The reference to God as a consuming fire (v. 24) has in mind Leviticus 10:1-2, the death of Nadab and Abihu for offering "strange fire" to the Lord; this was an effort to assert a common ground with other religions. This sentence (v. 24) is cited in Hebrews 12:29 with the same meaning.

C. H. Waller pointed out that this text, and especially v. 16, declares that a close connection exists between idolatry, or false worship, and corruption.¹

The jealousy of God is presented as an active, governing, personal force, omnipresent and inescapable, so that man must always reckon with it.

J. R. Dummelow observed, "The foundation of true religion and morals is a right conception of the nature of God."² This states clearly the demand made by Moses: they are to take "good heed" and to avoid corrupting themselves by any false idea of God. How we think about God must be derived from His revelation, not from our imagination. Our imagination and independent thinking have as their basis our fallen nature and our desire to be our own god (Gen. 3:5), whereas God requires us to think His thoughts after Him. The

¹ C. H. Waller, "Deuteronomy," in C. J. Elliott, ed., *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.), 20.

² J. R. Dummelow, ed., *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York, NY: Macmillan, [1908] 1942), 124.

Geneva Bible's comment on this text is "that destruction is prepared for all them that make any image to represent God."

There is a curious bit of history in connection with v. 19. Moses says that God has *divided*, *imparted*, or *allotted* these various forms of false worship to "all the nations under the whole heaven." Some rabbis have seen this as evidence of God's toleration of such false worship among the Gentiles and even as grounds for religious toleration for such practices. There is no ground for such an interpretation. What the text tells us is that God's predestination leads fallen men and nations into absurd practices which reveal their foolishness.

The meaning of our text is clearly that the vision of God means to know and apply His law-word, to see the meaning of His justice. It tells us that our God is a consuming fire *towards all* whose wisdom is a false one. God is not tolerant of injustice. The vision of God is not a physical image. The revelation at Sinai was a proclamation of His holiness and justice, of His law. This was the unveiling of His Person.

In the New Testament, in John 1:1-18, Jesus Christ is declared to be the *logos*, the word of God. John 1:18 says that the "Only begotten Son" hath *declared*, which is the Greek form of our English word *exegesis*. The climax of John's prologue uses a word that means to bring out the meaning, to interpret correctly. This is the biblical task of the lawyer, the exegete, and it is our necessary task in order to attain a vision of God.

Chapter Ten

Obedience and Life (Deuteronomy 4:25-40)

25. When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of anything, and shall do evil in the sight of the LORD thy God, to provoke him to anger:

26. I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed.

27. And the LORD shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the LORD shall lead you.

28. And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.

29. But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.

30. When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the LORD thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice;

31. (For the LORD thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them.

32. For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it?

33. Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live?

34. Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?

35. Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he is God; there is none else beside him.

36. Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee: and upon earth he shewed thee his great fire; and thou heardest his words out of the midst of the fire.

37. And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt;

38. To drive out nations from before thee greater and mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance, as it is this day.

39. Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the LORD he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else.

40. Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, for ever. (Deuteronomy 4:25-40)

Moses, in his “last words” to Israel, cites two witnesses to bear out his words concerning Israel’s inheritance. He again refers to these two witnesses in Deuteronomy 31:28 and 32:1. Above all, in Deuteronomy 30:19 he makes it clear that these two witnesses, heaven and earth, which outlast man’s life span, are as God’s creation a witness for Him:

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.

To choose God means to choose life and blessing; to turn away from Him is to choose death and cursing. Men may seek to make the issue a complex one, but Moses insists on its simplicity. They must begin by recognizing that they are a privileged people, and it has been all of grace. No other nation has had the revelations and privileges Israel has known (vv. 32-38), and for them to despise their covenant status before God would mean greater judgment and disasters. For disobedience, with its roots in ingratitude, they would be scattered among the nations (vv. 25-27). Our Lord states as a fundamental premise of God’s ways that

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:48)

This is how God deals with us, with Israel, *and* with the church: the greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility and the accountability. Let the church and the United States beware.

As *one* aspect of the covenant people's responsibility, Moses cites avoiding images. The images of antiquity represented two forces: the state, and aspects of nature. Men found then, and into our time with the revival of Gaia or Mother Earth worship, the reliability and certainties of the natural order very compelling. The order of natural phenomena they saw as an aspect of a cosmic natural and inherent power that had to be worshipped. The fathers of the early church, as against this belief, common to the people and the philosophers of Greece and Rome, shifted the *ultimate* order of necessity from the realms of nature to the triune God. C. N. Cochrane, in *Christianity and Classical Culture*, gave an excellent account of this battle, and of the Christian victory. In the world of the Enlightenment, and especially with Isaac Newton, the realm of necessity again became nature. Not surprisingly, images are reappearing in the new paganism.

No generation is born into a virginal historical context. Even Adam's world was a *given* order, with a variety of preconditions. In v. 31, Israel is told that the covenant of centuries earlier, made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, binds them also. They are born into a given context, even as all of us are, and that context gives us responsibilities, duties, and accountability from our birth on.

In addition, Israel has received two great and remarkable witnesses to God's covenant faithfulness. *First*, there is the deliverance from Egypt, and, *second*, there is the revelation at Mount Sinai.

If they are disobedient in the face of these things, it will lead to judgment. In Hoppe's words, "Disobedience will mean that God's power will be turned *against* Israel just as easily as it was once manifested *for* Israel."¹

In v. 32, we have an interesting statement which speaks of "the day that God created man"; this is clearly an assumption of the one-day creation of man, on the sixth day (Gen. 1:26-31). Those who try to lengthen the days of Genesis into ages have no ground anywhere in Scripture for such a view: it is an accommodation to evolutionary theory.

In v. 25, God declares that, with time passing, and peace and prosperity in their possession of Canaan, the people would forget their covenant God and fall in step with the false faiths of the Canaanites. Robert Ardrey spoke of men as bad-weather animals, and there is an

¹ Leslie J. Hoppe, O.F.M., *Deuteronomy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1985), 21.

element of truth to this. Adversity sometimes, *but by no means always*, pushes people back to the essentials. Whereas prosperity and peace *can* make them arrogant, proud, and self-sufficient, adversity is humbling and often humiliating to men. Paganism has often been an expensive faith in terms of its costs to “worshippers” or adherents, but it is a cheap faith in that it requires no inner change. The pagan is never a changed man: acts, rites, and experiences replace a fundamental transformation.

Some have rendered, “remain long in the land,” as having grown “old in the land” (Keil and Delitzsch). It means that the pattern of life and prosperity become for the people an aspect of a natural order rather than the grace of God. This will “provoke” God because He is a “jealous” God: He demands exclusive allegiance. To grow “old in the land” means that man sees his success as coming from himself *and* the natural order. This accounts for his readiness to become explicitly or implicitly pagan. C. H. Waller rendered “remain long in the land” as “shall slumber.” The people will be asleep to the true faith.² J. R. Dummelow gave a like translation, i.e., “slumbered in the land.”³

What Moses assumes from start to finish is a chain of generations accountable to God and subject to His judgments. Our modern individualistic perspective makes this a strange concept today. Each new generation now sees itself in supposed freedom and independence from the past. The result is both shallow and dangerous thinking. The freedom presupposed by this anarchistic view of history is very faulty. The chain of generations is not a binding chain but a foundation to build upon and in terms of which to grow.

Verses 39 and 40 are very important. God does *not* say to Israel, believe in me, and I will be grateful. We are told that it is *the fool* who has said in his heart that there is no God (Ps. 14:1). The Hebrew word for *fool* (*nabal*) means both stupid and wicked. James tells us that to believe in God is no merit nor a saving fact because, he says, “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19). God *never* says, believe, and I will be grateful, or that our belief will save us. Only God’s grace redeems and regenerates us. What God clearly demands is a

² C. H. Waller, “Deuteronomy” in C. J. Ellicott, ed., *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.), 20.

³ J. R. Dummelow, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible* (New York, NY: Macmillan, [1908] 1942), 124.

grace-created faith that renders *obedience*. God demands obedience as the test of faith (Matt. 7:15-23).

We are always surrounded by God's two witnesses, heaven and earth. We are summoned to believe and obey God the Lord. We live, not in a cosmic democracy, but a universal theocracy in which God, not man, is the sole sovereign and king.

Chapter Eleven

God's Law as a Refuge (Deuteronomy 4:41-49)

41. Then Moses severed three cities on this side Jordan toward the sunrising;
42. That the slayer might flee thither, which should kill his neighbour unawares, and hated him not in times past; and that fleeing unto one of these cities he might live:
43. Namely, Bezer in the wilderness, in the plain country, of the Reubenites; and Ramoth in Gilead, of the Gadites; and Golan in Bashan, of the Manassites.
44. And this is the law which Moses set before the children of Israel:
45. These are the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which Moses spake unto the children of Israel, after they came forth out of Egypt,
46. On this side Jordan, in the valley over against Beth-peor, in the land of Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt at Heshbon, whom Moses and the children of Israel smote, after they were come forth out of Egypt:
47. And they possessed his land, and the land of Og king of Bashan, two kings of the Amorites, which were on this side Jordan toward the sunrising;
48. From Aroer, which is by the bank of the river Arnon, even unto mount Sion, which is Hermon,
49. And all the plain on this side Jordan eastward, even unto the sea of the plain, under the springs of Pisgah.
(Deuteronomy 4:41-49)

These verses were obviously written on the east side of the river Jordan and before the conquest of Canaan proper. Their speaker is Moses, who is referred to in the third person, a common means of speech in antiquity by persons in authority.

Some scholars, such as H. Wheeler Robinson, have said of these verses, that they are "without any relation to what precedes or follows."¹ To say so is to assume Deuteronomy, and the whole Pentateuch, to be a mindless collection of miscellaneous documents, and this is the view of many "higher" critics. It seems to me that the obvious mindlessness is on the side of these biblical scholars. There is a clear pattern in all the Pentateuch.

¹ H. Wheeler Robinson, *Deuteronomy and Joshua* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. C. & E. C. Jack, n.d.), 82.

The cities of refuge cited are three. They are all on the east side of Jordan, Bezer in Reuben's territory, Ramoth in Gilead of the Gadites, and Golan in Bashan, within Mannaseh's borders (v. 43). The cities of refuge were places of escape and safety for men guilty of accidental manslaughter. The law provided in these a safety zone for men who proved their innocence of murder. To kill a man "unawares" means in the current English "without intent" (v. 42). More is said on the cities of refuge in Deuteronomy 19; in Numbers 35:13-14 the requirement of three such cities on the east side of Jordan is cited. These cities are cited in Joshua 20:8, and Bezer is mentioned in the Moabite Stone and is said to have been rebuilt by the Moabite king Mesha.

Let us turn again to the placement of these three verses, 41-43, on the cities of refuge. Obviously, since Israel had recently conquered these lands on the east bank, it was a good time to require the separation of three places as cities of refuge. It was a practical priority. But there is a more important reason. In Psalm 48:3, God is declared to be our refuge. In Psalm 14:6, God is named as the refuge of the poor. Above all, Psalm 46 has as its joyful proclamation, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1). Among the other texts referring to God as our refuge are the following:

The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.
(Ps. 46:7)

Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast. (Ps. 57:1)

But I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou has been my defense and refuge in the day of trouble. (Ps. 59:16)

In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us.
(Ps. 62:7-8)

I am as a wonder unto many; but thou art my strong refuge.
(Ps. 71:7)

I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God, in him will I trust. (Ps. 91:2)

Because thou has made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. (Ps. 91:9-10)

But the LORD is my defense; and my God is the rock of my refuge. (Ps. 94:22)

I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. (Ps. 142:5)

And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain. (Isa. 4:6)

For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. (Isa. 25:4)

O LORD, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit. (Jer. 16:19)

That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, which have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us. (Heb. 6:18)

I cite these verses, not a complete list, to make it clear that the cities of refuge represent the strength and security of God and His justice or law. The cities of refuge were a visible reminder that God's law provides justice and freedom. Hymn writers have seen the analogy in emotional terms. It is amazing that biblical scholars are so wooden that they fail to see that God's law and justice provide a refuge in these cities and in everyday life because God is our great refuge from the evils and injustice of this world. Thus, as Moses begins his commentary on and summary of the law, he lists first the three cities of refuge on the east side of Jordan.

There is more to be said on the subject of cities of refuge and the concept of refuge. Isaiah tells us, of the ungodly,

15. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves:

16. Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

17. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place.

18. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. (Isa. 28:15-18)

The meaning of the actions of the ungodly, of the lawless and the despisers of God, is that they have a covenant with death and hell. Not only so, but they believe in their hearts that not God but lies are their best refuge, their city and tower of defence. These men seek to shape history by their lies and laws. But God has a sure foundation for His city of refuge, as against the city of man and lies. It is His Messiah, God incarnate, who, as the new Adam, will create a new humanity in His image (1 Cor. 15:45ff.; 2 Cor. 5:17). Through Jesus Christ, the last Adam, God will disannul all that these evil men seek to establish, and their world order, founded on lies and injustice, shall finally perish.

The cities of refuge thus have a typological meaning which must not be neglected. Jesus Christ and His law-word provide us with our city of refuge in an evil generation.

It is important at the same time to remember that these are the "last words" of Moses, and he is giving to the people what God had revealed to Him, His law. They have a great inheritance, one far exceeding anything any nation of antiquity had: God's law. This in Christ is our inheritance. St. Paul, in Romans 8:4, tells us that Christ redeems us so that the righteousness or justice of the law may be fulfilled, put into force, in our lives and persons. We are to be God's people of justice: this is our inheritance and privilege.

When we see the law in the light of these things, we are strengthened and blessed. We have, in a world of evil, our city of refuge, Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God, and His lawbook, the way of justice because it is His way.

It is our task and privilege to make of the whole earth God's city of refuge, a place of justice and safety. Isaiah 2:1-5 gives us a vision of this city or world realm, of world peace and freedom. Many texts celebrate that coming event, and, in Revelation 11:15, we are told of the certainty of that triumph:

The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

The cities of refuge are thus no trifling nor incidental matter. The church which neglects their meaning has allied itself with a covenant with death, and is one whose refuge is a city of lies.

Chapter Twelve

Freedom Under God's Law (Deuteronomy 5:1-6)

1. And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them [or, keep to do them].
2. The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb.
3. The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day.
4. The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire,
5. (I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to shew you the word of the LORD: for ye were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up into the mount;) saying,
6. I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. (Deuteronomy 5:1-6)

These verses are usually described as a prologue or a preface to the Ten Commandments. They are that, certainly, but they are also much more. We have come to regard a preface as something to skip and as nonessential to the argument of a book, whereas from a biblical perspective, and in terms of the Reformation and its key documents, a prologue is often basic to what follows. Charles R. Erdman stated clearly the importance of these verses:

The *Preface to the Commandments*, “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage,” is an integral part and a supremely important part of the Decalogue. It relates all moral obligation on the revealed will of God, and it states that the motive for obedience to His laws is gratitude for His redeeming love.¹

Moses's first word to the people is, “Hear,” the Hebrew *shama*. It means more than to give ear, because its meaning requires *understanding* and *obedience*. It also implies *consent* and *contentment*. To hear God's word is to hear the truth, and our lives must be grounded on God's truth as our alpha and omega.

The demand is, “Hear, O Israel.” It is the nation that is addressed. The generation of adults at Sinai had died, but Moses still says, *first*,

¹ Charles R. Erdman, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1953), 31-32.

God made the covenant with the men now before Him (v. 2). *Second*, He did not make it with their fathers, those who had died. God knew that they were covenant-breakers in all their being. His covenant had in mind, therefore, the faithful ones who stood before Moses, those who came after him, and to us and to all the redeemed to the end of time. God looks beyond the moment to plan in terms of the generations and the ages. *Third*, God confronted Israel directly, as it were face to face, and Moses acted as the mediator of God to the fearful people. *Fourth*, the purpose of God, and of Moses's mediation, was "to shew you the word of God" (v. 5).

"Face to face" means that, while the covenant was a *legal* document, it was also a highly personal bond between God and man. Even more, "face to face" tells us that God's covenant and law are clearly personal facts as well, because they are the conditions of their relationship. We can understand this by analogy to marriage. Marriage is a legal fact; at the same time, it is clearly a personal one. Our modern view of the law as abstract and impersonal is a mythical one.

Law is abstract in the Greco-Roman tradition, whereas in Scripture it expresses the nature and will of the totally personal God. The law against murder deals with an ugly offense that brings great sorrow to the victim's family. It is much more than an offense against the state as law now has it (i.e., *The State v. John Doe*); it is a personal offense against God and man. To reduce the law to an abstraction and the law to the decree of the state, leads to plea bargaining and to abstract considerations that lessen the offense from a crime against God and His law and man in his person, life, and possessions.

Abstract law in time becomes irrelevant law: it satisfies neither the justice of God nor the just needs of the people. It becomes a nullity at best, and, at worst, a major obstruction to justice. The purpose of the state, if not justice, God's justice, soon becomes man's evil. The state becomes man's original sin, the will to be as god (Gen. 3:5), institutionalized and enacted, marching on earth in a challenge to Almighty God.

Israel is to *hear* the statutes and judgments of the Lord. God's law is given, *first*, as a privilege for Israel. It is not a punishment nor a "yoke" as the interpretations given by the Pharisees made of the law. It was given to be a liberating, prospering, and governing force. *Second*, the commandments are restrictive in that they require an exclusive and radical faithfulness to God: the covenant people are God's

property. Therefore, He declares that they can have no other gods before Him (v. 7). *Third*, as we have seen, in v. 3, God declares that the covenant is with those who stand before Him. Because men live and die, they view such events as the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai as simply historical events in a remote past. Even as our God is the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8), and it is we who are quickly a part of the past, so His covenant is a part of God's eternal realm of the present.

We are commanded in v. 1 to *hear* the laws of God and to *learn* them. The word translated as *learn* can also be rendered as *study*. The study of God's covenant law is the key to wisdom. All things must be studied from the perspective of God and His covenant, and His fundamental and universal law.

This insistence in Scripture is basic to the fact that in Christendom the goal *for all* has been literacy, knowledge of God's law-word, and wisdom. True Christianity is a faith for students, for those who seek wisdom and understanding.

These verses stress God's covenant law and covenant grace. Israel was about to enter Canaan: they had no natural nor historical *right* to the land. No nation has a natural right to anything, because the earth is the Lord's (Ps. 24:1). Claims to natural rights are invalid. God in His providence can raise up one people and put down another. To leave God out of history is at the least like attempting to maintain life without air.

Verse 6 is both the conclusion of the preface and the first sentence of the Ten Commandments. It declares, "I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." The law comes from the God who had delivered them from bondage, and the law therefore is not only a necessary part of their relationship to God, but *the key aspect of their deliverance*. They are not saved to live as moral idiots but as God's people of power, and the law is the key to that. The law is given as an aspect of their redemption: having been saved, they are now told how to live in freedom — by means of God's law.

Paul speaks of this in Romans 6:20-23:

20. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.

21. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.

22. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.
 23. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

For the ungodly, the law is a sentence of death; for the people of Christ, it is the way of life.

Verse 6 begins, "I am the LORD thy God." This is the foundation of all God's claims on us: He is the Creator, Sovereign, and Governor. "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3). There can thus be no questioning of His word or law. Isaiah says of those who turn the moral universe upside down,

Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He hath no understanding? (Isa. 29:16; cf. Isa. 45:9; Rom. 9:19)

Not only is God their Creator and ours, but also He declares that He brought them out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Similarly, He has brought us out of our blindness; not only so, He uses our past, makes all things work together for good (Rom. 8:28), and empowers us to be "more than conquerors" (Rom. 8:37), even as then He made Israel a conquering people.

Given these things, to substitute a man-made law for God's law is not only rebellion and stupidity, it is also the charter for human slavery, something fallen men prefer to freedom under God.

This preface to the Ten Commandments has as its purpose to remind us that there can be no valid law other than the law of God. The summons thus is to *hear*, understand and obey, and to *learn* or study God's law-word. It is our Magna Charta of freedom in Christ.

Chapter Thirteen

“None Other Gods” (*Deuteronomy 5:7*)

Thou shalt have none other gods before me. (*Deuteronomy 5:7*)

The first commandment is also the fundamental one. The whole of biblical faith rests on this premise: “None other gods.” The issue is polytheism versus theism, gods many versus the triune God. The issue in the modern age has been a concealed one, because polytheism is identified with pagan faiths such as those of Greece and Rome, where a whole pantheon of gods were recognized. Rome regularly added gods to that pantheon, usually dead emperors.

Polytheism is held by scholars to be a phase in the development of evolving man, from gods many, to one god, to no god and the triumph of reason and science. In this evolutionary view, prior to polytheism there was animism and pandaemonism.

This evolutionary perspective was in evidence very early, among the Greeks, for example. Xenophanes called attention to the fact that for the Ethiopians, the gods were black and flat-nosed, whereas for the Thracians, the gods were red-haired and blue eyed. This tells us something about all polytheism. *First*, in polytheism the gods are created in the image of men, reflecting their color and cultural outlook. When God bans all other gods, he denies to man the freedom to make a religion to suit his needs and desires. This is a major temptation for men: they want a god in their own image. Too many times I have heard people declare that they cannot believe in a God who would ordain things which they find morally reprehensible. Man’s fallen moral sense is used as a standard which God must meet and by which He must be judged. This is idolatry and a form of self-worship. Such people are affirming their moral judgment as god over all. “None other gods” means that our will and reason cannot function as judges over God.

Second, a very revealing fact about polytheism is the immorality of the gods. In Greek and Roman mythology, the gods and goddesses freely and without conscience practiced theft, adultery, deceit, and more. To be a god was to be beyond good and evil. The thinking of Nietzsche was anticipated by Greco-Roman polytheism. The Roman emperors, on their way to deification, anticipated it by their

flagrant contempt for morality. They held other men to their word while feeling personally exempt from any faithfulness to their own word. Power meant the privilege of exemption from the moral and legal ties binding ordinary mortals. Our Lord requires a way of life radically at odds with this pagan way:

25. ...The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.

26. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. (Luke 22:25-26)

48. ...For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:48)

Statements such as these, and others, make it clear that the whole moral order of paganism and polytheism is rejected by our Lord. The greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility and the accountability. In the pagan perspective, status confers exemption from morality and law. Cicero defended Gnaeus Plancius on a rape charge in 54 BC by saying that it was an old privilege of certain youth, and, while his client was innocent, the act was one "he was permitted by privilege to commit."¹

It can thus be said of polytheism that, the greater the status and privilege, the greater the freedom from law and morality. In this perspective, the people in power have the right to use those below them at their will and how they will, and this has been the working idea of polytheism.

Then, *third*, polytheism is implicit if not explicit in every society where the church is reduced by its own thinking to the spiritual sphere only. Theology is rightfully the queen of the sciences, of all areas of life and learning. To separate the various ideas, and to affirm with Clark Kerr a multiverse, and a multiversity, is to affirm polytheism. The appeal of this to the modern mind, as to pagan man, is that it is a denial of an overarching and absolute truth, and a denial of the God of truth. A multiverse of values means that men can choose their values and their lifestyles. Homosexuality, necrophilia, incest, bestiality, theft, murder, lies, and more all gain an

¹ Cicero, *The Speeches: Pro Achia Poeta, Post Rediteem in Senatic, Post Reditum ad Tuirites, De Doma Sua, De Haruspium, Responis, Pro Plancio, "Pro Plancio,"* 12:30-31 (London, England: Heinemann, 1923), 445, 447.

equal validity as lifestyles. In a world that affirms democracy, this means that all men have an equal right to play god and to live according to the morality of their choice. Our present moral decay is a product of this polytheistic faith. We cannot recover as a people and a culture without obedience to this first commandment: "Thou shalt have none other gods before me."

Fourth, we are the most dangerous of these "other gods." Our original sin is that in Adam we have as our essential urge the submission to the tempter's program:

4. ...Ye shall not surely die.

5. For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. (Gen. 3:4-5)

Man's original sin is his will to be his own god, his own determiner of what is good and evil, law and morality, and one whose eyes are opened, in that he knows himself to be the master of the world, not God's covenanted worker for the Kingdom of God.

Thus, when God forbids all other gods, He means emphatically that we ourselves must recognize that, as His creation, we must serve and obey Him. Our Lord, the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45-47), as very man of very man, set the pattern for us, in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying with respect to the crucifixion.

...O my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. (Matt. 26:39)

All the commandments are governed by this one: "Thou shalt have none other gods before me." It establishes priority in our lives. Our Lord says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15), and, again, in answer to the question, "Which is the great commandment of the law?"

37. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38. This is the first and great commandment. (Matt. 22:37-38)

Faith, love, and obedience are simply different facets of the same fact, knowing and rejoicing in our status as the creation of God.

Chapter Fourteen

The Worship of Images (Deuteronomy 5:8-10)

8. Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth:

9. Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me,

10. And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments. (Deuteronomy 5:8-10)

This is an important and controversial text; there are great differences of opinion concerning this law between Roman Catholics and Protestants, and among Protestants. Some Spanish Catholics have held strongly iconoclastic views. The difference is usually with regard to the nature of this commandment: is it two separate sections, i.e., (1) no graven images, and (2) no worship of them? This would make it two laws, in effect. Some read the law as saying, Make no images or likenesses of any kind *for the purpose* of worshipping them. This latter reading is more in line with God's commandments concerning His sanctuary. A variety of images and likenesses are included, such as the pomegranates, the cherubim, the engraved laver, and more. God would not, in the very construction and furnishing of His place of worship, violate His own law. Clearly, the use of art was not banned in God's instructions for His sanctuary.

John Calvin opposed depictions of God the Father and God the Spirit; having no visible, material form, any depiction of them would be falsification. On the other hand, he opposed the Anabaptist desire to smash existing sculpture and to deface paintings. He strongly opposed the misuse of art, not art itself.

There is another aspect to this law which tends to be neglected in the controversy pro and con over the place of art in the sanctuary. In. v. 9, we have the statement, "I the LORD thy God am a jealous God." The Berkeley Version reads, "I, the LORD your God, am a God who brooks no rival." This is the key to understanding this text. God brooks no rivals.

We can begin to unravel the meaning of this by citing two extremes. On the one hand, baroque art, combining intense emotionalism with

rationalism, left a sad legacy to the world: art replaced religion as the stimulus to worship. At its best, baroque art was magnificent, but its intense desire to create a religious, even mystical, experience through a deluge of aesthetic flamboyance contributed to the exhaustion of the Counter-Reformation *and* to the idea of art as a substitute for religion, and the artist as a prophet.

On the other hand, the Anabaptist and Zwinglian emphasis on no visual art, on bare, whitewashed walls, and often on no music, was equally a departure from God's law. It reduced religion to mystical experience, quietism, and, in too many cases, a retreat from both art and the world. Like Baroque Catholicism, it sometimes led also to a strong authoritarianism (as witness the Mennonites and others) because it was a retreat from God's word to man's wisdom.

God in this commandment forbids us from using our imagination or our ideas and concepts in framing, governing, or guiding worship. The Westminster Larger Catechism says of this commandment:

Q. 108. What are the duties required in the second commandment?

A. The duties required in the second commandment are: the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in his word; particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ; the reading, preaching, and hearing of the word; the administration and receiving of the sacraments; church government and discipline; the ministry and maintenance thereof; religious fasting; swearing by the name of God; and vowing unto him: as also the disapproving, detesting, opposing all false worship; and according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry.

Q. 109. What are the sins forbidden in the second commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the second commandments are: all devising, counselling, commanding, using, and any wise approving any religious worship not instituted by God himself; the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three Persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever; all worshipping of it, or God in it or by it; the making of any representation of feigned deities, and all worship of them, or service belonging to them; all superstitious devices, corrupting the worship of God; adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up of ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good

intent, or any other pretense whatsoever; simony, sacrilege; all neglect, contempt, hindering, and opposing the worship and ordinances which God hath appointed.

These answers ably state the positive and negative implications of the commandment. They also reflect the belief in iconoclasm as calling for the removal of "all monuments of idolatry," i.e., all church art. This emphasis gave a simplistic way of keeping this commandment; its application has been carried to great extremes, such as opposition to the presence of a cross in a church or on its steeple.

All this has not furthered obedience to the law. Arminianism, for example, exists commonly in bare and often ugly houses of worship, but this does not separate it from idolatry. The Arminian insistence on man's free will creates in man an icon of radical independence from God. If man can choose or reject God, man is then god over God. His free will can frustrate God. This is as much a false god as any of the Baalim of the Canaanites. We must again cite Isaiah 45:9-10:

9. Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?

10. Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What begettest thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth?

Thus, intellectual images must be seen as basic to idolatry. In fact, every pagan image embodies some intellectual premise, sometimes highly sophisticated ones. In Hinduism, for example, the various images represent a variety of concepts which seem intellectually astute and superior but for one defect: they represent man's ideas about what ultimate power should be, and they therefore set forth a fallen man's vision and an evil one.

Idolatry is not a primitive fact but an aspect of a sophisticated development of false religions. It is unknown among the ostensibly most "primitive" peoples, such as Bushmen, Eskimos, Hottentots, and others. Idolatry is an intellectual development among the more civilized peoples because it represents the triumph of the human intellect in interpreting reality.

Modern idolatry is purely intellectual in most cases. It has various names, such as the Marxist concept of the materialistic determination of history, the idea of inevitable progress, the dogma of evolution, and so on and on. Idols can be objectified in institutions, ideas,

scientific concepts, and the like. Freud, Darwin, and Marx have been important idol-makers in the modern era.

Basic to idolatries is a belief in a continuity of being between the natural and the supernatural realms. Given this premise, all reality is in a possible process of deification. As the gods are now, so men in time can be, it is held. "Mormonism" gives open assent to this belief. Such a faith creates idols out of its ideas and goes much further than some ancient pagan cults.

God says that He brooks no rivals, and all forms of idolatry are thus doomed. He brings home to children the consequences of an idolatrous generation to the third and fourth generation thereafter. Ideas and faiths clearly have consequences.

Strictly speaking, the subject of images or icons can be divided into two classes. *First*, idolatry is clearly the worship of false gods. *Second*, iconolatry is the use of prohibited means and devices in the worship of the God of Scripture. Iconolatry works to deflect and pervert the nature of worship by introducing man's concepts into a revealed religion. Man must think God's thoughts after Him, but man too often feels that his supplemental thinking will improve on what God has revealed. In all iconolatry, man is worshipping his own imagination and reasoning.

Chapter Fifteen

Taking God's Name in Vain (Deuteronomy 5:11)

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain:
for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name
in vain. (Deuteronomy 5:11)

When man reads the Bible, he seems determined to take the most minimal meaning wherever possible. As a result, this commandment is read as a prohibition of the vain use of God's name. Certainly, this is true, but is this all the law means?

In the Bible, *name* and *person* are closely linked. The name is expressive of the person. God's name is a statement that makes it clear that He transcends definition, "I AM THAT I AM" (Ex. 3:14), although He reveals His nature in His revelation. The biblical concept of names tells us that names should be a form of identification and should tell us about the person named. For this reason, people in Scripture often changed names. We do not know the original name of Abraham, but we know that it was first changed to Abram and then to Abraham.

Since a name represents in Scripture the person named, it also represented his person. We have this still in terms such as, "In the Name of the King," or, "In the Name of the Law." Thus the Name of God represents all the authority of the triune God. It can therefore be said, in brief, that to take God's Name in vain means primarily to invoke His authority falsely. In this sense, taking the Lord's Name in vain is more a sin of churchmen than of unbelievers.

We understand from this meaning of *name* why a married woman as well as unmarried daughters carry the name of the husband and father. They signify thereby that they are under his care and authority. It is a protective covering.

This makes clear the meaning of Isaiah 26:13:

O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion
over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name.

The meaning of the second clause is, having sinned and repented, we will now rely on thy name or authority only and will acknowledge none other name. None other gods means none other name.

The Name of God is also His self-revelation. God reveals Himself in His law-word. It is the expression of His being and Name. To take God's Name in vain means to despise or neglect God's law-word while professing His Name.

An ancient inscription from Sidon mentions "Ashtoreth the name of Baal," meaning that this Ashtoreth was a manifestation of Baal.¹

In the New Testament, the term, "the name of the Lord," is repeatedly cited from the Old Testament (Matt. 6:9; John 17:6, 26; etc.).

According to J. A. Motyer, the biblical doctrine of *name* can be summed up in three propositions. *First*, Motyer is more emphatic than we have been. He holds, "The name is the person." This is supremely true of God, but it is to some degree true of all of us. We think of ourselves inseparably from our name. When asked who we are, we give our name: it is who we are. We are not anonymous, and we do not like being reduced to a number. One of the punishments of imprisonment is being reduced to a number. When Social Security began, and then again when computerization began, there was much hostility by people against the reduction of people to numbers. We are not numbers: we are persons, and we have *names*. When people actually *seek* anonymity, their society begins to die because it is being depersonalized and dehumanized.

Second, "The name is the person revealed." Motyer states that Isaiah speaks of "the Name of Yahweh" rather than simply "Yahweh" because "the 'name of Yahweh' means Yahweh in all that fulness of divine power, holiness, wrath, and grace which He has revealed in His character." God's Name is a refuge because God has revealed Himself to be so. Our Social Security number will not identify us to people, but our name will.

Third, Motyer says, "The name is the person actively present." To call upon the Name of the Lord is to invoke His presence. To invoke the name of the law is to invoke the state's power and authority. To carry a name means to carry the fact of a person and a family, and the authority it may have.²

¹ G. B. Gray, "Name," in James Hastings, ed., *A Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, [1900] 1909), 479.

² J. A. Motyer, "Name," in J. D. Douglas, ed., *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, [1962] 1973), 861-864.

To return to the common idea of this commandment, it is certainly true that profanity is a serious misuse of the name of God. It is certainly a form of prohibited speech.

All the same, we must see the misuse of the name of God, of Christian, of Christianity, and so on, as far more serious. To invoke the authority of God, and to use His name for institutions and/or churches when we do not live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, is blasphemy; it is a violation of this commandment. None such men nor churches are guiltless.

The Hebrew word (*shav*) translated as *vain* has the connotation of evil, desolation or desolating, futile, useless, falsely, or lying. It means that God's name is *actively* put to evil use and is used to mask ungodliness. Its use is a deception. Thus, it can refer to false labelling, calling something godly when it is thoroughly ungodly.

We now have books which claim that the Bible does not oppose homosexuality, only homosexual prostitution. Besides being deconstructionist studies, such works are blasphemous and are clear violations of this commandment. They take the name of the Lord in vain, in falsity and for evil purposes.

The most serious violations of this law are not by the ungodly, however serious their contempt for God and their profanity. They are obviously evil, and all their lives are futility and vanity. Those who profess to be Christ's faithful servants and then treat His law-word as a plastic and malleable thing to be used as man sees fit are the evil ones who take His name in vain. God will not hold them to be guiltless. He will have His vengeance on the guilty ones.

We began by calling attention to the minimal meaning of this commandment. The church is very prone to this. It is easy to reduce this law to a prohibition of verbal profanity, which is true enough, while neglecting the fact that any church, any Christian, or any agency which uses Christ's name while disregarding His total law-word, denying His deity and incarnation, and denying the inerrancy of His word, is taking His Name in vain.

Chapter Sixteen

Guarding the Lord's Day (Deuteronomy 5:12-15)

12. Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee.

13. Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work:

14. But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.

15. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.
(Deuteronomy 5:12-15)

As we have seen in other contexts, the Sabbath is essentially a day of rest. The Sabbath is one day in seven, one year in seven, and the fiftieth year. It means a cessation of work, of debt, and of planning because it is an affirmation that God is the governor of all things, and His care is ceaseless.

The calendar year is a fact of nature. Less strictly, the month, too, is related to a natural fact even though the month is not for us strictly lunar. We associate the seasons of the year with the months, but the weeks have no such context. "The week is an artificial, man-made interval," according to one scholar.¹ We would say instead that the week is God-ordained. This being the case, the *need* for the sabbath rest is also God-ordained.

The Sabbath and rest have in the twentieth century given way to *leisure*. The Oxford English Dictionary's main definition for leisure is "Time which one can spend as one pleases."² The assumption is that work is not what one pleases to do, and also that the goal of living is to enjoy a life of leisure. The modern idea of retirement is an aspect of this. This means that dominion is not man's calling but rather that leisure is the goal. Such an idea is the product of an anti-Christian intellectual revolution. Not surprisingly, "In contemporary Western

¹ Witold Rybczyński, *Waiting for the Weekend* (New York, NY: Viking Penguin, [1991] 1992), 24.

² *Ibid.*, 15.

societies leisure has become an antidote to work.”³ Along with this is the idea of going *away* to rest.⁴ Such thinking is strongly humanistic. In terms of Scripture, man’s calling is to exercise dominion and to subdue the earth; as priest, king, and prophet under God in Christ, man dedicates his work and its results to God, rules over his sphere under Christ, and applies God’s law-word to every sphere as His prophet. The satisfaction of rest is in part to enjoy the success of our work under God.

In leisure, the goal is to escape from responsibility into an area where no duty exists. Man’s substitute Sabbath, leisure time, means time *away* from duties and responsibilities, not a joyful rest in the confidence of accomplishment.

Rest and leisure are not the same. Men now *work* at their leisure activities. “People used to ‘play’ tennis; now they ‘work’ on their backhand.”⁵

All of this is very important to the subject of the Sabbath. The French Revolution created a secular week.

Voltaire wrote that “if you wish to destroy the Christian religion you must first destroy the Christian Sunday,” and that was precisely what the secular week set out to do.⁶

Was Voltaire correct in saying so?

The destruction of the Christian Sunday removes the rest and the triumph from dominion work. The modern doctrine of progress, now virtually gone, is a secular form of the Christian doctrine of *providence*. The doctrine of providence had its major attention in Calvinistic circles. It asserts the total government, care, and direction of all creation by the triune God. At one time, the doctrine had its various subheads and stresses; now, the general doctrine is barely remembered. Charles Buck (1771-1815), wrote:

Providence has been divided into immediate and mediate, ordinary and extraordinary, common and special, universal and particular. *Immediate* providence is what is exercised by God himself, without the use of any instrument or second cause; *mediate* providence is what is exercised in the use of means; *ordinary* providence is what is exercised in the common course of

³. *Ibid.*, 159.

⁴. *Ibid.*, 108.

⁵. *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶. *Ibid.*, 45.

means; and by the chain of second causes; *extraordinary* is what is out of the common way, as miraculous operations; *common* providence is what belongs to the whole world; *special*, what relates to the church; *universal* relates to the general upholding and preserving of all things; *particular* relates to individuals in every action and circumstance.⁷

The doctrine of providence holds that nothing happens apart from, outside of, or without God. It declares that God is indeed totally God, and all things are totally His creation. Accident, chance, and fortune cannot exist in God's creation.

The doctrine of providence means that, despite all appearances, we are on the winning side as God's people. God works in and through all things to accomplish His sovereign purpose.

In terms of this, the Lord's day is a time of rest from our labors in the serene confidence that our work shall in God's providence prevail. Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Cor. 15:58)

Thus, among other things, the Lord's day tells us that we can rest because there is no futility in our labors, that our God makes all things work together for good for those who love Him (Rom. 8:28).

Israel is reminded of its deliverance from bondage in Egypt. That total deliverance requires now a total rest. Their servants and their animals must alike rest. Because they are God's people, they must give His rest to all who are with them and under them.

The Sabbath is related to the doctrine of providence because it is God who by His grace gives us revelation and the ability to rest. It is a day when we rest, not only from our work, but also from our cares. There can be no true rest if we are fretful and anxious about a variety of things.

The word *keep*, in "keep the sabbath day," means to *guard* it, to hedge it about. It is to be guarded as a valuable thing even as the Garden of Eden was hedged and guarded. Voltaire at this point may have been wiser than many churchmen. Guarding the Christian Sunday means guarding its meaning and purpose, the triumph of

⁷ Charles Buck, *A Theological Dictionary*, (Philadelphia, PA: Woodward, 1826), 502.

Christ over all things. It is a weekly reminder of the great proclamation of Revelation 11:15:

The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

The world of leisure is that of statism and irresponsibility. Play replaces work, and man's goal is to escape duty. Curiously, the enemies of the Christian Sunday have commercialized the day and made rest more difficult for more and more people. The goal, of course, is not rest but play.

The name *Sunday* retains the old Roman emphasis on the sun god, and this term is (with variations) in English, German, Dutch, the Scandinavian languages, and in Hindu culture. The Italians, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Gaelic use forms of the Latin *dominica*, referring thereby to the Lord.⁸ In English, the Puritan use of the term *Lord's day* has been largely supplanted.

We are to keep or guard the Sabbath day "to sanctify it," to make it holy, separated to rest under God. This is a *command* from God.

There is a curious sidelight on the neglect of the Lord's day in the twentieth century. In 1919 Sandor Ferenczi published a paper on "Sunday neuroses." Sunday, he wrote, was a day when modern man felt free from his duties and compulsions to be himself and to do as he pleased. Many, however, found their "liberation" to be a troubling one. In one case, involving a few, the symptoms appeared on Friday evening. With some, headaches and even vomiting mark their "liberated" Sabbath or Lord's day.⁹

"Liberated" man is never as free as he thinks. His liberation is too often from manhood and responsibility.

Otto Scott has observed that too many people regard work as slavery. Our Lord tells us that all men outside His new creation are slaves to sin (John 8:31-36). As a result, their slavery manifests itself in every sphere.

⁸ Rybczyaski, *Waiting for the Weekend*, 40-41.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 210ff.

Chapter Seventeen

Honoring Life (Deuteronomy 5:16)

Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. (Deuteronomy 5:16)

The word *honour*, given in both Exodus 20:12 and again in Deuteronomy 5:16, is a translation of a Hebrew word whose root meaning is *weighty*. Its use in the commandment means that honoring one's parents is a very serious matter in the sight of God. Our parents are our immediate source of life; to dishonor them is to despise both God and life. We are then at war with our own being in favor of an imagined nonbeing. There is a relationship between the hatred of one's parents and a will to suicide.

The persons attempting, or committing, suicide are marked, among other things, by a consuming self-pity. Self-pity is the worst cancer that afflicts humanity, and recent generations have been very prone to it. The rebellious person pities himself that one so noble and good as himself, or herself, must submit to the stupid and evil inanities of the father and/or the mother. The rebellious and suicidal person is also prone to be a revolutionary, and the world is seen as entrenched evil against his or her personal goodness. There is always enough evil in the world, and some sin in the best of parents, to lend a false justification to this perspective, but it is a monstrous perversion, because it refuses to recognize the sin of the rebel.

To dishonor one's parents is to dishonor life and authority in every sphere. It creates a rebellion which is essentially against life, and hence its suicidal nature.

St. Paul refers to this commandment and its meaning in Ephesians 6:1-4:

1. Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.
2. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise;
3. That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.
4. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Obedience is required “in the Lord,” as a religious duty. This requirement is of *children*; *honor* is required of all, old and young. Fathers are strictly commanded not to provoke their children to anger and disobedience. While their sin does not excuse the child’s sin, all the same, fathers in particular are held accountable if their lawless exercise of authority provokes their children into a like lawlessness.

Paul speaks also of this as “the *first* commandment with a promise.” *First* is in the Greek text *prote* (*protos*), which can mean first in order of importance, and this is the likely meaning. The promise of life attaches to all of God’s law, as Deuteronomy 4:40 makes clear:

Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, for ever.

The consequences of obeying this commandment have an effect on the next generation, so that an historical link is established. Whereas rebelliousness and dishonor are tied to revolution, the honoring of parents is firmly linked to social stability, a godly stability.

What God clearly says about obedience to *all* His law, and especially to honoring one’s parents, is that it is the key to social stability and a long life. The long life given is both personal and societal. Again, we must remember that this promise of long life is for obedience to *all* of God’s law, and the law with a singular priority is honoring one’s parents. The link to life and prosperity is a very real one: “that it may go well with thee,” we are told.

One aspect of honoring parents, which has a long history, is caring for them in their old age. This was the practice of the godly in Israel and in orthodox Judaism still. It also has a long history in Christendom, even to the design of homes in some countries.

Clearly, any study of the interpretation of this text, of the meaning of the word *honor*, makes it clear that one aspect of its meaning has been actual services. This is very clear from our Lord’s words in Mark 7:7-13. He sharply attacks as lawlessness any failure to care for needy parents. It is, He told the Pharisees, “making the word of God of none effect through your tradition” (Mark 7:13). We cannot reduce the honoring of parents to mere verbal respect.

There is still another aspect of this commandment which we cannot neglect without warping its meaning. There are two consequences of

obedience which are especially stressed. *First*, the promise of a prolonged life is a very important one. *Second*, it is tied to life in the land God gives His people, and the place where He prospers them.

This commandment is thus both life-linked and land-linked. Our faith is not simply a spiritual religion but a land-based faith. Psalm 37:11 declares,

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

Our Lord cites this in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:5). This linkage of faith and the land, of obedience and long life, cannot be neglected without destroying Christianity.

All this makes clearer the link between dishonoring parents and revolutionism and suicide. It destroys the essentials of life to dishonor the immediate source of life, and it is tied to a rebellion against God.

Those who dishonor their parents are marked by a rootless, restless discontent. Life and the world do not please them. They are bored with life. Since they are, in one way or another, killing themselves, it means nothing to them to kill life all around them.

Such people see themselves as suffering at the hands of a cruel family, a cruel world, and a cruel God. For some, revolution becomes a substitute for suicide. They relish the opportunity to punish others, and their sadistic impulses are unflagging.

As a student, I once spent a long time in argument with a young radical who was trying to convert me to his cause. He tried to flatter me by stating that I surely was too intelligent to believe in religion and reactionary myths. Stalin's purges and the enforced famine of the peasants were recent news, although their truth was denied by many. His answer to my questions about these things was, *first*, to deny them as "fascist lies." *Second*, he dismissed the problem by adding that, even if true, the whole matter was irrelevant because most people don't deserve to live, and, as against a socialist plan and future, these kulaks were an obstruction to the truth. This young man, full of contempt for his parents, had contempt for all who disagreed with him. He loved, not life, but an ideology. His faith was destructive of both life and the land. Basic to his perspective was an evil perfection: the world, his family, and all things had to meet his false standard or be judged.

Chapter Eighteen

Guarding Life (Deuteronomy 5:17)

Thou shalt not kill. (Deuteronomy 5:17)

As we have seen, the commandment to honor one's parents is a requirement to honor life. In this word, "Thou shalt not kill," life is protected. It cannot be taken except on God's terms. As P. C. Craigie noted, "The Decalog was representative of God's love in that its injunctions, both negative and positive, led not to restriction of life, but to fullness of life."¹ The law, however, is a burden to evil men, for, as Calvin said, "men would fain be exempted from all bondage."² Men want only that their will be done; anything else is for them slavery. Calvin said further,

Now we must understand that the way for men to rule their lives well and orderly, is to abstain from all evil doing, injury, and violence, and therewithal to live chastely and honestly without hurting or hindering of any man, and on the other side, to keep their tongues from harming any man by any manner of falsehood and lying. All these good properties must be in us, if we will frame ourselves to God's will and righteousness. So then, it is not to be marveled at, that God should speak here of murders. For it is done to hold us in awe, that we should not go about to do any outrage or harm to our neighbours. But yet for all this, we must come back again to that which I have touched already: that is to wit, that God speaketh after a rude and gross fashion, to apply himself both to great and small, and even to the very idiots. For we see how every man excuseth himself by ignorance: and if a thing be somewhat dark and hard, we think we have wherewith to wash our hands of the matter. When we have done amiss, (we think all is safe,) if we can say, Oh, it was too high and too profound for me, I understood never a whit of it. To the end therefore that men should have no such starting holes: God's will was to speak after such a fashion, as even little babes might understand what he said. That is the cause why he saith in short words, *Thou shalt not be a murderer*.³

¹ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 150.

² John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth Trust, [1583] 1987), 218.

³ *Ibid.*, 218-19.

Calvin held that this law requires men to “abstain from all wrong and violence.”⁴ He held that it is “not enough for men to abstain from evil doing,” because the positive implication of the law is to love our neighbor and to be godly in our relationship with him.⁵

God’s laws contain within them penalties for disobedience. We are told in Ecclesiastes 10:8,

He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.

Digging a pit has reference to a lawless attempt to ensnare a man; the man who does this will in time be trapped by his own evil. Farms in those days, and later in such countries as England, had hedge fences. Trees grew up in the hedge fence, which became a nesting place for birds, a refuge for small game, and a feeding ground for snakes. To break down a hedge fence at night to steal, or to allow one’s cattle to enter a neighbor’s field, meant that the trespasser was likely to get a snake bite.

How true is this?

Since World War II, we have, to a great extent, set aside the death penalty for most cases of murder. We have cheapened life, and murders have increased to a very high number. By making life easier for murderers and criminals generally, we have made it less tenable for ourselves. We have fallen into a pit of our making; we have broken the fence of God’s law, and we have been smitten as transgressors.

Another illustration: God’s law, and for centuries civil law, requires the death penalty for homosexuality. This has been set aside in much of the world. What is the result? In San Francisco, the Rev. Charles McIlhenny fired a homosexual organist and, in other ways, made clear his opposition to homosexuality. The church has been regularly defaced, and one murder attempt against him and his wife failed only because of an unexpected incident; however, the house was fire-bombed. Where we fail to follow God’s law, the penalties turn on our society. If we deny the validity of God’s law, its death penalties begin to operate against us. When we let murderers live, more people die.

Craigie’s comment is a valid one: the Ten Commandments manifest God’s love, and they lead, “not to restriction of life, but to fullness of

⁴ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 219-20.

life.” Modern man’s disobedience is leading to severe restrictions on our lives.

St. Peter says, in 1 Peter 4:15-16,

15. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters.
16. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

The word *suffer* means to experience passion and strong feelings. The first two offenses cited by Peter are very specific: murderer and thief. Then “evildoer” is general. Peter is speaking of not only the *acts* of murder and theft but the *desire* to kill or rob someone who offends us. The last sin is revealing: “a busybody in other’s men’s affairs,” i.e., a *meddler* who interferes by talk or action in the lives of others. If, rather, our *passion*, in actual suffering or fellow-feeling, be as a Christian, we are to glorify God. Our lives are then in harmony with Him. Peter speaks here in part about the temper of our lives, in thought and action.

The first murder, of Abel by Cain, is the root of all murder: it is the desire to be one’s own god (Gen. 3:5), and it is the hatred of God because *He* is God and not us. The more men hate God, the more they hate others and themselves.

In Isaiah 45:5, we read: “I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me.” Hence the commandment, “Thou shalt have none other gods before me” (Deut. 5:7). When men seek to be their own god, they not only deny the living God but also the right of all other men to any life in contradiction to themselves. A total intolerance of differences is then inevitable. In effect, such men are demanding of all others, including their own families, Bow down and worship me. The will to murder is a denial of God’s sovereignty and of the God-given grace of life given to other persons. Ungodly hatred is very often a safe way of expressing vengeance and committing murder.

The inwardness of this law is stressed in both the Old and New Testaments. To cite only a few verses,

Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart.... Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the LORD. (Lev. 19:17-18)

If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him. (Ex. 23:5)

Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again. (Deut. 22:4)

Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. (1 John 3:15)

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. (Rom. 13:8)

It is important to call attention to a qualification made by Calvin, in terms of God's law. What is here forbidden in the sixth commandment is *unjust* violence.⁶ The protection of our lives and property from violent and lawless men means that at times we must kill them. This is not a pacifist law. What is required is godly peace, and, lacking that, godly conduct. We are in fact *guilty* of breaking this law if we allow the earth to become polluted by innocent human blood (cf. Deut. 21:1-9). Calvin held that we then *implicate* ourselves in the guilt.

All Ten Commandments are very brief when compared with modern statutes. The sixth, seventh, and eighth are especially brief, and the first three words in the English (out of four in commandments six and eight, five in seven) are, "Thou shalt not." No words are wasted, nor is time spent, vindicating the law. The context of all God's law is *the totality* of the Bible; this provides more than enough explanation and understanding. This is not true of U. S. Federal law, nor of any state or county laws, or administrative laws issued by any statist agency on any level. In such cases, there is no uniform or stable context. As a result, some acts of Congress run frequently to five hundred or more pages, all unreadable and also unread by those who pass them. They have no clear, unchanging context; the Bible alone gives that. Supposedly, acts of Congress are in conformity to the U.S. Constitution, but the Constitution has become a fluid and meaningless piece of putty, made to mean whatever the federal government decrees. Such is not law, but the fiat of our new sultans.

⁶ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint), 20.

Chapter Nineteen

Guarding the Family (*Deuteronomy 5:18*)

Neither shalt thou commit adultery. (*Deuteronomy 5:18*)

Adultery in the Bible means not only sexual infidelity by a married person but includes also the sexual faithfulness of a betrothed person (*Deut. 22:23-24*). The death penalty applies in the biblical law (*Deut. 22:20-25*), because, the basic institution being the family, adultery is treason in a familistic society. Our world is statist, and treason is now unfaithfulness to the state.

Adultery, like all sin, is a double offense, against a man or a woman, the marital partner and the families involved, *and* against God, whose law is transgressed.

Even in societies like our humanistic one, where adultery is sometimes seen more as pleasure in variety rather than as sin, adultery has serious consequences. A high percentage of married men today are not certain who fathered the family's children. This uncertainty has vast social consequences. Adulterous women know that such an uncertainty has commonly an unsettling and even devastating effect on their husbands. It limits their future orientation. Why work to build up an estate, a business, or a farm for a son perhaps fathered by someone else? What happens then to a father's headship and authority? The sexual revolution was an aspect of a present-oriented culture, and it furthered that culture. Renaissance literature shows that the mockery of other men as cuckolds was an evil and commonplace fact, and a devastating one. Suspicion introduced in so basic a relationship as marriage has long-term consequences.

Among other things, true marriage is a religious fact as well as an intensely personal alliance. We now see it as a bond between two people, a man and a woman. The Bible underscores the fact that a new unit is created by marriage.

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. (*Gen. 2:24*)

This new unit is, however, in continuity with the old, for marriage is the basic community, after that the larger family, and, with some, the clan. In Ruth's statement we see this greater dimension:

16. And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

17. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me. (Ruth 1:16-17)

Ruth, a widow, makes this statement to her mother-in-law. By her marriage, Ruth has changed her faith and her loyalties, and for her there was no retreat.

A community always has a center of power and life. In a familistic society, that center is the man, the husband, and, in association with him as a vice-regent, the wife. It is not an accident that men tend to be authoritarian: they were created to be the human centers of culture.

In the modern world, humanism has shifted the power center from the family and the male to the state. The modern state is the power center, and it is intensely hostile to any other claimant to centrality, such as the church, but, most of all, hostile to the family. Controls on the family have as their purpose the chaining of the main rival to statist power.

One of the consequences of the triumph of statism is, *first*, limitations on women. The Enlightenment and the so-called Age of Reason severely limited a woman's powers over herself and her property. *Second*, because this restricted women unduly, a consequence of this was the rise of feminism. Women gravitate to power, whether as "groupies" ready to become the sexual playthings of media-created male celebrities, or as persons to whom "the real world" is no longer the family but the political order. Politics becomes feminized; a major political emotion becomes pity for every group singled out by politics for attention. The power center of humanistic women becomes the state. For some it is state-sponsored and state-promoted cultural activities. For such women, the power center is emphatically not their husbands nor families, no matter how great their affections for them.

This is why W. B. Yeats's words are so telling: in the modern world, "the center does not hold" because it is a false center. The result is an eccentric or off-center society. Children then too are off-center and accordingly become problems or are derelict.

Where men are power centers as heads of families, wives are also of great importance. John Adams was a man still close to the Puritan

world. Howe, the British viscount and general, proved to be alternately good and bad. Adams remarked, "a smart wife would have put Howe in possession of Philadelphia a long time ago."¹ To many, Adams's comment makes no sense, but to Adams, who knew men as power centers whose wives are powerful aides, the meaning was clear. Modern women are turning to the state and its "culture vultures" to be near to the new centers of power.

To detach power in society from the family is very dangerous. Man being a sinner, the abuses of power in families *are* real. In non-Christian cultures, they are endemic. It must be recognized that, despite abuses, the family is not simply a power center. It is a *family*, an intensely personal group, and the ties are those of blood and love, among other things. Very often, too, the power is a shared power. The family members of an important man gain in personal importance and privilege. The power exercised is personal and familial, not impersonal and statist.

Every social order is a system of power relations, and the more impersonal the power center, the less personal the consideration given to individuals. Statist power is the cold ability to dominate, control, and coerce people and to compel their conduct. In the family, faith and loyalty are strong compelling forces, whereas in the state it is the monopoly of legal power. The family's authority and power is a moral force when faithfully exercised. The state which is the power center has military and police power in its hands; it seeks, not a moral compliance, but a brute force organization of society.

Even sociologist Ray E. Baber summarized the defining fact of the family thus: it is "the basic social institution."² Since Baber wrote that in 1944, a statist revolution has triumphed, and the family is a major target of attack.

A Roman work, by Athenacus, written between AD 230 and 250, is revealing as to what happens when the state replaces the family as the power center. Athenacus held, as C. C. Zimmerman summarizes it,

¹ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York, NY: Avon Books [1977] 1978), 62.

² Ray E. Baber, "family," in Henry Pratt Fairchild, ed., *Dictionary of Sociology* (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1944), 114.

...that people had complete confidence in the power of sex to integrate the family and social system of that time and to insure the continuity of each.

The people were then ready to believe that this had always been true and every public character of the past is made out to be, whenever possible, a homosexual, to have had a mistress, and to have occasionally fathered illegitimate children. It reinforces the idea that women should sustain and feed the love of the husbands by out-Venus Venus. It shows a sex-life panorama as adequate — if not more so — as the most sophisticated writings on sex today.³

This primary emphasis on sexuality serves to erode the family. It gives a priority to anarchistic conduct which undermines the family, and it thereby furthers the state's claim to be the power center. So-called sexual freedom becomes an asset to the power state by helping to break down the family.

A final note: The inability of many scholars to understand the family as it once was appears in the work of an archeologist, Eberhard Zangger, in *The Flood from Heaven* (1992). Dr. Zangger sees the adultery which led to the Trojan War as a "trifling incident"!⁴ But, from the perspective of the time, Paris's adultery with Helen was an assault against the king and the realm, a grim fact that called for justice. Twentieth-century man may regard adultery with a queen, or anyone, as a trifling matter, but it was then an open contempt for and an assault on Greek power. This was why so many great Greeks joined in the war. It was far from being a trifling matter: *it treated them all as slave people* whose women could be taken at will, beginning with the queen. It was war.

³ Carle C. Zimmerman, *The Family of Tomorrow* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1949), 150-51.

⁴ Eberhard Zangger, *The Flood from Heaven* (New York, NY: William Morrow and Co., 1992), 191-92.

Chapter Twenty

Guarding Property (Deuteronomy 5:19)

Neither shalt thou steal. (Deuteronomy 5:19)

The modern world has been so saturated by Marxist and related views that property is theft that in many circles an intelligent discussion of the eighth commandment is difficult. Prior to the rise of socialist thinkers, the Lockean school defined society and the state in terms of property. We have thus moved from the religion of property to that of anti-property. When man departs from the God of Scripture and His law-word, his life and thinking become eccentric.

Man was created by God and is therefore defined by God, in whose image we are made. One aspect of God's image in us is dominion (Gen. 1:26-28). Dominion includes the ownership of property, and hence this law, "Neither shalt thou steal." Theft is the expropriation of that which belongs to another, whether land, things, or ideas, or hiring someone to steal them for us, or passing a law whereby another person's properties are taken in violation of God's law. Civil law can favor theft, or validate it, but this gives no moral justification to theft. The state does not define true law nor morality; it either recognizes God's law, or it transgresses it. The modern state is the greatest thief of all history, and its citizens are its allies in this immorality.

Some fifty or more years ago, I heard a lecturer describe man as no more, when stripped down to his essentials, than a pretentious rutting animal. Even before the rise of Romanticism, it was held that the true knowledge of man required a stripping down process. Religion was the first thing discarded by these "thinkers." Then, after Jean-Jacques Rousseau, civilization had to be discarded. After Marx, it was property, and, with the Naturists, such as George Bernard Shaw, it meant even clothing. Is the result true or essential man, or is it nonsense? Can no one know any of us except as we are all stripped naked for their examination and assessment?

The logic of the modern era holds that this is indeed the case. A most influential book of recent years, and important in shaping educational materials, was entitled *The Naked Ape*. Is man no more than a "naked ape" in his essence?

How do we truly know man, by stripping all men naked, or by knowing him as a creature made by God in His own image, in knowledge, holiness, righteousness (or, justice), and dominion (Gen. 1:26-28; Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24)?

The humanistic definition has led to stripping man of biblical faith. The Bible is banned in our schools, and it cannot be cited in American courts of law. Our schools teach evolution, man as a member of the family of apes.

Having legally stripped civil institutions of any connection with the God of Scripture, the humanists are now stripping man of other privileges given him by biblical faith and law. One of these is property.

A man is more than his own person, and a Christian man especially so. A man is a network of loyalties, allegiances, duties, and associations. He is never alone. Man in isolation is a figment of academic fantasies. Man is at all times in a context. Robinson Crusoe on a desert island quickly reestablished the context out of which he had come: he reproduced a society even in his solitary life, and then he fitted the native, Friday, into it.

One part of man's context is his property. There is a difference between a homeless, alcoholic man on the streets and a farmer with two hundred acres in grapes and peaches. The farmer, by hard work and thrift, has extended the scope of his God-given image by exercising a productive dominion over the land. His work both feeds and enriches others. His property is an expression of his character, thrift, and work. It is thus an attribute of his being that he is able to gain property and make it productive. The alcoholic street dweller is lacking in any godly exercise of dominion. The presence and absence of property helps define these two men. The fact of property is not incidental to the life of the farmer. All stripped down definitions of men are wrong, and much of our present political and social problems begin with false definitions of man.

The primary dictionary definition of *property* is that which is proper to anything, or is expressive of its essence or being. We now limit this definition to philosophy, but is this valid? *Property* in this sense is that which is "intrinsic" to a person; *property* in the sense of lands or buildings is held to be "extrinsic" to a person, not essential to his being. There are, however, intangible property "rights," ideas, writings in progress, and so on. How can such properties be called

extrinsic to a person? If he has ideas in the realm of writing, or inventions in the realm of computers, for example, he has a property right to them. They are an expression of his mind, his person. The boundary between intrinsic and extrinsic becomes a bit blurred. But a man who has developed a farm or a business has also put himself into the results. The results are both separate from his person and yet an expression of it. If this commandment, "Neither shalt thou steal," means anything, an attack on our property is an attack on our person. If property is honestly and lawfully acquired, its theft is an attack on our person and an attack on our lives. It is thereby related to murder.

The stripped down doctrine of man has led to the legalization of theft by the state. If men are no more than naked apes, or clothed apes, then they have no God-given privileges in any sphere. Then they have no right to either property or life. The attack on property is thus simply one aspect of a religious war.

Calvin made it clear that theft is an assault against God's law and God Himself. He said, "No man can be deprived of his possessions by criminal methods, without an injury being done to the Divine dispenser of them."¹ Calvin's summary statement is very clear:

The end of this precept is, that, as injustice is an abomination to God, every man may possess what belongs to him. The sum of it, then, is, that we are forbidden to covet the property of others, and are therefore enjoined faithfully to use our endeavors to preserve to every man what justly belongs to him.²

Our problem today is that the defense of property is linked to capitalism when it should be linked to theology. The attack on "private" ownership of property is an assault on the fundamental order of reality. It is an attempt to move from a God-ordained order to a man-made one. If the ownership of property by persons is a consequence of capitalism, then it has simply an historical rather than a theological and religious basis, and to agree to this is to surrender an essential point.

When God decrees, "Neither shalt thou steal," He is declaring what the fundamental order of human life is to be with respect to

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1 (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1926), bk. 2, chap. 8, sec. 45: 441.

² *Ibid.*

property. He is establishing its foundation *in Himself* rather than in any historical development.

There is a grim aspect to the war against property. At the same time that humanity is being denied the God-given privilege of property, our humanists, on “environmental” grounds, are insisting that vast areas of the earth *belong* to various animals, and even plants and trees, and must be protected against human trespass. Can this be called other than madness?

Chapter Twenty-One

Truth and Community (Deuteronomy 5:20)

Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour.
(Deuteronomy 5:20)

Joseph Bryant Rotherham's translation brings out the meaning of this commandment very plainly: "Neither shalt thou testify against thy neighbour with a witness of falsehood." Robert Young also uses the word "testimony" in his *Literal Translation*. Primarily, the reference is very clearly to a court of law. Secondly, all falsehood in normal circumstances of life is forbidden. This law does *not* forbid espionage and like covert action, nor does it obligate us to tell the truth to men who want to use it to do evil. We have in our time people who believe that we should, rather than keep silence or lie, reveal to evil men, to the Nazis in World War II, or to the K.G. B. in the Soviet Union, things which can be used to kill innocent men. This is not biblical, and it is a sordid justification for cowardice.

The purpose of this commandment is to *protect* the integrity of courts of law and the normal routines of life. We live in an evil and dishonest society, and we must protect the freedom of normal communication. In tyrant states, as under Marxism, people are afraid to talk freely one to another, or to their children. One who visited the Soviet Union in the Stalinist era told me that there were no conversations between people in the streets. At the same time, the squeak of badly made shoes was everywhere. He was, in fact, conspicuous because his shoes did not squeak. Because the Soviet socialist state held that it had a right to all men's secrets, truth-telling between persons was limited and dangerous. To hear another man's confidences and opinions on subjects not approved by the state placed both speaker and hearer at risk. Silence was therefore advisable. Moreover, since one had no way of knowing what dangerous opinions someone else had in secret, it was wisest not to get too close to others. This limited liability.

What tyrant states have created are societies that are closed to God but open to the state. The church is persecuted, and God's law is despised. The strength of a society is to have people who are open in two fundamental ways: *first*, they must be open to God in prayer. This helps arm them against the tyrant state because their appeal in

prayer is beyond man and the state to the sovereign and triune God. This freedom of access to the throne of all creation arms a man against the powers of the state. *Second*, men must be open to God by believing and obeying His law. They then know that God's justice governs men and nations, and that the wages of sin are finally and always death (Rom. 6:23). They are then able to stand against the small, closed world of the state.

To keep this commandment, we must recognize that the world was created by God the Son, who is truth incarnate (John 14:6). The enemy of the triune God is Satan, who is the father of lies (John 8:44). We have on the one hand the realm of Christ, of truth, and of life, and, on the other, the realm of fallen men, of lies, and of death. In protecting the realm of truth by this law, God summons us to further His kingdom, not the kingdom of Man.

We are *not* to testify against others with a witness of falsehood. The purpose of this law is to strengthen and further community. In the kingdom of Man, truth-telling is used to further evil. We are summoned to betray our neighbor's godliness. Is he secretly holding church services on his premises? The Kingdom of Man wants to use the truth to destroy men, and this is not God's ordained purpose for the truth. Hence, God blessed the Egyptian midwives for not betraying the mothers and their newly born babies (Ex. 1:16-22), and He blessed Rahab for saving the lives of the Hebrew spies (Josh. 2:1-24; Heb. 11:31). Truth cannot be divorced from God; it cannot be put to satanic purposes.

For the Greek philosophers, truth, along with goodness and beauty, was an abstract universal which existed apart from God, who to them was simply the first cause. Truth, for the philosophers, was an abstraction, not the Godhead. Plato wrote:

Just in the same way understand the condition of the soul to be as follows. Whenever it has fastened upon an object, over which truth and real existence are shining, it seizes that object by an act of reason, and knows it, and thus proves itself to be possessed of reason: but whenever it has fixed upon objects that are blent with darkness, — the world of birth and death, — then it rests in *opinion*, and its sight grows dim, as its opinions shift backwards and forwards, and it has the appearance of being destitute of reason.

Now, this power, which supplies the objects of real knowledge with the truth that is in them, and which renders to him who

knows them the faculty of knowing them, you must consider to be the essential Form of Good, and you must regard it as the origin of science, and of truth, so far as the latter comes within the range of knowledge: and though knowledge and truth are both very beautiful things, you will be right in looking upon good as something distinct from them, and even more beautiful.¹

Truth is thus an abstract concept; it is the accurate scientific perception of things. It is therefore limited to philosopher-kings and scientists. The major part of humanity can only have opinions; it cannot know the truth. This view of truth logically limited knowledge and power to an elite group of philosopher-kings, and it placed most men under their control.

In one form or another, this same concept of truth governs intellectuals, scientists, and politicians in our day. Most people are held to be incapable of knowing truth in this scientific sense, and truth is therefore beyond their knowledge. As a result, the carefully crafted political lie is basic to our society. We are not told the facts of our federal deficit, or anything else, so that all may understand. Truth is then the domain of a small elite. As against this, the biblical mandate is for truth to all men under most circumstances. Only when men seek to do evil, as Pharaoh with his order to kill all male children born to Hebrew women, are we exempt from telling them the truth and thereby aiding and abetting crime.

For Aristotle, the world had to be reduced in order to be comprehensible to man. He wrote:

Again, if the kinds of causes were infinite in *number* it would still be impossible to acquire knowledge; for it is only when we have become acquainted with the causes that we assume that we know a thing; and we cannot, in a finite time, go completely through what is additively infinite.²

In other words, truth for Aristotle must be comprehensible to the philosopher. For the Christian, truth, Jesus Christ, whose revelation is His enscriptured word, is open to all men; for Aristotle, truth is a domain for philosophers and scientists.

¹ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. J. L. Davies and D. J. Vaughan (London, England: Macmillan, [1852] 1935), [508] 230.

² Aristotle, *Metaphysics, Books 1-9*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (London, England: William Heinemann, [1933] 1956), 2.2.13, 93-94

For Aristotle, the good is that at which all men aim.³ But, as Christians, we know that fallen man aims at evil, not at truth. As a result, the non-Christian doctrine of truth, in all its forms, is a lie.

Thus, there are very basic issues in this law. It is a question which Pilate treated skeptically, saying, "What is truth?" (John 18:38).

The purpose of this commandment is to guard the truth, and the community of the Kingdom of God, by insisting that truth-telling means no false witness in courts of law, nor between ourselves and our neighbors. The purpose of truth is to enhance and develop justice and community in society. It means that this commandment, where obeyed, furthers peace and harmony in a society. If we do not testify against our neighbor with a witness of falsehood, it means positively that we live with him under the mandate of our King, Jesus Christ.

It is very important to recognize that, in this century, confession, full disclosure to God, has declined among Catholics and Protestants alike. At the same time, the federal government, and, for a time, corporations, were demanding full disclosure. The state was claiming the prerogatives of God while denying them to God. The Fifth Amendment to the U. S. Constitution was at the same time being breached: the right to be free of a forced confession, the immunity against self-incrimination, was denied on various federal levels, beginning with Congress. It is not surprising that servile churchmen, to whom openness to God is alien, should insist on a full disclosure to statist agencies.

³. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Hammondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, [1953] 1958), bk. 1, chap. 1: 25-26.

Chapter Twenty-Two

The Lawless Mind (Deuteronomy 5:21)

Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is thy neighbour's. (Deuteronomy 5:21)

In the Authorized or King James Version, the words in the English text are different, i.e., "thou shalt not desire thy neighbour's wife" in Deuteronomy, and, in Exodus 20:17, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife." Both *covet* and *desire* translate the same Hebrew word. Its meaning can be good or bad, depending on the context. Here, of course, the reference is to a lawless desire, delight, or coveting.

This law is closely related to Deuteronomy 5:19, "Neither shalt thou steal," and it applies to the mind what was previously applied to property. We have no right to want, desire, or think of gaining whatever is our neighbor's, and this means that neither in word nor thought, let alone deed, do we think of taking what does not belong to us.

The law speaks to the man, the male. What he must not do neither can the wife nor the children do. The man must set the pattern of faithfulness and obedience. He dare not use his headship to seek exemptions *from* the law, because his headship means that it is he who sets the pattern of faithfulness and law-keeping. This same premise appears in our Lord's words to His disciples when they sought eminence in the Kingdom:

42. But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.

43. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:

44. And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.

45. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

(Mark 10:42-45)

Jesus Christ, in His incarnation, kept the law perfectly (Heb. 4:15); He did not use His status to seek an exemption from it, but, as our

example, kept it fully and perfectly. We are therefore *commanded* to bring “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). The expression, “every thought,” can be translated as “every understanding,” or, simply, “the mind.” In Charles Hodge’s words, “the obedience of Christ is conceived of as a place, or fortress, into which the captive is led.”¹

To covet in an ungodly sense is to resent what others have and to believe that one has a better “right” to them; and it can lead to direct theft or expropriation, or hiring someone to do the stealing for us, or to the popular enactment of legislation whereby the wealth of others is legally expropriated. To covet in the sense of desiring the lawless sexual use of others is to treat other persons as things to be used. This is the essence of pornography, the reduction of persons to things to be used sexually. The current prevalence of pornography is related to the statism of our time. Statism gives priority to the impersonal machinery of civil government. The goals of society cease under statism to be the glory of God and man’s fulfillment in His service. The state becomes the focus of life and thought, and all problems are seen increasingly as matters requiring a statist solution. This is the depersonalization of all things, and this is the same approach to reality taken by pornography.

A lawless coveting strips the world of God and His law, and it also strips people of their status as persons. “Reality” then becomes no more than the self-will of the egocentric willing individual. I was told some years ago of a man, very abusive of his wife, who told her to leave the house: he was weary of her. When she not only did so, but found a rewarding job, became interested in another man, and filed for divorce in order to marry him, her husband shot and killed her. She had, in his eyes, no right to an independent existence and happiness. This is the pornographic mind: it denies an independent existence to any save itself.

The existentialist temper of the twentieth century has been very conducive to pornography. Man, being reduced to no more than an unattached person, without past or future, to life in the existential moment, has no ties to anything. He regards all things in terms of their usefulness to him. Man and the world outside of him become no more than resources for his use or pleasure.

¹ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint), 236.

This reductionism can be other than sexual. In this century, with the socialist influence on college students, one can find vicious examples of covetousness among students. For example, I have heard arguments which, stripped of their “noble” sentiments, meant, simply: It is not right for people less intelligent than we are (such as capitalists) to have more than we do. Hence, capitalism is evil.

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the egocentric premise of such students is true, and that they are more intelligent than most capitalists. Even then, we must say that man is much more than a mind! He is a person. Moreover, there is far more to capital accumulation than intelligence. Character, work, and thrift are basic to capital accumulation, whereas the socialist mind insists, rather, that it is simply theft: this turns the moral universe upside down, and it tries to vindicate covetousness and theft by redefining falsely every aspect of the economic scene. To neglect the part character, thrift, and work have in the spheres of life is to replace reality with imagination, and this is what pornography does.

The scope of this law is total: It begins with a mention of our neighbor’s spouse. By applying the law to the man, with regard to a neighbor’s wife, the law covers all coveting by family members, by a wife for a neighbor’s husband, or by either spouse for another’s children, and by children for a neighbor to be their parent.

Paul has this law in mind when he writes, “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6). Covetousness has lawless gain in mind. Paul says that godliness with contentment is the gainer.

This law also forbids coveting another man’s employees, his animals, “or anything that is thy neighbor’s.”

Lawless coveting seeks a short-cut to gaining its way and will. Where persons, such as another man’s wife, are concerned, its goal is possession without any reason other than desire. Family, social, and godly responsibilities are set aside in favor of one’s will. “My will be done” is the sufficient rationale because the person so motivated is one who seeks to be his own god, determining law for himself (Gen. 3:5), and his will is sufficient justification in his eyes.

To covet things lawlessly is to say that character, thrift, and work are morally unnecessary for the attainment of one’s goals.

God’s fiat word created all things, and, as the psalmist tells us, “For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:9). Man seeks, by his first willing, to gain what he wants. He

forgets that he is a creature, not God, and that he is a fallen creature as well, so that his will too often is an expression of sin.

The Ten Commandments seek to restrain our words, thoughts, and deeds in their fallen bent, in order that we may be freed to serve God as we ought. These laws govern all men because they are God's laws, but only the redeemed in Christ find in them "the law of liberty" (James 2:12) whereby they are free from the law of sin and death.

Chapter Twenty-Three

The Whole Path (Deuteronomy 5:22-33)

22. These words the LORD spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added no more. And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me.

23. And it came to pass, when ye heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, (for the mountain did burn with fire,) that ye came near unto me, even all the heads of your tribes, and your elders;

24. And ye said, Behold, the LORD our God hath shewed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth.

25. Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, then we shall die.

26. For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?

27. Go thou near, and hear all that the LORD our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it.

28. And the LORD heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the LORD said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken.

29. O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!

30. Go say to them, Get you into your tents again.

31. But as for thee, stand thou here by me, and I will speak unto thee all the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which thou shalt teach them, that they may do them in the land which I give them to possess it.

32. Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

33. Ye shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess. (Deuteronomy 5:22-33)

Moses here recalls the delivery of God's Ten Commandments and the rest of His law at Mount Sinai. Moreover, God there appointed Moses as the mediator (vv. 28-31). "Let Israel, therefore, obey and prosper" (vv. 32-33).¹

Moses is recounting incidents of about thirty-eight years earlier. The older generations to whom he then spoke had all died, except for himself, Caleb, and Joshua. All the same, Moses speaks as though they were the ones to whom God then spoke. An important biblical presupposition is involved here. A people's past is also to a degree their present. In particular, because of God's covenant, a people's past is also always their living present. It is important to understand the significance of this covenantal reality in order to appreciate history.

To illustrate, the United States, from the days of the first settlements in New England and Virginia, will, within a generation, be four hundred years old. Before God, its history involves its total life, from its early covenantal settlement to its present apostate ways. The present generation was not born into an empty world, nor do the immigrants coming in enter into nothing more than the present material culture. The present is a product of the past to a large degree. The nations are all like men to whom varying numbers of talents are given, and the Lord will hold them accountable for their past and present (Matt. 25:14-30). Every accounting by God is a total one: it begins with our past and includes its totality into all the present. Apart from the atonement and our sanctification, we stand as impossibly heavy debtors to God. For this reason, Moses spoke to the generation before him as fully a part of the generation past. The anarchistic individualism of our time makes us mindless of the importance of our past and of our histories as people.

The mandate is still the same. Israel must hear and obey to prosper. Their days cannot be prolonged apart from faith and obedience.

Israel at Sinai feared God because of a bad conscience, and with good reason. They therefore asked that Moses be their mediator. To be face to face with God and His law, His justice, was too much for them (vv. 24-31). The law of God is an indictment of man and his sin. Plato's *Republic* has no laws, nor does Aristotle's *Politics*, because neither had a doctrine of the Fall and of man's sin. For them,

¹ H. Wheeler Robinson, *Deuteronomy and Joshua* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. C. & E. C. Jack, n.d.), 87.

the problem was to ensure social health by the harmonious development of man, and also the state. True balance, with reason in control, would ensure the flowering of natural goodness. The philosophical elite would provide the guidance.

Since the Enlightenment, modern man has had a like belief. It has seen the fault, not in man, but in the bad arrangement of things, the lack of the sufficient application of reason and science to society, and the prevalence of Christianity. At the beginning of the century, Andrew Harper wrote:

But in our modern day....men like Goethe and Schopenhauer, and even Carlyle, have demanded that mankind should yield service to them, and then, by the furtherance and development they thereby attain, they promise to work out the deliverance of men from superstition and unreality and the bondage of ignorance. Goethe in this matter is typical. He preached and practiced the most uncompromising humanity in no way so well as by making every one he met, and all the experiences he encountered, minister to his own intellectual growth. Instead of saying with Moses, "Blot me out of Thy book," but spare these dim idolatrous masses, he would have said, "Let them all perish and let me become the origin of a wise, more intellectual, more self-restrained race than they." He consequently pursued his own ends relentlessly from his early years, and attained results so immense that almost every domain of thought, speculation, and science is now under some debt to him. But for all purposes of inspiring moral and spiritual enthusiasm he is practically useless. His selfishness, however high its kind, accomplished its work and left him cold, unapproachable, isolated.²

In every age, salvation has been by God's grace alone. This was emphatically true in Moses's day, as it is in our own. Israel's salvation was to be, as ours must be, the obedience of faith (vv. 30-33). In v. 32, the words, "Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you," can be rendered as, "Ye shall be *careful* to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you."

Richard Clifford has called attention to a detail in the very literal reading of the latter half of v. 32: "You shall turn neither right nor left on *the whole path* which the LORD your God has commanded that you walk...."³ According to Calvin the greatest benefit and the

² Andrew Harper, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: George H. Doran Co., n.d.), 113-14.

³ Richard Clifford, S. J., *Deuteronomy, with an Excursus on Covenant and Law* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier Inc., [1982] 1989), 44.

highest honor God gives to a people is to enter into covenant with them and to give them His law.

The marginal notes to this text in the Geneva Bible read as follows:

He requireth of us nothing but obedience, shewing also that of ourselves we are unwilling thereunto. As by obedience, God giveth us all felicity: so of disobeying God proceed all our miseries.

The early church strongly emphasized the two-way preaching of, on the one hand, sin, death, self-will, lawlessness, and unbelief, and on the other, life, righteousness or justice, obedience, faith, and godly service. Obedience is due to God because our salvation is an act of sovereign and free grace. As Thomas Scott said so well,

The word of God is spoken to us, that we may learn, retain, and practice it; for in this all religion is ultimately centered, and without it the whole is but a dead carcass, not only worthless but abominable.⁴

This is a blunt statement for our time. Modern man now defines things in terms of himself, or his experience, whereas God defines everything in terms of His word and will.

Verses 22-27 tell us of an “interesting” aspect of the giving of the Ten Commandments. When given at Sinai, all Israel heard the terrifying voice of God in giving the Decalogue. They then in terror asked that Moses mediate the rest of the law to them. Thus, only these Ten Commandments were heard by all. It was shortly after that, as they grew impatient with Moses’s return, that they turned to the golden bull-calf worship and fertility cult practices.

The law as a whole is a unity, not a collection of miscellaneous precepts. It sets forth the nature and the justice of God. It requires understanding as a unit, and then we can understand why love is the fulfilling, or putting into force, of the law (Rom. 13:8-10). The law is God’s plan for the conduct of life on earth, and it is a design for dominion and victory. It requires God-centered living, and it centers the life of man and society on God. The law insists that man face up to the consequences of his actions. This knowledge is the beginning of true history. Apart from it, history is simply a chronicle, a register of events, not an account of a developing meaning. The decline of faith leads in time to a decline in historiography.

⁴ Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible, ...with Explanatory Notes, etc.*, vol. 1 (Boston, MA: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1830 ed.), 534.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Sharpened Knowledge (Deuteronomy 6:1-15)

1. Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it:
2. That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged.
3. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey.
4. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:
5. And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.
6. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:
7. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.
8. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.
9. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.
10. And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not,
11. And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full;
12. Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.
13. Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.
14. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you;
15. (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth. (Deuteronomy 6:1-15)

Moses here tells Israel and all generations something which has never been popular, namely, "obedience will bring prosperity"¹ while disobedience brings judgment and death. Our generation is hostile to this fact. We are so far gone in our rebellion against law, discipline, and structure that our educators imagine that children can learn to read without knowing and mastering the alphabet. Such determined resistance to ordered learning means a willful resolution to sever all links with the past in the name of freedom. In economics, the failed experiment of John Law is now disregarded; in politics, we repeat every failure of the past and present. Especially with respect to Christianity men inside and outside the church say in effect of Jesus Christ, "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14).

Not only is obedience required, but an open avowal of faith. In vv. 8-9, we have a command to Israel to reveal their faith by an identifying mark on their heads, and on their houses. This was easier to obey then, because various nations, notably Egypt from whence they came, used such identifications. They were designed to reveal religious citizenship; the phylacteries of various peoples were a means of identification, a public evidence.

It is important to recognize the relationship of this to the mark of the beast in Revelation 13:16-17 and 20:4. The beast, the anti-Christian world order, demands that all men be identified in terms of this humanistic society. Men are to be known, not in terms of God nor their own achievements, but in terms of the state and its numerical classifications. This is the dehumanization of man. The phylacteries were worn as a profession of faith. The mark of the beast is a mandatory identification of all people.

These verses can be divided into the following sections:

1. "*Fear* the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and commandments" (v. 2). God is the ultimate and absolute power. To *fear* men and things and not to fear God is a strange and radically obtuse attitude. The essential determination of all things is in God's hands. There is a blessing in fearing and obeying God. In vv. 1-3, 13, and 15, we have this emphasis on fear, and on obedience.

2. The *love* of God is equally stressed. In vv. 4-5, the command stresses the unity of God, and the requirement that we love Him.

¹ H. Wheeler Robinson, *Deuteronomy and Joshua* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. C. & E. C. Jack, n.d.), 88.

Not to love God is to love evil. The love of God is thus a litmus test of our faith.

3. Then, in vv. 10-13, we are commanded to *remember* the Lord, and to *remember* His blessings. We did not enter an empty world, and we must not leave it less rich when we leave. We have a duty to God to capitalize the future.

The emphasis is clearly that faith must be practiced. Faith without works is not faith but a pretension. The faith required is a living, working one; it means the love of God and the hatred of sin. Such a faith creates a division between good and evil, between law-keepers and law-breakers, and the law means God's covenant law.

In v. 4, we have the summons, "Hear, O Israel," or *Shema* (hear) O Israel. To declare God to be "one LORD" is to proclaim the unity of faith and life. Instead of a pluralistic universe with diverse loyalties and alien realms, there is one Lord, one universal realm of truth, and one obvious allegiance, to God the Lord. This is closely related to v. 15, "the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you." The world cannot be divided into realms that are religious and others that are not. If we say that, for example, law and mathematics are spheres outside God's jurisdiction, we incur His wrath. Since all things were made by Him (John 1:3), there is no truth nor reality apart from Him. We provoke God's jealous wrath if we limit His dominion and truth to the church. The confession, "The LORD our God is one LORD," is in four words in the Hebrew.

In vv. 7-9, parents are *ordered* to teach their children the faith. This is to be done "diligently." The future of a family and the nation depends on the godly education of the generations to come. God teaches His people out of love, and failure to educate our children in the faith manifests a lack of sound love. It is one thing to be proud of our children, but another to make sure that they are reared in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Failure to teach our children and to instruct them in the faith and in God's law often rests on an implicit humanism. Especially in the modern era, men have believed that the child is naturally good. If this be the case, child-rearing becomes child indulgence. Because the child is held to reflect the lovely perfection of a state of nature rather than original sin, the child is then given freedom of self-expression and self-will.

Of course, instead of producing heaven on earth, such theories of child-rearing are creating a new barbarism, massive lawlessness, and a break with the past. If the child is naturally good, our past history and our Christian faith are impediments to the child because the child's state of nature is far superior to past history and biblical faith.

Humanistic child-rearing thus undermines both Christianity and a sound historiography. Not surprisingly, humanistic educators have banned the Bible from schools and replaced history with social studies. No lessons from God or the past are permitted! This is a basic premise of the new barbarians: wisdom is born with them, and hence neither God nor our past history have anything to offer to them.

The *Shema Israel* appears in various forms: as simply 6:4, or Deuteronomy 6:4-5; or 6:4-9; and sometimes as 11:13-21, or Numbers 15:37-41; it was a text for repetition twice daily.²

The command to teach and to talk about God's law-word diligently, both in the house and out of it, and both sitting and walking, is an image of total application. The whole of life and thought must be governed by God's word. It is a total relevance and therefore there must be a total allegiance.

Verse 5 is called by our Lord the first and the great commandment: "Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Matt. 22:37-38).

Gerhard von Rad called vv. 10-15 a "stereotyped list of 'real estate,'" because it is a legal form of derivation. It is like a land register of legal properties.³ In this instance, its meaning is that God reminds them that this is a gift from Him to them, and it represents an ancient gift promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If Israel despises God, He will wipe them off the face of the earth (v. 15). This is the essential statement of Deuteronomy 6:1-15: obedience will bring prosperity, and disobedience will bring death. In P.C. Craigie's words, "the commandments were to permeate every sphere of the life of man."⁴

² A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, [1979] 1981), 176.

³ Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1966), 64.

⁴ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 170.

There is an important aspect to the command (v. 7) to teach one's children God's law. In the words of Gustave E. Oehler, they set forth "*God's higher right of property* (which is sealed by circumcision)."⁵ God owns us and our children; circumcision and baptism are public admissions of this fact. As a result, the basic and fundamental requirement of parents is that they acknowledge this fact and act in terms of it.

The commandment in v. 7 says, "Thou shalt teach them [God's laws] diligently." According to John Gill, in a literal rendering, "it may be rendered *thou shalt whet* or *sharpen them*: the words or commandments; it is an expression of diligence and industry in teaching, by frequent repetition of things."⁶ In the constant teaching of God's laws, we gain a growing knowledge and insight into their meaning and application. Our failure to sharpen our knowledge of God's law has meant our own dullness in understanding the problems of our times.

⁵ Gustave F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, [1883] reprint, n. d.), 232.

⁶ John Gill, *Gill's Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, [1852-1854] 1980), 719.

Chapter Twenty-Five
The Free Society
(Deuteronomy 6:16-25)

16. Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah.

17. Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee.

18. And thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the LORD: that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest go in and possess the good land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers,

19. To cast out all thine enemies from before thee, as the LORD hath spoken.

20. And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you?

21. Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand:

22. And the LORD shewed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes:

23. And he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he swore unto our fathers.

24. And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.

25. And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us. (Deuteronomy 6:16-25)

In Matthew 4:1-11, in the account of our Lord's temptation in the wilderness, we see that three times our Lord answered the devil, and all three times it was by quoting a verse from Deuteronomy. In His first answer, He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3; in the second, Deuteronomy 6:16; and, in the third, Deuteronomy 6:13. Thus, two are from this chapter. Deuteronomy 6:13 forbids the invocation of any other god than the LORD God in all oaths. This means that the legal and actual foundation of all society, and of all spheres of society, must be in the God of Scripture and His law-word. An oath is an invocation of a society's ultimate and absolutely essential ground of all truth and law. In too many states now, a man's oath rests simply on a

man's word; we have shifted the foundation of society from God to man, and man is depraved, a fallen creature.

In Deuteronomy 6:16, "Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah," we are forbidden all efforts to prove, test, or evaluate God; God stands in and of Himself and His word. At Massah, Israel, needing water, declared, in contemptuous unbelief, "Is the LORD among us, or not?" (Ex. 17:7). Israel was saying, in effect, God is meaningless for us *unless* He serves us. The test of God becomes what He does for men. In J. A. Thompson's words, "To test God is to impose conditions upon Him and to make His response to the people's demand in the hour of crisis the condition of their continuing to follow Him."¹

In vv. 17-19, the covenant requirement of faithfulness to the covenant law is stressed. Obedience means the blessing of prosperity, possession of the land, and the defeat of all enemies (cf. Ex. 23:27-32). Obedience must not be perfunctory but diligent. The direction of our lives must be to fulfil our duties diligently. We do not keep the law, then, to avoid trouble, but because we delight in righteousness or justice. Our Lord says, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness [or, justice]: for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6).

In v. 18, we are told, "thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the LORD." The brief marginal note in the Geneva Bible says simply, "Here he condemneth all man's good intentions." Our intentions and our ideas of good and evil count for nothing. What matters is the law-word of God. Hence, our concern should be "that which is right and good in the sight of the LORD."

God had promised Canaan to Israel. How much of it they possessed now depended on them. Their conquest depended on their faithfulness to God's law (v. 18). God had promised to cast out all their enemies from before them (v. 19), but this was contingent upon doing "that which is right and good in the sight of the LORD." God can and does impose conditions upon us; we can never impose conditions upon God.

In vv. 20-25, the education of the young is commanded. The amount of teaching by parents of their children is minimal in a humanistic society. The child is assumed to be naturally good, and,

¹ J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, [1974] 1978), 125.

having the family's heredity, is held to be well equipped for life. The sad fact is that man's fallen estate is neglected in such rearing, and the child grows up an alien to his family because sin is always divisive.

Three things are stressed in this emphasis on education. *First*, the emphasis is on witness. The natural curiosity of the child is to be directed towards knowing the meaning of the faith. The child must be encouraged to know the meaning of the law, and of the history of the faith. This is particularly important today. The present generation has been cut off from the past by miseducation in the schools and by vague and general teachings in the church. To be cut off from the past is to be a barbarian.

Second, our history, like that of Israel, is one of deliverance and blessings. Youth today knows, or believes it knows, much about the evils of our time, but it has no awareness nor appreciation for the hard-won victories of past generations. Again, this is the mark of the barbarian. None of us are born into an empty world, and we must not leave it emptier when we die. We have a God-imposed duty to leave the world richer for having been here (Matt. 25:14-30).

Third, not only is the teaching of the law required, but it must be stressed that it is for our good always, "that he might preserve us alive" (v. 24). The survival of a people and of civilization depends on this. God's law must not be taught as a burdensome imposition. That was the teaching of the Pharisees, who turned the law into a yoke. The law is our protection and liberation. Remove two laws alone, Thou shalt not kill, and, Thou shalt not steal, and it becomes at once obvious how devastating the consequences would be, and how liberating God's law is. It is for our good always, as v. 24 makes very clear.

One aspect of biblical education was music and songs. For example, in Deuteronomy 31:19, we read,

Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it to the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel.

The song in question is the whole of Deuteronomy 32. Of course, many other portions of Scripture were memorized and sung by young and old, and also the Psalms, as a part of their education.

Receiving the law was a first step in education and towards freedom, but it had to be followed by obedience. Memorization was for

centuries, together with music, an essential part of education. Calvin favored the singing of the creeds and more.

According to A. D. H. Mayes, in v. 23,

he brought us out: this expresses, in legal terms, Yahweh's emancipation of Israel from Egypt; cf. Exod. 21:2ff, where the verb is frequently used of a slave legally gaining his freedom.²

This is at the heart of the text. The people must know God's law, and each successive generation must be taught the law, for there is no freedom without it. To imagine a free people or society without law is to imagine a state of anarchy. This is, of course, where humanistic doctrines of freedom are very rapidly taking us. As in Rome and in the Renaissance, and so now also, this moral anarchy is always accompanied by statism and tyranny.

Archbishop Cranmer, commenting once upon a godly society, said, "There must be great strength to support such good days."³ This is something our age has forgotten: there is no cheap or easy road to the good society for fallen men. It requires the strength of men faithful to God's law to establish and maintain a good society. Freedom comes not from lawlessness nor antinomian doctrines but only from godliness and the obedience of faith.

To attempt the establishment of a good society without God is stupidity; the Marquis de Sade knew better than modern humanists what the outcome would be. "It shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us" (v. 25). Justice for us and our society means, in other words, keeping God's law. The just and free society is the godly society.

² A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, [1979] 1981), 80.

³ John Peter Lange, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, reprint, n.d.), 97.

Chapter Twenty-Six
The Ban
(Deuteronomy 7:1-11)

1. When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou;
2. And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them:
3. Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.
4. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.
5. But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire.
6. For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.
7. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people:
8. But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.
9. Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations;
10. And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face.
11. Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them. (Deuteronomy 7:1-11)

Both the substance and the details of these verses were separated on other occasions by Moses. The substance of it is a ban on certain nations and their practices. The peoples of Canaan belonged to fertility

cults; their cultures were saturated with homosexuality, bestiality, and a routine exaltation of things evil. The ban had a moral purpose. *First*, it demanded in God's name a total separation from these pagan cultures and practices. In the wars against these peoples, there was to be no mercy shown. Verse 5 makes it clear that, while the armies are to be destroyed, the continuation of the peoples is foreseen. There must be no covenant made between Israel and these peoples; a treaty presupposes a common religious nature to their laws, and no such common ground existed for either alliances or marriages. In our time, we have seen some disastrous marriages, such as between Americans of a Christian background and Islamic students. On a return to the husband's homeland, the American bride finds that every standard is the reverse of what she has known; no common premise for life exists.

The ban denies to the army and people any right to profit by the confiscations and destructions. What is not ear-marked for destruction is devoted to God, i.e., must be given to His service. A total ban meant total destruction. For this reason, such a religious ban has been scarce in history, in that victors prefer to profit by their victories. Had it been otherwise, armies would readily invoke religious bans as a step towards mass seizures. The biblical ban prevents this.

The moral purpose of the ban was paramount and central. A sharp line was drawn between good and evil; it could not be crossed during wartime or peacetime. The difference was strongly affirmed. Not only were men barred from allying themselves with evil, but they could not profit from evil in the name of having fought against it.

The ramifications of this law are therefore important. The modern state, as the warring body, *cannot* morally seize money and property from guilty (let alone innocent) people and retain such assets. If restitution needs to be made to innocent parties, it must be done, but, for the state to profit from the most justifiable seizures means that such profiting will lead to unjustifiable seizures, as is happening in our day.

What is clear is that violations of the ban involved, *first*, mixed marriages between the covenant people and the ungodly; *second*, failure to destroy the prescribed pagan images and properties; and, *third*, the personal use of what belonged to God or was to be destroyed at His orders. Failure in these areas placed one under the same ban.

About a century ago, the Rev. Andrew Harper of Melbourne, Australia, saw clearly the nature of the coming twentieth century. He saw a new form of the ban beginning to appear, stating, "In wide circles both within and without the Church it seems to be held that pain is the only intolerable evil."¹ Since then, pain has been with many groups placed under a ban for men and animals: no spanking, no hunting, no use of furs, no plain-speaking that might distress someone, and so on and on. The ban in humanistic form is very much with us.

In vv. 6-8, Israel is told why they must enforce the ban. God had *chosen* them by His sovereign grace. God's choice meant no merit whatsoever on Israel's part, nor any strength. Although they had been made a specially protected and loved people, they were in reality an insignificant group: God's miraculous deliverances simply witnessed to God's grace, not Israel's merit nor usefulness. There was simply no humanistic reason whatsoever for Israel's election, *nor for ours*. The required separation rested not on Israel's superiority but on God's requirement: "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God" (v. 6). Their holiness is not a self-generated, self-serving merit: it is a part of their calling "unto the LORD thy God." No ground for self-satisfaction is permitted. In spite of their sin and stupidity, God had chosen them and had decreed their deliverance from Egypt. Nothing in the history of their escape from Egypt gave them any ground for anything other than shame at their conduct and gratitude towards God for His mercy.

In v. 9, the command is, "Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations." *Know therefore* means recognize and feel the force of God's sovereign power and mercy. God keeps a covenant of grace and mercy to the thousandth generation of them that love Him, but He will repay to their faces and destroy those who hate Him.

We began with a ban which God's people must impose on His enemies. Now we come to another ban, this one promised by God to His chosen people if they despise His grace, law, and sovereign election. God's ban will be the more enduring, exacting, and thorough one. History is the story of God's bans in action. Men are ready to

¹. Andrew Harper, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: George H. Doran Co., n.d.), 185.

discuss the ban Israel was told to enforce. They are less ready to discuss the ban God promises to Israel, and to us.

In v. 7, the smallness of Israel as compared to other nations is stressed. This emphasis is basic to the chapter. Israel's trust was not to be in any supposed advantage they themselves possessed inherently, but in God's grace and law. The covenant people had to stand in terms of the covenant God; anything short of that was unbelief.

God thus in requiring the ban on the Canaanite peoples was also setting forth the requirements on Israel to avoid being banned by God. In Deuteronomy 28:15ff. we have God's description of His ban at work. We can look at the world around us in similar terms. Every effort is being made to despise God's covenant and law; the *form* of the covenant still prevails in the constitutional oath of office, a fact which aggravates the offense against God. It would be morally wrong to disbelieve that, without repentance and reformation, we too will not be banned by God.

The Hebrew word for ban, *herem*, is related to the English word *harem*, which refers to the separation of women for an exclusive possession; the concept is also related to excommunication, a ban which on certain conditions can be lifted. Its main use in the Bible is, *first*, to ban certain Canaanite peoples; *second*, to ban Israelites, or covenant peoples, from certain anti-covenantal practices ranging from mixed marriages to secret idolatry; and *third*, to devote certain things or persons to a particular use only. The ban must be only in terms of God's law. In the Christian era, Judaism seriously damaged the ban by applying it for infractions of various kinds as decreed by the elders. The church has also excommunicated people too often for infractions of church rules rather than of God's law and has therefore damaged its own strength and credibility.

Chapter Twenty-Seven
“The Covenant and the Mercy”
(Deuteronomy 7:12-16)

12. Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the LORD thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he swore unto thy fathers:

13. And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he swore unto thy fathers to give thee.

14. Thou shalt be blessed above all people: there shall not be male or female barren among you, or among your cattle.

15. And the LORD will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which thou knowest, upon thee; but will lay them upon all them that hate thee.

16. And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee. (Deuteronomy 7:12-16)

This is a text which is usually given a brief and hurried treatment. It is an embarrassing text because it is too specific, and vague promises by God are for many people easier to deal with.

The text is, *first* of all, totally at odds with “spiritual” interpretations of biblical faith. An essential link is declared between our faith and the material realm. It is not an infallible link, but it is an essential one. It does not say that all who are godly will be healthy and will not be barren. For God’s own purposes, for example, Sarah was long barren; so too was Rachel, and, centuries later, Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. Both fertility and barrenness, health and sickness, are in God’s hands, and both have His sovereign purpose in mind, and all things can be blessings or curses. Normally, however, the essential link between our faith and our material lives must be seen as the text declares it.

Second, diseases in particular can be a part of God’s curse on a people. In v. 15, mention is made of the evil diseases of Egypt, all well known to the Hebrews. Well into the present century, these were many and included such diseases as elephantiasis, various boils, eye diseases, and bowel infections. By mid-century, twentieth century

man, with a variety of powerful drugs, felt that these ancient curses were nearing an end. Now, however, a variety of diseases and viruses threaten the life of a sizeable part of mankind. As against these and other plagues, God would protect a covenant nation.

Third, there would be material prosperity and agricultural fertility and abundance if they were godly. This would be by God's blessing, so that the credit would not be theirs but God's. To assume otherwise means that we hold the natural realm to be more determinative than God Himself. This heresy of naturalism reduces God to an influence rather than the determiner. History is not determined by man nor by natural forces but essentially by God, in whose hands man and nature are but instruments. This text radically ignores the naturalistic interpretation of history. The religions of antiquity strongly affirmed naturalistic determination, so that our text speaks against the faith of the times. Israel's sin in the centuries that followed was to lapse regularly into Baalism, into naturalistic determinism.

Fourth, v. 16 affirms military success for the covenant people. They shall consume or eat all the people whom God delivers into their hands. This is the key: all depends on God delivering the nations into their hands. We cannot shift determination to our obedience, necessary as that clearly is. Whether it be fertility, productivity, or victory, it all depends on God's sovereign purpose. A law-order is posited: obedience brings blessings. But obedience cannot *command* blessings. These are contingent upon the will of God. The promises of the law do not transfer determination from God to man. Rather, they tell us how God blesses us when He chooses. This text, and others like it, become embarrassing only to those who insist on a humanistic determination. Such people say, in effect, if we do certain things, *then* God *must* give us certain blessings. To believe so is to say we are blessed or cursed in terms of our expectation and determination.

Fifth, when we are faithful, v. 15 tells us, God's curses will fall on our enemies. If faithless, the covenant-breakers will be smitten in the same way and worse. According to Deuteronomy 28:27-29,

27. The LORD will smite thee with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed.

28. The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart:

29. And thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou

shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee.

In Deuteronomy 30:7, the promise is the same as in 7:15:

And the LORD thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee.

Sixth, the very fact that these things promised by God are *blessings* makes it clear that determination rests in God's hands. We receive blessings or favors, not earnings. The Giver determines the gift, and what we receive may be other than we desire, but it is what God purposes in terms of an eternal plan.

Seventh, everything even then is conditional also on our obedience. Verse 12 begins, "if ye hearken to these judgments," or, "if you listen and obey these laws," or, "as a return for your hearkening." Our immunity (v. 15) to the foul diseases of Egypt is also conditional upon our obedience. *Clearly, immunity to diseases has a fundamentally religious aspect.* In v. 14, the promise is, "Thou shalt be blessed among all people." Too often, in studies of diseases, we have a one-way perspective. We read of the diseases which white men gave to the natives of the Americas. The fact is that the natives had various diseases prior to the coming of the Europeans. Although there were exceptions, much of the reported transmission was from the Europeans to the natives, who were supposedly in better health. Scholars have not, to my knowledge, studied the relative immunity of the Europeans. In Africa, many Europeans died at first but soon gained either a resistance or an effective medication.

Eighth, as an aspect of the relationship between biblical faith and the material realm, we have in vv. 13-14 the plain assumption of an essential link between a godly faith and the productivity of the earth. Most peoples of history have been abusive of the soil. So, too, despite popular beliefs to the contrary, have been more than a few animals. The American buffalo destroyed trees, streams, and grasslands. The African elephant destroys forests, and so on. Where unrestrained by man, animals can be very destructive. Godly faith, on the other hand, develops the fertility and usefulness of the earth. Incidentally, it is a myth that "virgin soil" is necessarily highly productive. Such soil is often heavily abused by various animals and requires much work to restore to fertility.

Ninth, v. 13 makes it obvious that a covenant of law is basic to a relationship of love by God to man. God's love is not for those who

despise Him and who transgress His laws: it is for those who keep His covenant law. Obedience gains love and blessings. This is fundamental to all the Bible. Our text tells us of the blessings of obedience, and the love of God for the obedient. God's love is not lawless; it is not antinomian. Salvation throughout the Bible is by God's sovereign grace alone, but this is no charter for antinomianism, which despises the law or nature of God, a fearful offense.

Tenth, as C. H. Waller noted, "the law of Moses was in many of its details a sanitary quite as much as a moral code."¹ This again underscores the essential link between biblical faith and the material world. There is no confusion between the two, but neither is there a false separation.

Eleventh, v. 12 refers to God's relationship to Israel as "the covenant and the mercy." The two are inseparable. God's covenant with man in all ages is a covenant of law and therefore a covenant of grace, because God in His mercy gives a law to man, the law which expresses His being and justice. This term, "the covenant and the mercy," makes it clear that law and grace cannot be separated, and that all God's blessings and providential care are aspects of His mercy.

¹ C. H. Waller, "Deuteronomy," in C. J. Ellicott, ed., *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.), 28.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

The Abomination (Deuteronomy 7:17-26)

17. If thou shalt say in thine heart, These nations are more than I; how can I dispossess them?

18. Thou shalt not be afraid of them: but shalt well remember what the LORD thy God did unto Pharaoh, and unto all Egypt;

19. The great temptations which thine eyes saw, and the signs, and the wonders, and the mighty hand, and the stretched out arm, whereby the LORD thy God brought thee out: so shall the LORD thy God do unto all the people of whom thou art afraid.

20. Moreover the LORD thy God will send the hornet among them, until they that are left, and hide themselves from thee, be destroyed.

21. Thou shalt not be affrighted at them: for the LORD thy God is among you, a mighty God and terrible.

22. And the LORD thy God will put out those nations before thee by little and little: thou mayest not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee.

23. But the LORD thy God shall deliver them unto thee, and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction, until they be destroyed.

24. And he shall deliver their kings into thine hand, and thou shalt destroy their name from under heaven: there shall no man be able to stand before thee, until thou have destroyed them.

25. The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire: thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein: for it is an abomination to the LORD thy God.

26. Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing like it: but thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it; for it is a cursed thing.

(Deuteronomy 7:17-26)

We have in v. 20 a strange statement which is difficult to set in a time sequence although its basic meaning is clear once we know what *the hornet* is. *The hornet* was a symbol of pharaohs. The archeologist, John Garstang, made this clear some years ago, as did Sir Charles Marston after him.¹ The whole area of Canaan and Syria had been under Egyptian power, and the practical effect of the collapse

¹ John Garstang, *Joshua and Judges* (London, England: Constable, 1931), 112-15, 258-60. See also Sir Charles Marston, *New Bible Evidence* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell, 1934), 166, 223.

of Egypt's power had left the various Canaanite states unable to defend themselves. They were morally bankrupt, economically rich, and militarily incompetent apparently. *The Hornet*, or Egyptian military power, had reduced the Canaanites to the point that a numerically fewer people would easily overthrow them.

The reference to *the hornet*, or Pharaoh and his power, was at once understandable to Israel. It also was a startling commentary on God's providence. Egypt had been the great oppressive power, and its overthrow had required supernatural actions. Now their way into Canaan was made easier because of Egypt's earlier shattering of the Canaanite states. Their ancient oppressive enemy was now their blessing, in that Egypt's earlier campaigns had left shattered peoples. A little later, Rahab described to the spies how the Canaanites felt about a people before whom Egypt had fallen:

9. And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

10. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.

11. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. (Josh. 2:9-11)

We are too often so absorbed with our fears or problems that we forget that God works at every end and aspect of all things, so that our deliverance and prosperity come from unexpected sources. Those whom Israel feared in turn feared Israel, and with better reason.

These enemy peoples were also the enemies of God. This is an aspect of our battles we must never forget: if our enemies are the enemies of God, they will, in His good time, be destroyed. Their religion being a false one, whatever its pretenses, everything used therein is an *abomination* to God. In v. 26, not only is the term *abomination* used, but also "a cursed thing," and "thou shalt utterly abhor it." An *abomination* means something unlawful, unclean, abhorrent, and evil. It is a word that can be used of things, such as idols, or acts, such as lawless sex, or of eating forbidden foods, or of ungodly marriages. It can also refer to unjust weights (Deut. 25:13-16), to wearing things pertaining to the other sex (Deut. 22:5), and much more. Such

things are important to God because they are His laws. The term *abomination* does not refer to things seen as trifles by God. For practicing abominations, Canaan had become an abomination in God's sight, and hence judgment was necessary.

In brief, to regard history humanistically is to impoverish ourselves. It means that we see no force in history other than our own, and this is a sure recipe for defeatism. To deny God's power at work in history is itself an abomination, a dirty, repulsive, and evil thing. The concept of an *abomination* is side-stepped by a humanistic culture, which finds offensive only that which offends humanistic man.

This entire chapter stresses something which Joseph C. Morecraft III has called strength through isolation. Because our view of strength is humanistic, we see strength in humanistic terms.² We are told to look to God for our strength, not to man. The humanistic approach leads to compromise and to dangerous alliances.

An absolute loyalty to God is set forth as necessary, and three grounds for such a fidelity are stressed. *First*, God has demonstrated in all His dealings that He is absolutely true to His covenant promises. He had initiated the covenant in grace; man could and can dissolve it with sin (vv. 7-11).

Second, God's covenant always gives material blessings, including physical health. We must not reduce God's blessings to the spiritual realm because the Bible clearly does not (vv. 12-15). We cannot tell God *how* to bless us; we are plainly told, "He shall choose our inheritance for us" (Ps. 47:4). God does not discriminate against either material or spiritual gifts because both realms are His creation and avenues of His blessings.

Third, we are summoned to be faithful because God is always faithful and always present in all His power. As He did to Pharaoh, to Egypt, to Og, Sihon, Amalek, and others, "so shall the LORD thy God do unto all the people of whom thou art afraid" (v. 19). There is more to life than we can see, and we must always walk by faith (vv. 16-26).³

Verse 22 is a remarkable one. God summoned Israel to a total and immediate victory, but He knew their weaknesses. After their initial

² Joseph C. Morecraft III, *A Christian Manual of Law: An Application of Deuteronomy* (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Christian Training Center, n.d.), 21.

³ Charles R. Erdman, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1953), 39-40.

victories, the peoples settled into their designated areas and were less willing to help conquer other parts of Canaan. As a result, the conquest took some generations. God, in His foreknowledge, refers to this and cites it as something He ordains and uses to bless them: "thou mayest not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee." Too quick a conquest would leave unoccupied land, and wild animals would then have the opportunity to increase at a dangerous rate. Modern man has an exaggerated, and probably a conceited, belief in his power to destroy. We are seeing a return of many wild animals once believed to be gone from much of America, and we are seeing an increased destructiveness by many of these proliferating animals. It was a blessing of God to Israel that the land was not emptied by conquest and allowed thereby to revert to wilderness. A related myth to that of the paradise of wild animals is that of virgin soil. No virgin soil has existed since God created the earth. Animals can be very destructive of the soil, vegetation, and trees.

In v. 26, there is a very stern warning: "Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing like it." In other words, "He who brings an abomination into his house, himself becomes abominable."⁴

Thus, they are not to be afraid of the enemy nations but of God. God is always the significant friend or enemy, and it is His wrath we must fear, not man's. Therefore, as far as these peoples of Canaan are concerned, "Thou shalt not be afraid of them" (v. 18). The antidote to fear is to remember God, and what He has done (v. 18). When they walk in faithfulness to the covenant God and His law, "there shall no man be able to stand before thee, until thou have destroyed them" (v. 24). This is a remarkable promise from man's perspective, but, from God's, it is simply an aspect of His covenant faithfulness.

We live in a fallen world, a sinful world, a world that is militantly at war against God. God's view of man and nations is not a sentimental one. They either serve the Lord, or they serve themselves. They either war on God's side against all that He calls an abomination, or they themselves become an abomination. God gives to no man nor nation the option of neutrality. It does not exist.

⁴ J. H. Hertz, ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London, England: Soncino Press, [1935] 1962), 781.

Chapter Twenty-Nine
The God Who Humbles Us
(*Deuteronomy 8:1-20*)

1. All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers.
2. And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.
3. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.
4. Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.
5. Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee.
6. Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him.
7. For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills;
8. A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey,
9. A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.
10. When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.
11. Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day:
12. Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein;
13. And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied;
14. Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.
15. Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint;

16. Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end;

17. And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.

18. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth the power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.

19. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish.

20. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God. (Deuteronomy 8:1-20)

The purpose of this text is clearly stated in v. 2, “thou shalt remember.” An emphasis on historical memory is to be found in the law and the prophets as well as the various books of wisdom. Without the correcting force of a godly memory, men will act stupidly and will repeat their sins endlessly.

The implications of this are very ably set forth by Joseph C. Morecraft III:

1. Chapters eight and nine tell us that God’s claim reaches the mind and attitude, and obedience involves a total submission of the thought-life (including what we think of ourselves) to the Word.

2. These chapters warn us of “pretended autonomy.” Autonomy is the sinful notion that we are responsible for the governing of our passion, desires, etc.; that our minds are sufficient to understand and improve upon life, with no regard to God or His Word; that life is what we say it is; and that truth is what seems to be true to us.

3. Chapter eight warns us especially of any sense of self-sufficiency, which is the sinful notion that we do not need God in the every day course of events, because we have great wisdom and strength; that we are the bringers of prosperity and producers of success.¹

These verses also tell us much about Palestine in that era, before the Turks made it a desert. It was, v. 7 tells us, a land of brooks of water, and of springs and *depths*, referring to underground waters. Although wheat and barley were not major crops, they are cited because they

¹Joseph C. Morecraft III, *A Christian Manual of Law: An Application of Deuteronomy* (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Christian Training Center, n.d.), 21.

were staples of diet. Then we have cited vines, fig trees, pomegranates, olives, and honey. Three of these, the olive, the grapevine, and the fig, were basic; in fact, a history of these three could be important in tracing the course of civilization in the Mediterranean world. The reference to “brass” means copper.

Verses 2 and 3 make a startling statement: God humbled Israel in the wilderness by making them dependent on manna. Here was a great miracle of providence; it did give the people a startling measure of economic security daily for about forty years. It was a blessing, and yet it was a humbling. The proud and ungodly Israelites were reminded daily, as they ate manna, that they were dependent upon God. Kings in antiquity fed all members of their court. This accomplished a double purpose. *First*, being fed by the ruler made them members of his family; it was a form of adoption, and an act of grace. But, *second*, the daily feeding was a reminder of who was king, of his power and protection. It served to stress dependence and to further humility. This was also God’s purpose. At first, He allowed them to suffer hunger to teach them to rely on Him, and then He fed them. He made them His sons, and He chastened, humbled, and disciplined them.

Manna was thus in part a humiliation. Man seeks to live by bread alone, but, as v. 3 stresses, this is not possible. Man cannot live like a cow; his own work cannot feed the whole man, no matter how productive he is, nor how much food he raises. He needs the “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD” (v. 3).

Israel accepted manna as a privilege, not as a humiliation and a gift of grace, and it thereby sinned.

This chapter makes a contrast between Israel’s life in the desert and its future life in a land with a rich soil and great fertility. In the desert, Israel readily forgot God even though its existence depended on God’s supernatural care. This providential guidance went so far that their clothing did not wear out, nor their feet give out in the wilderness (v. 4). If they could forget God under the wilderness circumstances, what gratitude would they show in a lush land of milk and honey? God’s power and care would soon be forgotten.

Moses then makes three contrasts and three commands. In each of these three, Moses speaks of “this day,” or, “today” (vv. 1, 11, 18). The *first*, v. 1, is a summons to obedience. God has given them the

gift of His covenant, and the gifts of the land and its prosperity. Their response must be to obey His law.

Second, they are commanded in v. 11 to *remember* and obey. They must not become existentialists, i.e., forgetting the history of God's covenant grace and assuming that their own power had given them these gifts of care, land, and prosperity. This is stressed in vv. 11-17.

Third, they are told that the consequences of forgetting will be that God will place them on the same level as the Canaanites and then deal with them accordingly (vv. 18-20). If they forget God, He will "forget" them as His people and will punish them as He does the Canaanites. The land did not create itself: it is the Lord's, and He will give it to whom He wills, whether as a blessing or a curse. As v. 1 says so plainly, "All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, *that ye may live*." Life, personal and national, depends upon God and His care. About 1900, some theologians used this chapter to warn the peoples of the West about the necessity for faithfulness. They were not heeded, and we see the results today. Verses 19 and 20 have been called by some, such as P. C. Craigie, as basic to Deuteronomy. In v. 18, Israel is reminded of God's sovereignty:

But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he swear unto thy fathers, as it is this day.

God gives gifts to men to bless or to curse them, as the case may be. To His covenant people, the power to get wealth is given "that he may establish his covenant." The gifts God gives us, whether of wealth or of talents, are not for our sakes but for the sake of His covenant. The goal of life is not our enrichment but the Kingdom of God.

It is wrong therefore to say, as did Bernard N. Schneider, "Prosperity is still a great enemy of faith and spiritual life."² The focus in Deuteronomy is *not* on ourselves, nor on our prosperity, nor on our lack of it, but it is always on God's covenant, its grace and law.

Moses declares that the dangers ahead come not from their enemies but from themselves:

² Bernard N. Schneider, *Deuteronomy* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1970), 74.

Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day. (v. 11)

God's purpose in the wilderness journey was threefold: "to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandments, or no" (v. 2). They were being tested and tried so that they would see themselves as the major problem. Joseph Parker called this process God's plan of life.

When Moses declares, "man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live" (v. 3), he is not contrasting a material way of life against a spiritual one, but, rather, the contrast is between man's desire for autonomy as against a total dependence on and trust in God. The stress throughout this chapter is on God's providence. *Man is not alone in this world; more pervasive and total than the air he breathes is the providence of God.* We are never outside His very particular government. To live by God's every word and predestined act for us means also that we cannot pick and choose our destinies: they are God ordained. Man is not self-sufficient nor autonomous, and for him to think of life apart from God's purposes is to live in terms of illusions rather than the truth.

In v. 2, when Moses says that God puts us through various experiences "to know what is in thine heart," the meaning, as C. H. Waller pointed out, is that the knowledge might arise, that a refining process would develop and bring out in us our potential under God.³

This chapter has had in part a sad history because it sets forth so clearly God's prerogative to humble, test, and prove His people by subjecting them to a variety of sad experiences. The great medieval Jewish scholar Maimonides rebelled against such a doctrine, and much of Judaism followed him. Evil experiences were charged to various "natural" causes. In the twentieth century, this development led some rabbis to reject the hand of God in the Jewish ordeal under Hitler.⁴ Behind this is a belief common now to both synagogue and church that God has no "right" to will anything but good for man. Together with this we have the belief in the natural goodness of

³ C. H. Waller, "Deuteronomy," in C. J. Ellicott, ed., *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.), 30.

⁴ W. Gunther Plaut, "Deuteronomy," in W. Gunther Plaut, Bernard J. Bamberger, and William W. Hallo, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York, NY: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), 1391.

man. The grim consequence is this: if man is good, and evil comes to him, then God is either incapable of controlling history, or He is not good. Both positions have their followers.

In my seminary days, professors and biblical commentators were particularly derogatory about Deuteronomy. The book is simply Moses preaching about the law; at first glance, the downgrading of Deuteronomy seems strange. Its offense, however, is that here we see God strongly and unequivocally declared to be the absolute determiner of history. Basic to modernism in every sphere is the belief that man is the determiner of history. In terms of this, Deuteronomy is seen as an intolerable book.

Chapter Thirty

Sovereignty in History (Deuteronomy 9:1-6)

1. Hear, O Israel: Thou art to pass over Jordan this day, to go in to possess nations greater and mightier than thyself, cities great and fenced up to heaven,
2. A people great and tall, the children of the Anakims, whom thou knowest, and of whom thou hast heard say, Who can stand before the children of Anak!
3. Understand therefore this day, that the LORD thy God is he which goeth over before thee; as a consuming fire he shall destroy them, and he shall bring them down before thy face: so shalt thou drive them out, and destroy them quickly, as the LORD hath said unto thee.
4. Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the LORD thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the LORD hath brought me to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD doth drive them out from before thee.
5. Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
6. Understand therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people. (Deuteronomy 9:1-6)

When men lose interest in the study of history, very often the reason is that they have first of all lost interest in the study of the Bible. The Bible tells us that history is totally governed by God and cannot be understood apart from Him.

In the 1950s, an unknown young Russian wrote a novel challenging Marxism. In the course of his novel, he wrote:

The Court is in session, it is in session throughout the world. And not only Rabinovich, unmasked by the City Prosecutor, but all of us, however many we may be, are being daily, nightly, tried and questioned. This is called history.¹

More than history, it is God.

¹. "Abram Tertz," *The Trial Begins* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1960), 59.

Our text cannot be seen as simply an ancient Hebrew document. The records of antiquity cite victories, not defeats; they flatter but do not criticize. The text does not give us the opinion that the Hebrews had of themselves. In fact, God sums up His indictment in v. 6 by calling them “a stiffnecked people.” James Moffatt renders this, “for you are an obstinate race.” This is God’s opinion, not man’s, even though it comes through Moses. H. Wheeler Robinson cited Driver with regard to this description; Driver wrote, “The figure underlying the expression is of course the unyielding neck of an obstinate intractable animal.”²

According to Louis Goldberg, there is a contrast in these six verses between God’s majestic power and man’s puny righteousness. Men are marked by spiritual shortsightedness.³

God stresses that history is not determined by man but by Himself, and man is His agent. This means, *first*, that the real victory in any and every case is God Himself. Whatever the apparent outcome, all history fulfills His sovereign purpose. For either the godly or the ungodly to imagine otherwise is a sin and a delusion.

Second, and specifically, for God’s people to claim the victory is to forsake God. No righteousness, strength, or merit on their part is the primary, or even real, cause of the victory. It is always God’s grace and sovereign purpose. God’s people may well be the more righteous by far, but for them to see this as determinative is to shift the power in and the government of history from God to man.⁴

In v. 3, God is identified “as a consuming fire.” God is repeatedly so described in the Bible:

And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.
(Ex. 3:2)

And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel.
(Ex. 24:17)

² H. Wheeler Robinson, *Deuteronomy and Joshua* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. C. & E. C. Jack, n.d.), 102.

³ Louis Goldberg, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Lamplighter Books, 1980), 74-75.

⁴ J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, [1974] 1978), 137.

Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee: and upon earth he shewed thee his great fire; and thou heardest his words out of the midst of the fire. (Deut. 4:36)

For our God is a consuming fire. (Heb. 12:29)

In vv. 4-6, a key word is *righteousness* or *justice*. The governing force in history is not man's justice but God's. God's justice governs all of history, and God in His patience often allows injustice to develop its full implications before He moves against it. God often allows evil to develop into maturity so that even the ungodly cry out against it. God therefore in these verses specifically rejects the chosen people's idea of justice. It is His will, not man's, that shall be done. Israel must never say, "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (8:17). We must never see ourselves as the determining force in history nor in our own lives.

The reason for the judgment on Canaan is Canaan's depravity, and Israel is the beneficiary of this judgment. Therefore, "Speak not thou in thine heart...saying, For my righteousness the LORD hath brought me to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee" (v. 4). The attitude condemned here is Phariseism, the religious faith that condemned Israel, and many nations since then. It marks us to a great extent today. As Schneider observed, it is "native to fallen humanity to feel self-righteous."⁵

Moses repeatedly uses the term "this day" or "today," as in v. 3. There is a stress on immediacy. God's word is not an academic matter for discussion on general terms. It is an urgent and immediate word. God says, Hear me now, this moment, and always.

God tells Israel that, in their own way, they are no better than the Canaanites whom they will soon destroy. God's favor to them is due to His covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (v. 5). They are not a determining consideration in God's sight. God knew them better than they knew themselves, and He describes them as a stubborn and perverse people. God warns Israel three times in these verses that the gift of the land is an act of grace. *First*, He tells them that, even though they will triumph, it will not be due to their righteousness nor their merits. It will be an act of judgment by God.

⁵. Bernard N. Schneider, *Deuteronomy* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1970), 77.

Second, God was giving them this victory for reasons going back a few centuries to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The history of the moment involves God's purposes going back to creation and looking forward to all eternity. The narrowness of our vision and time-span does not determine the extent of God's concern and action. God keeps an ancient promise made to the three patriarchs, and He executes a sentence on some ungodly peoples. Both these factors make Israel's part a lesser one, and one that is not based on merit.

Third, God does not allow Israel to see that, in spite of these things, they have some merit on their side, some claim to a reward. God calls them stubborn and perverse, and He stresses His grace to an undeserving people. However, as Craigie points out,

The gift of the land could not be a reward for righteousness; it was a gift of God's graciousness. On the other hand, the continuing possession of the land by the Israelites would certainly be contingent upon obedience. Disobedience to the covenant could lead to forfeiting the land, and the Israelites would join the Canaanites as ex-residents.⁶

This makes plain what all Scripture teaches, namely, that our salvation is by God's sovereign and atoning grace, but our sanctification as well as our continuing place in His providential care depend on our obedience to His law-word. Those who are antinomian say in effect that they will receive from God but that they will not obey Him.

Joseph Parker's comment on Moses's words here is very good:

He told the people in crossing Jordan and undertaking a severe task that "God is he which goeth over before thee." Having told Israel that the encountering people were "great and tall, the children of the Anakims, whom thou knowest, and of whom thou hast heard say, Who can stand before the children of Anak?" he said, — remember, or "understand" — grasp the theology of the case — God is at the head of the army, and the Anakim are before him as the grasshoppers of the earth. Moses insists upon Israel having a right theology — not a science, not merely formulated opinion, but a distinct, living grasp of the thought that God is, and is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.⁷

In other words, simply believing is not enough: our faith must be a constantly determining and dominating force in our lives. Moreover,

⁶ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 194.

⁷ Joseph Parker, *The People's Bible*, vol. 4, *Numbers 27—Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 197.

“God prepares the way for his people,” and “success is due to God, not to persons.”⁸ From beginning to end, Deuteronomy emphasizes the unmerited grace of God as the only source of salvation for men or nations. Those who see salvation by law as basic to the Old Testament are spiritually blind.

God’s preparation of Israel for the conquest thus was to stress the sovereignty of His grace. They had to see the theological issue clearly; they then had a duty to express their gratitude in obedience.

⁸. Roy Lee Honeycutt Jr., *The Layman’s Bible Book Commentary*, vol. 3, *Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1979), 129-30.

Chapter Thirty-One
Priest and Prophet and Self-Satisfaction
(*Deuteronomy 9:7-29*)

7. Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedst the LORD thy God to wrath in the wilderness: from the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt, until ye came unto this place, ye have been rebellious against the LORD.

8. Also in Horeb ye provoked the LORD to wrath, so that the LORD was angry with you to have destroyed you.

9. When I was gone up into the mount to receive the tables of stone, even the tables of the covenant which the LORD made with you, then I abode in the mount forty days and forty nights, I neither did eat bread nor drink water:

10. And the LORD delivered unto me two tables of stone written with the finger of God; and on them was written according to all the words, which the LORD spake with you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly.

11. And it came to pass at the end of forty days and forty nights, that the LORD gave me the two tables of stone, even the tables of the covenant.

12. And the LORD said unto me, Arise, get thee down quickly from hence; for thy people which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt have corrupted themselves; they are quickly turned aside out of the way which I commanded them; they have made them a molten image.

13. Furthermore the LORD spake unto me, saying, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people:

14. Let me alone, that I may destroy them, and blot out their name from under heaven: and I will make of thee a nation mightier and greater than they.

15. So I turned and came down from the mount, and the mount burned with fire: and the two tables of the covenant were in my two hands.

16. And I looked, and, behold, ye had sinned against the LORD your God, and had made you a molten calf: ye had turned aside quickly out of the way which the LORD had commanded you.

17. And I took the two tables, and cast them out of my two hands, and brake them before your eyes.

18. And I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and forty nights: I did neither eat bread, nor drink water, because of all your sins which ye sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.

19. For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure, wherewith the LORD was wroth against you to destroy you. But the LORD hearkened unto me at that time also.

20. And the LORD was very angry with Aaron to have destroyed him: and I prayed for Aaron also the same time.

21. And I took your sin, the calf which ye had made, and burnt it with fire, and stamped it, and ground it very small, even until it was as small as dust: and I cast the dust thereof into the brook that descended out of the mount.

22. And at Taberah, and at Massah, and at Kibroth-hattaavah, ye provoked the LORD to wrath.

23. Likewise when the LORD sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, Go up and possess the land which I have given you; then ye rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God, and ye believed him not, nor hearkened to his voice.

24. Ye have been rebellious against the LORD from the day that I knew you.

25. Thus I fell down before the LORD forty days and forty nights, as I fell down at the first; because the LORD had said he would destroy you.

26. I prayed therefore unto the LORD, and said, O LORD God, destroy not thy people and thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

27. Remember thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; look not unto the stubbornness of this people, nor to their wickedness, nor to their sin:

28. Lest the land whence thou broughtest us out say, Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land which he promised them, and because he hated them, he hath brought them out to slay them in the wilderness.

29. Yet they are thy people and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest out by thy mighty power and by thy stretched out arm. (Deuteronomy 9:7-29)

Daniel F. Payne has pointed out that this chapter is a very important index to history. The most blessed nation of the ancient world is shown to have a long history of disobedience. Although their history from Egypt to the borders of Canaan was a series of miracles, we find no reference anywhere to anyone other than Moses looking back with awe and gratitude. Instead, the Hebrews showed themselves to be consummate ingrates, whiners, cowards, and fools. Only for the sake of His word to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did God bless them.

But there is more here. We have a contrast between the faithfulness of Moses, God's prophet, and Aaron the high priest. Aaron was the forefather of all priests in Israel. The function of priests is to

maintain an orderly sequence of worship, whereas the prophet *challenges* the shortcomings of the age.¹

Neither the church of the Old Testament nor that of the Christian era has been fond of prophets. They challenge the status quo and are disruptive of institutional peace and routine. This is not to say that Aaron was an evil man; despite moments of weakness, he was in the main faithful, but not forceful. It was Moses, God's prophet, who again and again challenged the evils of Israel.

In vv. 7-8, Israel is bluntly reminded of its past sins; three words bring out the warning: *remember*, and *forget not*. Nations are prone to remember things that are pleasing and flattering, whereas God requires that we remember our sins and God's grace, and to avoid forgetfulness, complacency, and self-satisfaction.

There is another aspect to these verses which we must take note of, the intensity of feeling *and* the resultant dedication. In v. 18, for example, Moses's radical fasting seems impossible to us. We are not given to such total commitments. Before World War II, it was a little more common to hear of ordinary Catholics and Protestants fasting for some time because of an intense concern. Somehow, they seemed to have a supernatural ability to survive untroubled and without any outward indication of what they were doing. We have had imitations of religious fasting by some leftists and prisoners to call attention to their cause, but Christian fasting is relatively uncommon.

Moses stressed that Israel's redemption was an act of mercy on God's part. No credit or virtue belonged to Israel. God, not Israel, is the righteous one, and it would be sin for Israel to take any credit to itself (vv. 4-6).

When Moses came down from the mountain and found Israel engaged in fertility cult worship, he broke the two tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written because the covenant had been broken and was now null and void. The death penalty for its violation now applied to Israel.

Because of this penalty, Moses immediately fasted and prayed. He became the intercessor with God for Israel to prevent the execution of the death penalty. What we see, *first*, is that Israel was prayed for by Moses to prevent its immediate annihilation. He clearly recognized that God's justice required Israel's death (v. 19).

¹ David F. Payne, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985), 67.

Second, Moses made particular intercession for Aaron (v. 20). At the same time, Moses destroyed the golden bull calf. Moreover, *third*, he reduced the lump of molten gold to fine powder. He then threw the gold dust into a fast-running mountain brook to make retrieval impossible.²

Edward P. Blair rightly called attention to the fact that Deuteronomy, like the New Testament, stresses that “salvation is the unmerited gift of God.”³ Israel’s success was God’s work. God’s providence had prepared the way for Israel, and the people could not take credit for God’s grace, mercy, or care.

Verse 14 is especially moving. God tells Moses,

Let me alone, that I may destroy them, and blot out their name from under heaven: and I will make of thee a nation mightier and greater than they.

“Let me alone” is in the Hebrew literally “Loosen [your grip] from me,” and this gives us a vivid image of the intensity of Moses’s prayer.⁴ Moses was concerned with God’s honor (vv. 27-28), not Israel’s safety. To destroy Israel would be to undo the great miracle of deliverance God had wrought. Moses recounts all this so that the new generation might with humility assume their task. They were *not* a great people; rather, they had a great God.

When we examine the besetting sin of Judea in the New Testament era, we find it is very clearly Phariseeism. Phariseeism is a form of hypocrisy and self-righteousness. It is precisely this self-righteousness that Moses here condemns. When God is merciful and gracious to a people, they cannot claim this favor on God’s part as a merit on their part. Self-righteousness before God inverts the moral scale and has man contributing to God’s cause and adding to His work. Self-righteousness makes a claim on God and is thus the antithesis of true religion. As the Rev. J. Orr wrote,

The nature of the error (is) a magnified opinion of one’s righteousness; the idea that it is *our* righteousness which is the meritorious ground of the bestowal of blessing. The Jews might not suppose that they were absolutely righteous — though some of

² P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 196.

³ Edward P. Blair, *Deuteronomy, Joshua* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, [1944] 1964), 44.

⁴ Moshe Weinfeld, *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 5., *Deuteronomy 1-11* (Doubleday, 1991), 402.

the later Pharisees seem almost to have gone this length (Luke xviii. 11). But they thought they were so far righteous as to have established a claim on God's justice for what they had. This is a state of mind into which men glide half unconsciously. We often say it "in our hearts," when we would be ashamed to avow it with our lips. The self-complacency, *e.g.*, which accepts prosperity as the reward of superior virtue; the self-satisfaction which esteems such reward due to it; the complaint of injustice which is raised when blessings are removed, — betray its presence. In the spiritual sphere, the tendency is evidenced in the denial of the need for salvation; in the self-justifying spirit which refuses to accept the position of one condemned, and justly exposed to wrath; in the reassertion in subtler or coarser forms of the principle of salvation by works. In whatever degree a man thinks himself *entitled* to acceptance with God, and to spiritual blessings, whether on the ground of obedience to prescribed rules, or on the ground of internal characteristics (faith, holiness, etc.), he is permitting himself to fall into this error.⁵

As we have seen, Moses stresses memory: "Remember," he declares, your guilt. However, his purpose is not to make them a guilt-ridden people but rather to require of them a reliance on grace. Without God's forgiveness and grace, we are both guilt-ridden but also given to suppressing our guilt under a facade of self-righteousness. To remember our guilt in faith is also to know God's forgiving grace and to rely on Him rather than ourselves.

God clearly stresses the reprobation of the Canaanites (v. 5), and He does this to warn Israel that what He regards is not a people's pretenses but their lives. If Israel violates God's covenant grace and law, Israel will be no less reprobate than the Canaanites. Approbation comes only to those faithful to God's covenant.

Moses, by reviewing Israel's faithfulness to God's covenant, was dredging up humiliating memories, not simply to degrade them but to enable them to view themselves in terms of God's grace rather than their false pride. Moses's purpose was to strengthen their faith.

In vv. 22 and 23, Moses cites the sites of their rebellions against God; these were Taberah (Num. 11:2-3); Massah (Ex. 17:7); Kibroth-hattaaveh (Num. 11:33-34), and Kadesh-barnea (Num. 13:31-33). These were not the only instances of grumbling and unbelief, but

⁵ J. Orr, in H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 171.

they were enough to make it clear that Israel's history was not one of merit, whatever their pride might be.

Israel's error was one common to man's history, and to be found in many peoples and nations. Success is assumed to be a natural, inherent quality of a particular people; this assumption is an outgrowth of the belief that man, not God, determines history. It follows then that a people's rise to eminence and power are due to their natural virtue rather than to God's sovereign plan and purpose. Men are unwilling to recognize that the natural inclination of men and nations is more toward Nineveh and Sodom than to God. On their own, the peoples of this world are like the nations of Canaan. No man nor nation earns this earth nor heaven. History is not a human product but a divine plan. Seen humanistically, history can only lead us to despair. Seen biblically, we know God is at work, and all His ways are justice and truth.

In the vortex of history, we see the priestly mentality at work in every sphere. Certainly in both church and state there is no lack of manpower dedicated to the belief that what they the institutionalists represent is a part of an unending order. They work therefore to maintain that order and to further its power. As against this, the prophetic spirit witnesses against the established order in the name of the triune God. Clearly, priests are needed, but without the prophetic voices a people will perish. A people's self-satisfaction and self-righteousness will have prevailed.

Chapter Thirty-Two

The Scope of History (Deuteronomy 10:1-11)

1. At that time the LORD said unto me, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first, and come up unto me into the mount, and make thee an ark of wood.
 2. And I will write on the tables the words that were in the first tables which thou brakest, and thou shalt put them in the ark.
 3. And I made an ark of shittim wood, and hewed two tables of stone like unto the first, and went up into the mount, having the two tables in mine hand.
 4. And he wrote on the tables, according to the first writing, the ten commandments, which the LORD spake unto you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly: and the LORD gave them unto me.
 5. And I turned myself and came down from the mount, and put the tables in the ark which I had made; and there they be, as the LORD commanded me.
 6. And the children of Israel took their journey from Beeroth of the children of Jaakan to Mosera: there Aaron died, and there he was buried; and Eleazar his son ministered in the priest's office in his stead.
 7. From thence they journeyed unto Gudgodah; and from Gudgodah to Jotbath, a land of rivers of waters.
 8. At that time the LORD separated the tribe of Levi, to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister unto him, and to bless in his name, unto this day.
 9. Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the LORD is his inheritance, according as the LORD thy God promised him.
 10. And I stayed in the mount, according to the first time, forty days and forty nights; and the LORD hearkened unto me at that time also, and the LORD would not destroy thee.
 11. And the LORD said unto me, Arise, take thy journey before the people, that they may go in and possess the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give unto them.
- (Deuteronomy 10:1-11)

In these verses, Moses continues his review of the past, but not necessarily in a chronological manner. His purpose is to give covenantal teaching. The subject of Moses's sermon from 9:1 - 10:11 can be summed up under two general subjects. *First*, God is the determiner of history. In Honeycutt's words,

...the one God prepares the way for his people (9:1-3). Success in life is more often than not dependent upon events over which persons have had no control. In this instance, Israel was to cross the Jordan and confront those people who had prevented them from entering Kadeth over forty years earlier. How could they now succeed when previously they had failed? The answer is clear and direct: "Know therefore this day that he who goes over before you...is the LORD your God" (9:3).¹

Then, *second*, success comes often in spite of the people: it is due to God, not man.²

But there is a *third* fact, related to these two, that Moses stresses, namely, the mercy and the forbearance of God. After the destruction of the original covenant tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments, God requires Moses to come again to the mount with two freshly hewn tablets. It was *not* because God had forgiven and forgotten their evil but because of His promise to the forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was forbearance not forgiveness.

In preparation for the renewal of the covenant, the ark had to be built (vv. 2-3). This means little to us because humanism has denuded the world of meaning. Law is a religious fact: religions are differing systems of law that set forth the ultimate nature of good and the source of good. A covenant was a treaty of law between two parties, and two copies of a covenant were always made, one for each party. The covenant or law treaty was then housed in the temples of the contracting parties; in the case of Israel, the sanctuary was God's House or palace as well as the people's holy place. To place God's law in the ark tells us that God, who *requires* this, holds that His law is central to His covenant man. To despise God's law is to despise God.

So important is the law to God that, in the great renewal of the covenant with Christ, the law is to be written also in the hearts of His people (Jer. 31:31-34). The law is to become second nature to the redeemed. This means that antinomians are rejecting the Gospel and are ignorant of the meaning of regeneration.

It is the death of Aaron which is chronologically out of place here. It took place later at Mount Hor (Deut. 32:50; Num. 20:22-29). Its purpose here is to tell us that, just as the covenant was renewed, so too was the priesthood in the person of Eleazar (v. 6).

¹Roy Lee Honeycutt Jr., *The Layman's Bible Book Commentary*, vol. 3, *Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1979), 129-30.

²*Ibid.*, 130.

God's covenant mercy is seen also in the separation of the tribe of Levi to undertake three tasks for God. *First*, they are to carry the ark (Num. 3:31; 4:15). Because the ark carried the covenant law, this made the Levites the instructors of Israel, the teachers of the law, as Deuteronomy 33:10 tells us. In other words, God did not limit His ministry to the priests but very specifically gave special eminence to His clerisy (v. 8).

Second, the Levites were "to stand before the LORD to minister unto him" (v. 8). The priests, while having certain exclusive functions, were thus definitely not God's only servants or ministers. The Levites could not be excluded; the service of God is definitely broader than the official channels. The institutionalization of the sanctuary was thereby breached. With the coming of Christ, and the Aaronic priesthood's end, the Levitical functions are now broader.

Third, the order of Levites were to "bless in his name" (v. 8). Again, this was normally a priestly function (Deut. 21:5; Lev. 9:23; Num. 6:23).³

Moses's sermons in Deuteronomy are warnings. They remind Israel of *past* sins that are *endemic* to the heart of fallen man. Man's basic or original sin is to be his own god (Gen. 3:5), and, as a result, he views himself, not as a fallen man but as a god in the making, one independent of any word other than his own. Charles Simeon described this condition very ably:

Man is a dependent creature: he has nothing of his own: he can do nothing: he can control no event whatever; he is altogether in the hands of God, who supports him in life, and accomplishes both in him and by him his own sovereign will and pleasure. Yet he affects wisdom, though "he is born like a wild ass's colt;" and strength, though he is "crushed before the moth:" nay, so extraordinary is his blindness, that he arrogates righteousness to him, though he is so corrupt, that he has "not so much as one imagination of the thought of his heart which is not evil continually." If there ever were a people that might be expected to be free from self-complacent thoughts, it must be the Israelites who were brought out of Egypt; for no people had ever had such opportunities of discovering the evil of their hearts as they had. No persons ever received such signal mercies, as they; nor ever betrayed such perverseness of mind, as they. Yet did Moses judge it necessary to caution even them, not to ascribe to any

³. J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, [1974] 1978), 146.

merits of their own the interpositions of God in their behalf, but to trace them to their proper source—the determination of God to display in and by them his own glorious perfections.⁴

In v. 9, we are told that Levi was to have no landed inheritance. In the division of the land among the clans or tribes, Levi was to receive no *farm* land, only town sites. The Levites were thereby barred from depending on the land for their income. The *tithes* of the people were to provide their support. God's clerisy is thus freed thereby from the economic problem in order to be better enabled to learn and to teach.

Calvin said of the law,

By the way we have to marke also, that it is not for us to make or frame lawes to serve God withall, but that we must simply bring out tables and let him write in them what he thinkes good. Moses was a great and excellent Prophet: and yet did not God give him leave or libertie to write any thing in his tables, or to put anything unto them, but restrained him altogether to the things that were written there. And they appeared well in this, in that both the tables were written, not on the one side only, but on both, even to the full, to the intent that no man living should add any thing to them. Seeing then that God wrote his commandments in those two tables himselfe, and committed not that charge unto Moses: is it lawfull for any mortall creature to add any invention of his owne to God's law? Ye see then the way for us to put this doctrine in use, is to beare in mind that if Moses being so excellent a man, and as an Angel of God, might not write or add any thing to God's law: much less may we. Wherefore to serve God aright, let us learne that we must not take upon us to invent any thing at all, nor to presume upon our own devotions, as we term them: for all such geere will be misliked, but sacrifice, so as there bee not anything written in us, until God speak, and that we receive simply without any gainsaying, whatsoever proceedeth out of his mouth.⁵

There is an interesting geographical reference in v. 7 to Jotbath, described as "a land of rivers of waters." Nothing like that exists in the area now. We are not accustomed to thinking of lands blighted and cursed by God. We prefer to think of man as the one who can destroy the earth, a bit of humanistic arrogance. God can bless or

⁴ Charles Simeon, *Expository Outlines on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2, *Numbers through Joshua* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, [1847] 1956), 305, comments on Deut.9:4-6.

⁵ John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth Trust, [1583] 1987), 423.

curse a land; He can make it rich and productive or barren and dry. How far man has gone in his arrogance is clear in his notion that he can destroy the earth.

God's mercy to Israel appears, *first*, in that they are allowed to continue their wilderness journey, in spite of their rebellion. *Second*, He allows Moses to be a mediator, interceding for the people. In this respect, Moses was again a forerunner of Christ.

There is another aspect to this history that is very important. God's wrath and His mercy had a far greater concern than with Israel and that moment of history. His judgments as well as His grace looked beyond Israel to Christ, beyond the church, to the end of time and to eternity. A persistent fallacy on man's part is to view the historical process and God's workings therein in terms of the present, as though all history culminates in us. The blessed fact is that it does not, and, if we view the events of the day in terms of ourselves, we shall be a miserable people. But God's purposes transcend ours, and His perspective has all time and eternity in mind.

Chapter Thirty-Three
Programming God?
(Deuteronomy 10:12-22)

12. And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul,
13. To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?
14. Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is.
15. Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day.
16. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.
17. For the LORD your God is God of gods, and LORD of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward:
18. He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment.
19. Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.
20. Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name.
21. He is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen.
22. Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons; and now the LORD thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude. (Deuteronomy 10:12-22)

This text has a familiar ring to it because it is so often quoted or echoed elsewhere in the Bible. For example, v. 12 is clearly the source of Micah 6:8. Psalm 115:16 has its source in v. 14, and v. 16 is cited by Jeremiah 4:4. Verse 17 is echoed in Joshua 22:22, Daniel 2:47 and 11:36, and also in Revelation 17:14 and 19:16. Verses 18 and 19, with this requirement of charity towards widows, orphans, and aliens, repeats key laws, and these, as well as their formulation here, are often repeated. In v. 20, the fear of God is commanded, something often repeated, and the reference in v. 22 to the patriarchs and Egypt, as well as the promise to Abraham of great growth, is one common to the prophets and apostles.

The modernists are prompt to call this a “late” writing because their evolutionary views bar anything that they would call “advanced” as against “primitive” religion. Their rigid evolutionary framework is consistently destructive of meaning.

The words *fear* or *revere*, *walk*, *love*, *serve*, and *keep* are found repeatedly in Deuteronomy to describe what man’s religious responses should be. What Moses tells Israel is that God’s law-word does not call for a debate nor discussion but *obedient action*.

In v. 16, an uncircumcised heart means an unregenerate heart, one governed by the fall of man rather than by God’s grace. Throughout the Bible, this image is used again and again to indicate the centrality of regeneration. The uncircumcised heart represents the stubborn rebellion against God.

In vv. 17-19, we have a vivid stress on the majesty and omnipotence of God, combined with the requirement of charity as our response to His majesty. Because He is so great, and we so undeserving, we must manifest the grace we received by showing grace to others.

Some of these peoples we must show a loving charity towards will be clearly unlovable, but we are to remember that God loves us, who were unlovable when not in His grace, and we are therefore to manifest His grace towards those who are unlovable in our eyes.

This fact is brought into sharp focus in v. 21:

He is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen.

If we would be asked what there is in us that can be praised, we would begin cataloging our assets and abilities. But Moses tells Israel, and he reminds us, that God is our praise. The word *praise* here means a hymn, a laudation. We should read it as a noun. God is our hymn as well as our God, i.e., He is our joy, hope, and strength, and He has demonstrated this by the great and marvellous things He has done. God is thus two things to us, according to Moses, among many other things: He is our song, and He is our God.

Verse 20 tells us that we should *cleave* to God, or keep very close to Him. In Genesis 2:24, the same word indicates the necessary relationship between a man and his wife in true marriage. We must have a great closeness to God in order to know and feel secure in His government and power.

In v. 22, God speaks bluntly on a very practical and pragmatic level:

Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons; and now the LORD thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude.

We forget that until recently, in all the world, and in much of it still, and perhaps again soon for most, survival has meant *children and land*. The very early marriages, for example, of the medieval nobility, often at puberty, were for intensely practical reasons. The nobility were the military class, and their death rate was high, and their life expectancy not long. Early marriages marked this class because there had to be a continuity of government to maintain power. God tells Israel, to whom He is about to give the land of Canaan, that He has already given them a remarkable fertility. With the land and the fertility, they will have the essentials of survival and power from a humanistic perspective. They are to remember, however, that both fertility and land are God's gifts to them.

Moses had already told them,

11. Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day...

17. And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.

18. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish the covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.
(Deut. 8:11, 17-18)

God is not only their hymn of praise and strength, He is also their sustainer and the One who gives them power to get wealth. Fertility and the land are alike God's gifts, and it is God whom they must always remember with thanksgiving and praise.

This is why this passage begins, in v. 12, with a form of *the great* commandment of Deuteronomy 6:5:

And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

This, of course, is cited by our LORD (Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27).

The subject of this particular passage especially, but also of all Deuteronomy, is *allegiance*. This is why Deuteronomy is so fitting a

book for our time, and also why it is a very much resented book. God makes it clear that He requires of a covenant people *a total allegiance to Himself*. Loyalty to God means loyalty to His covenant law. Any lesser loyalties that minimize or impinge upon a people's loyalty to the God of the covenant are thereby evil because they warp both man and society.

Israel's loyalty became in time loyalty to itself, and Caiaphas, the high priest, could say, "it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (John 11:50). A like judgment has been pronounced by the U.S. Supreme Court, Congress, and the presidency, so that national allegiances all over the world and here have superseded allegiance to the triune God. This is why the warnings of Deuteronomy are so urgent: beware, and remember.

In the words of Charles Simeon,

There is to be no limit to our obedience; no line beyond which we will not go, if God calls us. "No commandment is to be considered as grievous;" nor is anything to be regarded as "a hard saying." We are to "walk in all God's ways," obeying every commandment "without partiality and without hypocrisy." We are to "do his will on earth, even as it is done in heaven." Of the angels we are told, that "they do God's will, *hearkening to the voice of his word*." They look for the very first intimation of his will, and fly to execute it with all their might. They never for a moment consider what bearing the command may have on their own personal concerns: they find all their happiness in fulfilling the divine will. And this should be the state of our minds also: it should be "our meat and our drink to do the will of Him that sent us." And, if suffering be the recompense allotted us, we should "rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer for His sake." Even life itself should not be dear to us in comparison to His honour; and we should be ready to lay it down, at any time, and in any way, that the sacrifice may be demanded of us.¹

In v. 17, we have a remarkable description of God as "a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward." Our age is too hypocritical to understand these words readily. God says that He is so mighty and so terrible for men to accept readily *because* He has no respect for persons and status *and* cannot be bribed! Men want powers over them that can be

¹. Charles Simeon, *Expository Outlines on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2, *Numbers through Joshua* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, [1847] 1956), 324.

influenced, manipulated, or bribed. For God to say that He is above and beyond these things leaves men uneasy and uncomfortable. They want only superior powers that can be used, manipulated, or placated, and God takes no bribes of any kind.

This verse is essentially related to predestination. It tells us that men want a God they can program and predestinate, whereas God declares that He creates and governs man. Man's sin, his will to be his own god (Gen. 3:1-5), requires him to redefine God, if God is to be given any place, as one whom man can program, bribe, or predestine in terms of man's will. It cannot be done, and it is madness to think so.

Chapter Thirty-Four
Judgment in History
(Deuteronomy 11:1-9)

1. Therefore thou shalt love the LORD thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, alway.
 2. And know ye this day: for I speak not with your children which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the LORD your God, his greatness, his mighty hand, and his stretched out arm,
 3. And his miracles, and his acts, which he did in the midst of Egypt unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and unto all his land;
 4. And what he did unto the army of Egypt, unto their horses, and to their chariots; how he made the water of the Red sea to overflow them as they pursued after you, and how the LORD hath destroyed them unto this day;
 5. And what he did unto you in the wilderness, until ye came into this place;
 6. And what he did unto Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben: how the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households, and their tents, and all the substance that was in their possession, in the midst of all Israel:
 7. But your eyes have seen all the great acts of the LORD which he did.
 8. Therefore shall ye keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that ye may be strong, and go in and possess the land, whither ye go to possess it;
 9. And that ye may prolong your days in the land, which the LORD swore unto your fathers to give unto them and to their seed, a land that floweth with milk and honey.
- (Deuteronomy 11:1-9)

During my seminary days, Old Testament pentateuchal studies were dominated by two names, Karl Heinrich Graf and Julius Wellhausen, two nineteenth-century critics who headed a school of thought holding that the books of Moses were the works of four diverse schools of editors and redactors, JEDP: Jahvist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, and Priestly. Using two premises mainly, *first*, an evolutionary perspective which rated things in terms of an evolutionary development, and, *second*, a hostility to the supernatural, this school reduced the Pentateuch to nothing, and it replaced revelation with a mishmash of “random” documents. On one occasion,

I raised a question in class which did my standing no good. Since we *know* that Shakespeare's plays often represented collaboration (as did more than a few Elizabethan plays), why is it that we cannot separate the Shakespearean lines when a single sentence in the Pentateuch is supposedly drawn from four sources, none of which are known to exist? Of course, the answer is that the Graf-Wellhausen documentary hypothesis, and also its successors, represents a hostility to biblical revelation. In the case of Deuteronomy, and the biblical historical books, the animosity is towards the very apparent philosophy of history. It is held that there cannot be a God governing history, unless, like Hegel's god, he is a spirit from within history and working through men. Only a humanistic philosophy of history is tolerated, and, with each generation, that version is increasingly in tatters.

The text has a strong emphasis on historical memory. Moses states that he is not speaking to the younger generation which has no personal knowledge and memory of the events from Egypt to Jordan. He makes no effort to teach the young; that is the responsibility of their parents. He speaks to those who experienced God's judgments and deliverances. Therefore, he tells them, they are to remember God, to love and obey Him always. The purpose of memory is to guide and govern action. It is also to remind them that God's judgments prevail in time as well as in eternity.

This raises an important question. *Meaning* is essential to life, and, much as men fight shy of it, it confronts them everywhere. Numerous books have been written by humanistic scholars, beginning with Edward Gibbon, on the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Their central question is, Why did Rome fall? That question is the wrong one. Given their own collections of data, the proper question would be, Why not sooner? Why did Rome hang on so long?

Moreover, by assuming in the name *Rome* all the qualities that may have marked it in the pre-Christian era, we warp radically our ability to assess Rome in AD 300, or a century earlier. No person or culture stands still. Renewal is possible, but so too is radical degeneration and collapse.

Morecraft is very much on target in pointing out that Moses here stresses *the relationship of obedience to memory*.¹ The memory of our

¹ Joseph C. Morecraft III, *A Christian Manual of Law: An Application of Deuteronomy* (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Christian Training Center, n.d.), 50.

sins is a great incentive to obedience *if we are redeemed*. David, in Psalm 51:1, prays that God blot out his transgressions and remember them no more. In eternity, God does that, after the Last Judgment, but, in time, God records David's sins for all of us to know and to learn thereby. In Jeremiah 18:23, the prophet prays that God neither forgive, forget, nor blot out the sins of his enemies. In history, in time, God requires the memory of our sins, not for self-torture, but as *an incentive to obedience*.

Again, in vv. 8-12, as Morecraft points out, there is a stress that follows the emphasis on memory and obedience: such an obedience leads to *hope*. If we do not remember our sins, we are not stirred to obedience, and *without this obedience, there is no hope*.

Moses, in requiring historical memory, cites things Israel would prefer to forget. The evils of Egypt are cited but also the rebellion of Dathan and Abiram, and God's total judgment against them (vv. 2-7). Contrary to popular thinking then and ever since, it was more than Egypt versus Israel. Since Israel left Egypt "a mixed multitude" of Hebrews and aliens (Ex. 12:38), the line of division *from the beginning* was between the redeemed and the unredeemed. This is still true. We cannot say the line today is between the institutional church and the world, because *it cannot be institutionalized*. It is between Christ's new humanity and the fallen old humanity. The parable of judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 tells of the great Shepherd-King dividing His own flock, to get rid of those who are not His own.

There is another aspect to this requirement of *memory as the premise of obedience*. J. A. Thompson has pointed out that vv. 7-9 stress the relation of obedience to blessing.² Memory prompts obedience, because the memory of our sins brings, in the redeemed, an incentive to faithfulness, to obedience. The end result is that we are made strong, and we are enabled to become conquerors. This also leads to a general health and a longevity.

In everyday education, memory plays a central and essential part. The memory of our sins and waywardness is used by God to teach us. As P. C. Craigie summed it up, "The discipline of God is thus the education of God."³ Wherever education or discipline, whether within

² J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, [1974] 1978), 151.

³ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 208.

the school, the church, or the family, abandons memory it performs a lobotomy on the minds of its students. According to Hoppe, remembering the past "is an education into the ways of God."⁴

The first verse of this text is very commonly the subject of sermons when the rest are forgotten. This is because of its emphasis on loving God. Even then, this love is essentially linked to obedience to the law of God, for we read:

Therefore thou shalt love the LORD thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments alway.

If we stop here, we miss the point. It is followed by the insistence that we remember our sins, not to grieve or mourn endlessly over them, but in order to be prompt in our obedience. Man prefers to forget his sins, but God says, remember and obey; then you will be blessed.

There is a *very* rare mental condition known as amnesia, the total loss of memory. If it occurs, it renders a person into a virtual non-person, a zombie of sorts. The tragic fact is that in our time individuals and peoples are seeking amnesia. They want to separate themselves from the past, and this is done by miseducation and by a deliberate choice by individuals. Both are forms of suicide.

Judgment in history comes most rapidly to those individuals and societies who suppress their memories of the past instead of growing in terms of them. Amnesia is a first step towards defeat and death.

⁴ Leslie J. Hoppe, O.F.M., *Deuteronomy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1985), 38.

Chapter Thirty-Five

God and the Weather (Deuteronomy 11:10-17)

10. For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs:

11. But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven:

12. A land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.

13. And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul,

14. That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.

15. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full.

16. Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them;

17. And then the LORD's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you. (Deuteronomy 11:10-17)

This text is a step in understanding both the *offense* of Deuteronomy and its *insistence* on God's providence. Moses here declares that the weather is under God's personal providence. The worldview of humanism is very much at odds with this. For the humanist, there is a "scientific" reason for everything, and by "scientific" is meant an *impersonal* cause or causes producing random effects. In my university days, I was taught in a course on psychology that consciousness was merely an *epiphenomenon*, a side effect of the activities of the brain muscles and having no real meaning. Consciousness was thus by definition reduced to something meaningless and impersonal. Scientism uses the same strategy to depersonalize all of life, and, in fact, will not deal head on with the fact of *life*.

Our text militates against all of this. It tells us plainly that our weather is an aspect of God's government and providence. The psychology

course I took at Berkeley dealt with human action in non-human terms, as stimulus and response. It accounted for everything without mentioning meaning, purpose, or consciousness, let alone God and His purposes. Such scientism is as far afield as can be: it is deliberately blind to meaning.

Our text has a contrast between two kinds of weather. *First*, the weather and farming of Egypt is cited. In Egypt, the Nile was dependent on weather far upstream from Egyptian territories. Rains and streams remote from the farm areas determined survival. In the time of high waters, the farmer had no problems: the irrigation water was directed into the fields. Wooden “checks” blocked and directed the waters into the desired fields. A farmer, with his foot, could knock aside a check, or place it where needed, in order to best utilize the water. The remoteness of the headwaters of the Nile made him less aware of his dependence on the rains that fell.

But, *second*, Canaan is a land of hills and valleys. Irrigation can still be utilized, but the dependence on rainfall is an obvious one. The Israelites would have to look to the sky for rain, and they would therefore be more obviously aware of their need to depend on God. This fact should prompt them to faith and obedience.

Of course, as Moses later predicts (Deut. 28:15ff.), the Hebrews did not look to God but rather to themselves. Men prefer to have things under their control than in God’s hands. This was the appeal of the fertility cults. Their premise was that human action can be made efficacious in all and every area of life, so that the basic issues are in men’s hands.

According to Sir George Adam Smith, whose perspective was *not* orthodox,

In fact, the Egyptian peasant could scarcely understand a living personal relationship between the individual and the deity. Thus the Egyptian grew up under conditions unfavourable to the development of his spiritual life, but such as would fortify his understanding and practical industry.¹

If Smith were right, then it should have followed that sciences developed greatly in Egypt, but this is not true. They were no more remarkable there than were other peoples of antiquity. He is right,

¹ Sir George Adam Smith, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, [1918] 1950), 148.

however, in stressing the impersonal nature of the relationship of the people of Egypt with their gods.

God promises rain in its season, the early rains in October and the latter rains in March and April (v. 14). The result will be grass in the fields for their livestock, and rain for their crops. In the earlier years of the twentieth century, the annual rainfall in Jerusalem was about twenty-five inches, about the same as in London, England.

In making His promise, God requires a threefold obligation of obedience in this chapter. Each obligation begins with the words, "Therefore shall ye," or, "Therefore thou shalt." These three obligations are given in v. 1, in vv. 8-9, and in vv. 18-21. The *first* is to love God and obey Him (v. 1), and the two are identical. We cannot love God and disobey Him. The *second*, vv. 8-9, is more specific in commanding obedience. It is their source of strength. The *third*, vv. 18-21, requires that our children be taught obedience. Honeycutt called it "the threefold obligation of obedience."²

It is this *obedience* that men want rid of. It is for them better to suffer from impersonal but potentially controllable natural elements than to be dependent upon God. Herodotus, in his visit to Egypt, encountered a comparable attitude among the Egyptian priests. He was told,

for, having heard that all the lands of Greece were watered by rain, and not by rivers, as their own was, they said, "that the Grecians at some time or other would be disappointed in their great expectations, and suffer miserably from famine," meaning, "that if the deity should not vouchsafe rain in them, but visit them with a long drought, the Greeks must perish by famine, since they had no other resource for water except from Jupiter only."³

The issue is thus not a new one. From antiquity, men have seen it as God versus man, and they have chosen man, as did Israel. Men do not want a Garden of Eden from God unless they can control it and remake it. This is why, in vv. 16-17, Moses warns the Hebrews against paganism. All forms of paganism are variations of humanism; in one form or another, they stress man's essential autonomy.

² Roy Lee Honeycutt Jr., *The Layman's Bible Book Commentary*, vol. 3, *Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1979), 131-32.

³ Henry Cary, trans., *Herodotus* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, [1847] 1879), 2.13:99.

J. A. Thompson rightly stressed the fact of God's total and sovereign control in all spheres:

These verses give expression to the belief, which is found in many areas of the Old Testament, that there was a close connection between loyalty and obedience to Yahweh and material blessing (cf. Am. 4:6-10). God was sovereign over both nature and history and could make the weather and other natural phenomena serve historical ends (Gen. 6-9; 1 Kings 17:1; Joel 2:11; Amos 4:7; Haggai 2:17; cf. 1 Cor. 11:29f.; James 5:17f.).⁴

The belief in man's power as basic is the primary ingredient in self-righteousness or Phariseeism. God "stacked" things against such an attitude in giving Canaan instead of Egypt to the Hebrews, so that He thereby left them without a shred of an excuse in their subsequent apostasy into Phariseeism. Of course, in any part of the earth, the weather should teach men humility, but it does not.

Matthew 5:45 is sometimes cited against our text. Our LORD declares,

For he [God] maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

This has nothing to do with times of judgment. In the normal course of affairs, the weather affects all equally. In the normal course of human dealings, we are to be just to all alike. This does not mean that we do not prosecute criminals, but that in our normal dealings, we deal justly with all men. Our Lord does not say that God never judges men through the weather. His reference to Noah in Matthew 24:37-38 makes that very clear.

This text tells us how far we have come from a biblical view of history. God's determination of the weather and of history are not often asserted, and God's contact with man is too often limited to a vague influence on the soul. This is emphatically not biblical religion.

⁴ J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, [1974] 1978), 154.

Chapter Thirty-Six

Cultural Stability

(Deuteronomy 11:18-25)

18. Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes.

19. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

20. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates:

21. That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth.

22. For if ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him;

23. Then will the LORD drive out all these nations from before you, and ye shall possess greater nations and mightier than yourselves.

24. Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be.

25. There shall no man be able to stand before you: for the LORD your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as he hath said unto you. (Deuteronomy 11:18-25)

Moses here begins with words which repeat Deuteronomy 6:6-9. He commands them to *lay up* these words. The Hebrew for *lay* is a word with many facets of meaning, but one is clearly this: they are to preserve and treasure these words as a *promise* of wealth and victory. To assume that these are merely words of counsel is to fail to understand that God promises covenant blessings for covenant faithfulness. Momentous consequences rest on their obedience.

As P. C. Craigie stated, God here makes three requirements of the covenant people, and all three are radically interrelated and are not to be separated. They are law, obedience, and love.¹

¹ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 211.

These verses are a summary of what Moses has taught thus far in his final instructions to Israel. The issues are stated plainly: Israel now has no excuse for disobedience and failure. The consequences of past sins have been cited, and the promises for obedience. Louis Goldberg observed of these verses (11:18-25),

Some people wonder why there is a continuous restatement of the commands. But we are reminded that repetition is the mother of learning.²

What Moses wants most earnestly is "loyalty to the covenant."³ This seems simple enough, and certainly is an elementary requirement. But man's fallen estate makes him radically at war against all loyalties to anything other than his own will. Fallen man wants the world to revolve around himself and his purpose, and this puts him in opposition to God. He wants God to serve him, not he God.

In return for loyalty to the covenant, God promises Israel (v. 24) some remarkable boundaries. In the northeast, the river Euphrates would provide a natural boundary in what is now Syria. The Mediterranean would be their western boundary; the mountains of Lebanon would be north of them; east and south of them would be a barren area for another natural defense. Only under David and Solomon was there any approach to these boundaries. Later, King Josiah sought to return Judah to the covenant law; at the same time, he came close to attaining these boundaries.

There is a remarkable statement in v. 21 which has attracted major interest over the centuries. Of the promise of the land, Moses says that God swore unto your fathers to give *them* the land. *The seed* are not mentioned here, only the patriarchs. Even among the rabbis this phrase was seen as a promise of life after death in that the gift of the land would be to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, three patriarchs alive and with God. We are not to speculate on what all this involves, but neither can we ignore the fact that God gives gifts to His people not only during their life here but when they are in heaven.

In v. 18, there is a reference to the identifying marks of Hebrews in their clothing. To us, this seems strange, but, until recently, this was routine in most of the world. Various peoples identified themselves

² Louis Goldberg, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Lamplighter Books, 1986), 82.

³ J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, [1974] 1978), 155.

by a number of ways, religiously and nationally. Thus, when medieval Jews were required to wear the star of David and like identifying marks, this was not a case of singling out Jews. Sumptuary laws required people to dress in terms of their class, to identify themselves. Peasants could not carry a sword, only a staff, which in itself was an excellent weapon. Every order of monks wore identifying marks. An unidentifiable man was distrusted.

Identifying marks earlier in this century, in a minor way, were such things as the wearing of crosses. Hostility to such things is now increasing. I do remember that in a farming community in which I grew up many foreign born farmers wore a new pair of overalls to church; to them, a business suit was "inappropriate," even though they could afford it. With the Depression of 1929 on, necessity led some to return to the older practice.

What v. 18 represents is alien to our time because the goal now is a blurring of all distinctions, not a happy acceptance of them. In such a culture, our distinctive marks must be intellectual and religious. We are to be identified by a living faith more than by conventional forms.

Moses then insists, in v. 19, on an education of children in terms of the covenant. A general, neutral education does not exist. Education is inescapably religious because it transmits the tools and values of a culture from the old to the young. Education is essentially a familistic and religious concern, and thus must be a constant concern to godly parents.

Diligence in obedience is stressed strongly in v. 22. Life is not an endless holiday but a testing, a calling to serve God, and a responsibility; the joy of life comes in meeting our godly duties, not in evading them. Diligence in obeying God's law carries great promises, sure promises (vv. 22-25). *First*, God will drive out all opposing nations from before them. The promise is explicit: "There shall no man be able to stand before you." God will fill their enemies with fear and dread. *Second*, wherever they tread shall be their possession. This means that the only impediment to the conquests of the designated areas will be their own sin and unwillingness. *Third*, their victories will be God's doing. It is the Lord who will "drive out all these nations from before you" (v. 23). They cannot credit themselves with the power but only God.

Men must not forget in any age the mystery of grace, namely, that it comes to men and nations not because they deserve it but in spite of themselves. We are often unlikely candidates for grace, and strange witnesses to God's power, humanly speaking. St. Paul makes it very clear how God confounds the world's elitism to use men and things the world despises. God's contempt for men's humanistic evaluations is very notable. In Paul's words,

26. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

27. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

28. And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

29. That no flesh should glory in his presence. (1 Cor.1:26-29)

This text is often misread. Paul does *not* say that *no* wise men, or powerful, wealthy, and noble are called, because he himself was all these things before his conversion. What Paul does say is that God is not governed by man's assessments or probabilities. He chooses whom He will, brings at times hatred and contempt upon them as His training for service. Our democratic age has at times been ready to misuse Paul's words also, holding that to be foolish, weak, and despised makes one a member of the elect circle. Paul stresses rather the sovereign choice of God as the sole source of election, and the purpose is "that no flesh should glory in his presence" (v. 29). Man can take no legitimate credit for what God has done. God has regularly put down peoples who have seen themselves as the chosen and hence the superior people. He withdraws His grace and withholds His mercy to the self-elected.

But self-election has been a besetting sin of both Israel and the church, and its judgment is a sure one. Arminianism is a theological form of self-election, and very evil.

The life of diligent obedience is described as a good and a long one (v. 21). An unusual expression is used. The days of the faithful shall be multiplied "as the days of heaven upon the earth" (v. 21). This is the reading, not only of the Authorized Version but also of the older Jewish version from the Masoretic text. Many new translations now read, like the 1962 *Torah* version, "as long as there is a heaven over

the earth.” In any case, the meaning is that, when we are diligent in obedience, God’s promise is as sure as can be. It has the stability of the heavens, and the whole of God’s order. The foundation of cultural stability is not in man’s humanistic efforts and pretensions but in man’s diligent obedience to God.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

The Requirement of Obedience (Deuteronomy 11:26-32)

26. Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse;
27. A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day:
28. And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known.
29. And it shall come to pass, when the LORD thy God hath brought thee in unto the land whither thou goest to possess it, that thou shalt put the blessing upon mount Gerizim, and the curse upon mount Ebal.
30. Are they not on the other side Jordan, by the way where the sun goeth down, in the land of the Canaanites, which dwell in the champaign over against Gilgal, beside the plains of Moreh?
31. For ye shall pass over Jordan to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God giveth you, and ye shall possess it, and dwell therein.
32. And ye shall observe to do all the statutes and judgments which I set before you this day. (Deuteronomy 11:26-32)

Moses declares that man's choice is between obedience and disobedience, and this means a choice between blessings and curses. Since all men are created by God, all men face this choice. Israel's decision brought greater repercussions in both directions. In Deuteronomy 28, we have a fuller statement of what this means.

Joseph Parker stated the matter very ably when he wrote that man "is not meant to be a moral inventor — a maker of morals, — that he has to accept a revealed morality and an offered righteousness: that God has been so kind to him as to arrange the whole way of life."¹ But men seek to be moral inventors because man's original sin is to be his own god, his own determiner and inventor of law and morality. "New situations do not necessitate new morals," as situation ethics holds.² Antinomianism denies to God the power to determine good and evil; it is more in harmony with fallen man than anything else.

¹ Joseph Parker, *The People's Bible*, vol. 4, *Numbers 27 – Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 214.

² *Ibid.*, 218.

God gives a motive for obedience: blessings. Man's preference, however, is for his own will to be done, not God's, and he chooses to disobey. In the Bible, a curse is much more than a verbal statement. It is the active and personal force of God's judgment at work in history, against men and nations, and sometimes against the earth in the punishment of men.

In Hoppe's words,

The law, then, is not simply a legal code to pattern Israel's behavior; it is the key to the fullness of life that awaits Israel on the other side of the Jordan River.³

Fallen man's key to life is held to be his free choice, which in essence is the choice to dissent from God. Man wants the freedom to make decisions without consequences; he wants to determine what follows from his free choice rather than to face predetermined conclusions. Moses makes it clear that there are no consequence-free options; man pays a price for his self-will. He cannot decide against God and for himself without paying the price. There are no such options in God's creation.

The form of this choice is covenantal, and a covenant is a treaty. Ancient treaty-making involved a statement of curses and blessings or penalties and rewards, for disobedience and obedience. Modern treaties have no such penalties and are not strictly speaking treaties, since they are made for convenience and without moral penalties.

When God says, "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse" (v. 26), He tells us that we have a God-ordained choice, to obey or disobey, so that the terms are set by God Himself, not by man. Man wants as his choice the power to create alternatives of his choosing, whereas God declares that the choices and the consequences are of His ordination. Centuries later, God through Isaiah described such people as men who say,

Stand by thyself, come not near me; for I am holier than thou.
These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.
(Isa. 65:5)

This is, of course, self-righteousness, or Phariseeism, or, as Isaiah said, and from whom the term comes, "holier than thou." This is the

³. Leslie J. Hoppe, O.F.M., *Deuteronomy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1985), 40.

attitude of humanism as evidenced by our contemporary “politically correct” self-created elite.

Geography comes into the matter as in v. 29 reference is made to two mountains, Gerizim and Ebal, Gerizim to represent blessings, and Ebal, curses. Mount Gerizim had fertile slopes, while Mount Ebal, representing curses, stood barren and sterile. In Deuteronomy 27, we see the practical application of this.

Samuel Nollies Driver (1846-1914), a very influential Old Testament scholar, also influenced churches deeply with his modernisms. He held, with respect to Deuteronomy and the law, that

duties are not to be performed from secondary motives, such as fear or dread of consequences; they are to be the spontaneous outcome of a heart which is penetrated by an all-absorbing sense of personal devotion to God.⁴

This was the kind of opinion that led to antinomianism. Driver represented the triumph of humanism in biblical studies. Note how, *first*, he replaces simple obedience with a “spontaneous outcome.” How far would we get if we reduced man’s reaction to commands not to kill, steal, or commit adultery to a spontaneous desire only? Man’s natural goodness is assumed by Driver. This *may* have been true, let us assume, at Oxford in Driver’s day, when it was a church-dominated town, but even Driver should have known better had he known himself! *Second*, Driver apparently equated humanity with the angels in assuming “a heart from which every taint of worldliness has been removed, and which is penetrated by an all-absorbing sense of personal devotion to God.” In my student days, both at the university and in seminary, Driver’s words were more respected than the Bible. We should not be surprised at what our world has become.

An older, more traditional perspective on this text was given by C. Clemance, when he titled this text as “the dread alternative before every man.” Our Lord repeatedly calls attention to this choice, as does John also in John 3:18-21. Man was created to be a moral being, and moral choices are inescapable for him. They do not disappear when he denies them. God’s test of men is in terms of their choices: if they are of Christ, they reveal it in their works, their fruits.⁵

⁴. Cited from Driver’s *Introduction* by Andrew Harper, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: George H. Doran Co., n.d.), 231-32. Harper on the whole approves of Driver’s statement.

⁵. C. Clemance, in H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 201-2.

The commandment therefore is plain-spoken: "And ye shall observe to do all the statutes and judgments which I set before you this day" (v. 32). The statement is not an appeal, saying, Think about it, and make God happy by doing what He suggests! It is a blunt command: *do it*. Man is not asked to reflect on what God says, nor to understand it, but to obey it.

Contemporary education stresses the *participation* of the child, who is urged to comment on the teaching, express opinions, and to treat the body of knowledge as something to be judged, to be taken only at will. The result is ignorance, because the self-importance of the child is cultivated rather than his self-discipline. Education for ignorance and arrogance is the result.

The antinomianism of the churches has been a major force in this evil development. We have had a child-centered education, and not only God but subject content has lost its rightful place. Life is neither child-centered nor man-centered, and it is an illusion to think so. Life is God-centered. It serves His purposes or incurs His judgment. Curses and blessings, rewards and punishments, are therefore inseparable from life. The disaster of "public" education has been its abandonment of rewards and punishments. In the 1950s, a woman was called to the school for consultation about her son, described on the telephone as a "social deviate." She hurried to the school in shock and alarm. She found that her son's problem was that he read books during recess instead of playing. We can see why education has been going downhill since then. Such rewards and punishments as do exist are *not* in terms of any valid standard.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Exclusive Allegiance (Deuteronomy 12:1-16)

1. These are the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which the LORD God of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth.
2. Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree:
3. And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place.
4. Ye shall not do so unto the LORD your God.
5. But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come:
6. And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks:
7. And there ye shall eat before the LORD your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the LORD thy God hath blessed thee.
8. Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes.
9. For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD your God giveth you.
10. But when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and when he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety;
11. Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the LORD:
12. And ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God, ye, and your sons, and your daughters, and your menservants, and your maidservants, and the Levite that is within your gates; forasmuch as he hath no part nor inheritance with you.
13. Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest:
14. But in the place which the LORD shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou

shalt do all that I command thee.

15. Notwithstanding thou mayest kill and eat flesh in all thy gates, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee: the unclean and the clean may eat thereof, as of the roebuck, and as of the hart.

16. Only ye shall not eat the blood; ye shall pour it upon the earth as water. (Deuteronomy 12:1-16)

Both the patience and the judgment of God meet with human disfavor. When God in Genesis 15:16 tells Abraham that he will be patient with the Canaanites until their iniquity be full, God's apparent tolerance has met with dismay from some Christians. Their reaction is, must we wait for generations to pass before God brings in judgment? Again, when God, a few centuries later, required Israel to destroy these Canaanites, churchmen and anti-Christians have seen this as morally wrong! With Paul, we must say that the clay has no right to judge the potter, or the creature to judge His Creator (Rom. 9:19-21). God gives evil men more freedom at times than other men want, but, at the same time, His judgments are more thorough than men feel comfortable with.

In v. 1-3, God says, *first*, obey me and live, and, *second*, utterly destroy the pillars and groves of the Canaanite phallic cults, their sexual symbols and practices. God's worship is an exclusive one: there can be none other gods before Him (Ex. 20:3). The Canaanite temples were open-air ones; their worship was of natural forces, supremely the sexual. Altars, pillars (sexual), and idols were set up in natural surroundings to promote fertility through rituals. Human sacrifices also were offered at times.

It is necessary to understand that these ancient cults, like modern, environmentalist Gaia (mother-earth) worship, were not lacking in noble sentiments. Archeological research has uncovered many high-sounding sentiments among the peoples of antiquity. For example, the ancient laws of Manu demanded humane warfare. This is what was said:

When he (the king) fights with his foes in battle, let him not strike with weapons concealed (in wood), nor with (such as are) barbed, poisoned, or the points of which are glowing with fire. Let him not strike one who (in flight) has climbed on an eminence, nor a eunuch, nor one who joins the palms of his hands (in supplication), nor one (who flees) with flying hair, nor one who has lost his coat of mail, nor one who is naked, nor one

who is disarmed, nor one who looks on without taking part in the fight, nor one who is fighting with another foe, nor one whose weapons are broken, nor one afflicted (with sorrow), nor one who has been grievously wounded, nor one who is in fear, nor one who has turned to flight; but in all these cases let him remember the duty (of honourable warriors).¹

Such ancient rules of war were about as effective as the Kellogg-Briand pact outlawing war, or more recent treaties outlawing nuclear weapons. History cannot be understood by the noble professions of countless men and nations.

What God through Moses tells Israel in vv. 2-28 is that their fundamental law must be one altar, one God, and the implications of this requirement. Faith in God requires a total break with the faiths, laws, and beliefs of the world around them.

The singleness of faith required a singleness of sanctuary. No man could say that he could worship the true God at any other sanctuary. Not until Israel abandoned attempts at syncretistic worship could the synagogues arise; then the teaching of God's word could take place anywhere, although the Temple remained as the sole locale of true sacrifice. The singleness of faith in the one true God required a singleness of worship. There were no multiple avenues to God; men did not and do not have the prerogative to pick and choose the way to please God.

Moses made it clear that he had good reason to stress this, because

Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes. (v. 8)

This idea of every man as his own lawmaker, determining what is good and evil for himself, comes from the fall (Gen. 3:5). We meet it again in Judges:

In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes. (Judg. 17:6; 21:25)

When God is not the king, every man makes himself the king.

Our text stresses the priority of worshipping the true God. While this worship cannot be separated from God's true sanctuary, it cannot be identified with it. Worship is more than ritual: it is the character of

¹. Andrew Harper, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: George H. Doran Co., n.d.), 246.

life. Worship is separated from nature in vv. 1-7 because God is the creator of all things, not a part of them.

In vv. 10-14, the requirement of the central sanctuary is set forth. In vv. 15-16, we have the prohibition of the eating of blood. Up until now, the animals had to be "sacrificed," i.e., butchered at the sanctuary, but, in Canaan, distances would make this impractical. All the same, no blood could be eaten. Even at that time, gazelle and deer, clean animals, were not to be killed at the sanctuary.

We have here again the repetitive language which marks law books; everything is clearly specified to allow for no excuses. In terms of this, the requirements regarding the sanctuary are important as stated here and elsewhere. *First*, God ordains and institutes worship, not man. Worship is not a human option. The Enlightenment worked to disestablish Christianity and to reduce it to a human option rather than a necessity. The death of Christendom began when the state became the single order or necessity and Christianity and the church became options and hence of no consequence or necessity. *Second*, worship requires sacrifice. It is not a matter of option whether or not we tithe, sacrifice, or otherwise recognize the priority of God's claims on us. Our relationship to God cannot be reduced to the level of membership in a golf club. It is not a choice but a necessity. *Third*, worship carries with it a grace for all who see it, not as a human option, but a divine mandate because God is sovereign, not man.

There is another aspect to all this. In v. 12, we are told, "All ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God." In the many centuries of Hebrew history, this had reference to the offering of sacrifices *and* the meal that followed that included widows, orphans, and Levites. In Leviticus 23:40, this joy is also cited, there with reference to the feast of tabernacles. The joy of faith is not a restricted and egocentric one.

This joy comes on God's terms, not man's. As a result, v. 13 declares, "Take heed to thyself" to be faithful. Our Lord makes it clear how necessary a singleness of life and worship is, declaring,

21. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.
(Matt. 6:21)

24. No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.
(Matt. 6:24)

The modern state requires a total obedience and submission and resents the claims of the triune God. God permits *subordinate* allegiances, not rival ones.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

The Levites

(Deuteronomy 12:17-19)

17. Thou mayest not eat within thy gates the tithe of thy corn, or of thy wine, or of thy oil, or the firstlings of thy herds or of thy flock, nor any of thy vows which thou vowest, nor thy free-will offerings, or heave offering of thine hand:

18. But thou must eat them before the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD thy God shall choose, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates: and thou shalt rejoice before the LORD thy God in all that thou puttest thine hands unto.

19. Take heed to thyself that thou forsake not the Levite as long as thou livest upon the earth. (Deuteronomy 12:17-19)

We come now to an often stressed law concerning the Levites, Israel's clerisy. The Levites have been a problem to modernist scholars. As Merlin D. Rehon noted, "Wellhausen believed he had 'solved' the problem of the Levites by showing that they had never existed as a priestly class before the monarchical period."¹ In 1902, William Robertson Smith and A. Bertholat were following the basic Wellhausen premise also.² Such writers tell us less about the Levites and more about their own evolutionary faith and perspective.

Patrick Fairbairn, however, wrote of the diverse functions of the Levites: duties in the temple, administrators of the temple treasures (1 Chron. 26:20-28), officers for outward business (1 Chron. 26:29-32), and so on. Above all, they were the instructors of Israel in terms of God's law-word (Deut. 33:10).³ Despite some periods of decadence, William Smith could still say of the Levites, "It is not often, in the history of the world, that a religious caste or order has passed away with more claims to the respect and gratitude of mankind than the tribe of Levi."⁴

¹ Merlin D. Rehon, "Levites and Priests," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, K-N (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 297-98.

² William Robertson Smith and A. Bertholet, "Levites," in T. K. Cheyne and J. Lutherland Black, eds., *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, vol. 3 (London, England: Adam and Charles Black, 1902), 2770-76.

³ George C. M. Douglas, "Levite," in Patrick Fairbairn, ed., *Fairbairn's Imperial Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, [1891] 1957 reprint), 85-92.

⁴ William Smith, ed., *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Hartford, CT: S. S. Scranton, 1902), 480.

The problem with the Levites is that they do not fit in to the patterns men expect. They were a class very diverse, inclusive of everything from temple custodians, to administrators and treasurers, to scholars. They were created to meet God's requirements, not man's.

The standard for all believers, and for the Levites also, is stated at the end of v. 18: "Thou shalt rejoice before the LORD thy God in all that thou puttest thine hands unto." God gives to the Levites a variety of tasks, both humble and great, and all are to be respected. The Levites in a very important respect made life livable: they provided the intellectual stimulus, the music, the business end of the sanctuary, judgment in everyday life, and a focus for living. As a clerisy, they bound society together with their duties, which often included the administration of the tithe.

The world of most Israelites would be a rather private one, restricted to their ranch or their farm. The requirement of observing the festivals at a central sanctuary made their lives public periodically, and it was on these public occasions that their respect for those chosen or protected by God had to be made public. Their servants had to be treated as family members, and the Levites had to be honored.

All men have dependencies on one another. We are told in Ecclesiastes 5:9, "Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field." Because we do not live rightfully only unto ourselves, the Lord requires that we share our bounty with the needy and with God's clerisy. There is no requirement here that the priest necessarily become a party in the family's celebration, but the inclusion of widows and orphans together with God's clerisy is explicitly stated (Deut. 14:29). Scripture ties together the head and the hand, faith and works. Whereas Hellenic and other cultures radically separated the intellectual and practical realms, the Bible unites them. The farmer and the sheep rancher, the widow and the orphan, the needy, the foreigner, and the Levitical thinker sat down and ate together. This has been the function of church potlucks from the *agape* feasts of the early church to the present. These are sacred meals. In v. 19, the people are warned not to neglect the Levites.

The food eaten on such occasions was that which had been specifically set aside for God's use (v.17), and it was therefore to be eaten at His sanctuary. This did not exclude feasting with servants, the needy, and the Levites in one's home. Both are aspects of the life of faith.

In v. 17, the food is referred to as *the tithe*, and this refers to at least part of the second tithe; it is referred to again in Deuteronomy 14:22-29. "The Levite that is within thy gates" refers to those living within one's tribal area and jurisdiction.

In Numbers 18:25-26 we are told that, where men did not themselves administer the tithe, the Levites received it and administered it. In other words, the decentralized Levites were not an institution but served God and His people in a variety of capacities. They were not locked into a framework of institutional character. Since there was no penalty by man for failure to pay the tithe, the status of the Levites could be both high and low.

The inclusion of the Levites into the tithe meal before the Lord meant that God's clerisy had to be regarded as a necessary part of family life. Likewise, men and women servants had to be included. To *rest* in the Lord means to include both high and low in that rest. An older translation of v. 18 reads, "And thou shalt be merry before the LORD thy God in all things whereunto thou putttest thy hand."

This stress on the freedom of joy is an important one. The feast before the Lord was not to be a chore, done out of a sense of duty, but it was to be celebrated as an aspect of the joy of life. 1 Peter 3:7 speaks of husbands and wives "as being heirs together of the grace of life." As men become godless, they become joyless; the song departs from life to be replaced by an unending hunger for noise and activity to cover the barren and empty lives of men.

It is *after* this command to rejoice or make merry before the Lord that we have the warning to "forsake not the Levite as long as thou livest upon the earth" (v. 19). Man's peace with God requires faithfulness to His law-word. To neglect the Levite, God's clerisy, is to reduce one's vision. According to Proverbs 29:18, "Where there is no vision, the people perish [or, is made naked]: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." Vision comes by the faithful interpretation and application of God's revelation. We need God's clerisy to interpret the times in terms of God's revelation. The bonding of society, from the needy to the leaders, is here set forth, and it is in terms of God and His covenant.

Part Two

“Forsake Not the Levites”

Deuteronomy 12:17-19 must be seen in connection with v. 12:

And ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God, ye, and your sons, and your daughters, and your menservants, and your maidservants, and the Levite that is within your gates; forasmuch as he hath no part nor inheritance with you.

The law requires that three groups of peoples be remembered by the faithful in their rejoicing before the Lord. These are, *first*, the needy, i.e., widows and orphans, the poor, the aged without families, and so on. *Second*, aliens or strangers who are residents in the land are to be included, and, *third*, the *Levites*, God’s clerisy.

In the early church, the agape feasts were one aspect of this practice. In time, the church forbade their continuation. They had been church potlucks, to use a contemporary term, held after services, at first weekly. They were finally banned by church leaders because they had become disorderly, and drunkenness had been common and disruptive. This fact is important. Charity is never an easy matter. The poor and the needy are not thereby to be classified also as the good. Such they can be, but they can also be greedy, sinful, lazy, and exploitive. The church then, besides extensive charities in various ways, urged the needy to place themselves at the church door to receive alms. The rationale was that church-goers would know who the local “free-loaders” were, and who the truly needy, crippled, or otherwise unfortunate neighbors were. Church-goers were familiar with the local people who were “God’s poor” and those who were rogues.

This practice faded after the Reformation and with the rise of state controls on begging, on the migration of the poor from one district to another, and so on. No satisfactory plan has been developed since then.

What is clear in biblical law is that, *first*, poor relief is to be from person to person. It is not institutional but personal. This means that those who are fraudulent and shiftless are excluded by their neighbors, who know their nature. *Second*, it is local in character. The people in each community know the nature of the people therein. They, and the local charitable groups they create, know the people they deal with, and this makes exploitation less likely. *Third*, however else the charitable help was rendered, in rejoicing before the

Lord the needy were included in the family meal in order to unite the rich and poor in the Lord. This points to the *fourth* aspect of biblical laws concerning charity. They were not essentially charity but religion in action. The fundamental unity of faith in the Lord means that the rich and the poor are alike His family. This is a fundamental ecumenicity, not of institutions, but of believers.

This common meal, perhaps at best once a year, usually the third year, was simply one aspect of many whereby the poor were to be helped. Others included outright gifts, gleaning, interest-free loans, and more.

There is still another aspect to these feasts of rejoicing: servants and employees were to be included. In the earlier years of the nineteenth century, this practice in the United States meant that workers at a man's store or factory had Sunday dinner with their employer. This in time disappeared, to be replaced by an echo of it, the company picnic, or, sometimes, dinner. Servants were to be regarded as family members. Again we see that the purpose is far more than charity: it is community. This makes clear the purpose: it is the unity of society.

When the state replaces the community, this leads to the bureaucratization of life. The state destroys the familistic authorities of life, and there is then a need for a bureaucracy to replace the natural authorities of our world.

The obligation to center the eating of communal offerings in the sanctuary means that the religious character of all charity is not to be ignored. The motivation is not primarily human need but community in the Lord. The feast is no ordinary eating but a form of communion.

The Levites had to be included because their presence made clear the religious nature of the meal. But this is not all. As Samson Raphael Hirsch pointed out, the people of Israel were largely engaged in farming, sheep, and cattle, and it would have been easy for them to view the Levites as unproductive and useless.⁵

These commandments are restated in the following section, vv. 20-28. Obviously, God felt that particular stress was due here. Consider the differences between those gathered around the table at the sanctuary: the farmer or rancher, reasonably successful and prosperous,

⁵. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 5, *Deuteronomy*, trans. Isaac Levy, 2nd ed. rev. (London, England: Judaica Press, [1966] 1982), 219.

the poor and needy of the community, and then the Levite or Levites, the scholars of Israel. There was a great gap between them, economically and intellectually. God's purpose was to bridge that gap *in terms of Himself as their unifying force*. All were to see in one another fellow members of the covenant. The sacramental nature of a common meal is clearly evident.

This meal took place every third year by law, but it was not restricted to that time. In the church, the agape feasts could take place weekly, or at stated intervals. The meal stressed a relationship one to another in the Lord.

The reference in v.18 is to "the Levite that is within they gates," i.e., the Levite whose calling is to serve in that particular area.

In v. 17, the meal is called a *tithe*. This is the second or poor tithe. This does not mean that the Levite was a poor man, although he might well be either poor or rich. His presence was mandatory in order to stress the religious nature of the meal and the charity.

Gustave F. Oehler rightly called this second tithe a "theocratic" tax. It is this tithe to which Amos 4:4 refers.⁶ The fact that charity is a tithe to the Lord stresses again the God-centered character of all such giving in biblical law.

As John Peter Lange said, the emphasis is on "the one place, of the one sanctuary, of the one Jehovah."⁷ In v. 18, God declares that He Himself will choose the place of the one sanctuary, so that nothing is left for man to do but to obey. God prescribes the tithe, the food, the guests, and place; for man, He prescribes obedience. This order concludes by requiring that the Levites be always present.

Thus, at every point God commands what we are to do. At the same time, this is a festival, a time of thanksgiving. Thanks are given to God not only for His bounty which makes the feast possible but also for the commandments which keep us on the pathway of righteousness or justice. We do not thank God because we have prospered on our own but because we by His grace and law have been blessed and guided into better ways. We are to "forsake not the Levites" because they are our instructors in the way God prescribes for us.

⁶ Gustave F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, reprint of 1883 ed.), 298-99.

⁷ John Peter Lange, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, reprint, n.d.), 124.

Chapter Forty

Obedience versus Abomination (Deuteronomy 12:20-32)

20. When the LORD thy God shall enlarge thy border, as he hath promised thee, and thou shalt say, I will eat flesh, because thy soul longeth to eat flesh; thou mayest eat flesh, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after.

21. If the place which the LORD thy God hath chosen to put his name there be too far from thee, then thou shalt kill of thy herd and of thy flock, which the LORD hath given thee, as I have commanded thee, and thou shalt eat in thy gates whatsoever thy soul lusteth after.

22. Even as the roebuck and the hart is eaten, so thou shalt eat them: the unclean and the clean shall eat of them alike.

23. Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh.

24. Thou shalt not eat it; thou shalt pour it upon the earth as water.

25. Thou shalt not eat it; that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, when thou shalt do that which is right in the sight of the LORD.

26. Only thy holy things which thou hast, and thy vows, thou shalt take, and go unto the place which the LORD shall choose:

27. And thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, the flesh and the blood, upon the altar of the LORD thy God: and the blood of thy sacrifices shall be poured out upon the altar of the LORD thy God, and thou shalt eat the flesh.

28. Observe and hear all these words which I command thee, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee for ever, when thou doest that which is good and right in the sight of the LORD thy God.

29. When the LORD thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou goest to possess them, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their land;

30. Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise.

31. Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods.

32. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.

(Deuteronomy 12:20-32)

It is routinely assumed that vv. 20-28 simply repeat the preceding section, but this is a mistake. Verses 20-28 precede vv. 29-32 and Deuteronomy 13:1-18, laws against assimilating the cults of Canaan with the worship of their covenant God. These substantially dietary rules of vv. 20-28 precede the laws banning syncretism and apostasy. The dietary rules are not hard commandments: if men cannot obey God in the small things, they will not be ready to obey Him in the great things of life.

During the forty years in the wilderness, the nation was thoroughly centralized. During most of that time, once the sanctuary was erected, the tribes or clans were stationed around it, so that an unusual closeness existed one with another. On top of that, all were under the eyes of Moses, so that sins were more readily detected. Decentralization would make for greater freedom but also provided more opportunities for sinning without priestly detection.

In the days of centralization, vv. 20-28, all clean farm animals were taken to the sanctuary to be slaughtered there. They were therefore properly bled and butchered. With decentralization, it would be easy to violate the ban on the eating of blood, of fat, and of organs which were to be avoided. There was an unconditional permission now to eat clean meats without taking them to the altar. The people were now on their own, to govern themselves by God's law. Their contacts with other men, and with central authorities, were now limited. With these rules, we begin to understand a basic aspect of Deuteronomy: it tells the covenant families that their covenant life will be a decentralized one, and the families must function as the working, everyday unit of law.

The people are reminded again that blood means life, and they must treat life with respect. Even when taking life legally for food, the blood must be treated with respect; it must be poured upon the earth and covered over (vv. 23-24). The earth is the Lord's, and all things therein, and nothing can be used apart from His rules and commandments. No hardship is imposed by the law, and this makes disobedience and contempt for it all the more serious.

Animals fit for sacrifice may now be eaten apart from the sanctuary when the purpose is not sacrificial, and also clean non-sacrificial animals (v. 22).

There is apparently some awareness of the meaning of the prohibition of blood eating among pagan peoples because they readily

practice it as a means of gaining life. At present, in Africa, it has become a means whereby blood-drinkers are acquiring AIDS. In v. 25, happiness, well-being, and favor from God go with obedience to the prohibition against blood as food. Very clearly, God regards this as a serious matter.

Again, in vv. 27-28, the matter is stressed. There is a correlation between obedience here and doing "that which is good and right in the sight of the LORD thy God" (v. 28). It is very curious that J. A. Thompson, who sees no application here of any rule for Christians, could still write:

Obedience to God's commands in these matters is the principal prerequisite of blessing. The comment is that it will go well with Israel and her descendants when she does what is good and right in the sight of Yahweh.¹

It is baffling to see an able scholar write so clearly and yet without seeing that God does not change.

Verses 29-32 follow these laws and are a warning. They had already been ordered, in vv. 2-3, to destroy the fertility cult symbols, shrines, and sacred areas of Canaanite and other pagan forms of worship. They were to clear the land of all traces of these pornographic cults and to avoid the mental and social influences of them.

In v. 30, Israel is warned specifically against establishing any kind of continuity with pagan practices under the illusion that the land required it. They should not say, "How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise." There had to be a radical break. God cannot be worshipped in any way not specified by Him: in all essential matters, His law is determinative. Therefore, "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (v. 32). This requirement cannot be trivialized as some would do. We are not required to have on the clothing of biblical times when we worship the Lord, nor must we abolish electric lights in favor of candles. Too much of the church's time is given to disputes over like trivialities. Fools and knaves try to gain a pretense of holiness by haggling over trifles, as though their consciences are more sensitive and holy. We are told in Proverbs,

¹ J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, [1974] 1978), 172.

Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. (Prov. 26:4)

Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly. (Prov. 17:12)

A church without authority becomes plagued with fools.

The term used in v. 31 is *abomination*. This is a rarely used word today, and its use is essentially biblical. Even the churches usually avoid it. It means in the Hebrew something disgusting in a moral sense, and it is often applied to idols and idolatry. The English word *abomination* translates four Hebrew words which are used for human sacrifices, sexual sins, and false weights and measures. In every religious case, an abomination is something offensive to God because it is a serious violation of His fundamental order. The word abomination is also used for the fact that the Hebrews (and other aliens) were repulsive to the Egyptians, who would not eat with them (Gen. 43:32). It covered things repulsive and detestable.

We have one kind of abomination specified in v. 31: "for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods." Certainly, the current practice of abortion, and the harvesting of the body parts for a variety of medical and commercial uses, is an abomination. The sacrifices of children in antiquity were limited usually to emergency occasions, whereas abortion now occurs in the millions annually.

The sacrifice of children is noted as occurring in the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6). It was abolished by Josiah (2 Kings 23:10), but it reappeared before the Captivity (Jer. 7:31; 19:5; 32:35). It was not a practice of "primitive" worship, nor did it exist in the earlier years of Hebrew life. It came in with the "advanced" Hebrew civilization, even as abortion on a mass scale has now. Such practices are not a product of primitivism but of sin.

As we have seen, Moses here speaks of the soon to come radical decentralization of Hebrew life. It has been common in history for men to see the solution to societal problems in centralization and centralized controls. The result is tyranny. This does not mean that decentralization gives an answer. It has a potential for good, but it can lead also to anarchy. The stress on Levites which precedes this section is related to it: if they are taught by the Levites, and if they hearken unto their voice, they can have a godly and happy society. They must not forsake the Levite (v. 19) for the abominations of the

Canaanites (vv. 29-32). God's Levites had to be honored and their teachings obeyed. Their source of unity could not be in centralization but in God the Lord.

Chapter Forty-One
Treason, Part 1
(Deuteronomy 13:1-11)

1. If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder,
2. And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them;
3. Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.
4. Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.
5. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee.
6. If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers;
7. Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth;
8. Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him:
9. But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people.
10. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.
11. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you. (Deuteronomy 13:1-11)

This is a very important and much misinterpreted text. It is also regarded as an ugly requirement. The emotional reaction prevents an understanding of its meaning. The concern here is with *treason*

and *cowardice*. The subject is *subversion*. The text presupposes a covenant people and unbelievers living side by side. No punishment is given by this law for the pagans who quietly continued the practice of their old faith. The penalties are for those in the covenant people who attempted to subvert the faith, promote syncretism, or practice a sub-rosa apostasy. *Cowardice*, or fearfulness, is equated by Scripture with a lack of faith. According to Revelation 21:8,

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

The apostates dealt with in our text are not open unbelievers. At any time, an Israelite could have left Israel to become an Edomite, Moabite, or Philistine. It is possible that some or many did. We are told nothing, but we know that foreigners became Israelites, and there is no reason to doubt that the reverse was true. Such an action would be open and honest. What we have here is an apostate remaining in his covenant place while trying to subvert others. What is described is secret subversion, attempts to subvert others, often close relatives, in a cowardly manner.

Such an action was not only cowardly, it was also treasonable. To be a member of the covenant meant a requirement to faithfulness. Treason to that covenant carried a penalty of death, as treason always has.

Our text cites several forms of this treason. Verses 1–5 deal with the arising of a false prophet, one possessing obviously supernatural powers. His ostensible miracles seem to indicate divine powers. His appeal can be very great, and v. 3 tells us that at times God proves or tests us, to see whether we love Him or are more attached to marvels (v. 3). Because God's covenant is an everlasting covenant, no man can offer anything to improve on God and His purposes. The prophet who in the name of the Lord prophesied falsely was to be rejected. God had sent him as a test of His people's faithfulness. The false prophet's accuracy on a particular point did not establish his character. The critical point is faithfulness to the Lord as against apostasy and rebellion.

Faced with such a false prophet, Moses declares, *first*, "Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet." An accurate prediction cannot outweigh a lack of faithfulness to God. *Second*, they

should continue to obey God: "Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him." This is an emphatic statement: obedience to God takes total priority over anything else. Then, *third*, the false prophet must be executed as a traitor. Because he speaks falsely in the name of the Lord, he is a traitor. What he does is cowardly and subversive. He does not declare himself openly. He appears as a prophet, and yet in the name of God, he says, "Let us go after other gods." His message is syncretistic; he tries to unite things which cannot be united.

The only instance we have of false prophets being killed is in 1 Kings 18:40, by Elijah. False prophets are frequently mentioned in the Bible, but only this once killed.

Verses 6-11 deal with seduction into false faiths by a family member. Such a person was to be charged and then executed by the relative first approached, together with the whole family.

Biblical law gives priority on the human scene to the family, but nothing can have priority over God. All loyalties other than to God are limited loyalties. The family comes into its own only under God. Anything which puts family or clan, or national, loyalty over our faithfulness to God becomes thereby wrong. No more than we can say rightly, My Country, right or wrong, can we say, My family, right or wrong.

We live in an era where lawless deaths have become commonplace. Street violence is a grim and constant fact. In some areas, parents no longer allow their children to play outside the house or yard. We are deluged with violence and deaths.

At the same time, civil and military violence is common all over the world. It is said that a thousand soldiers die daily, and many civilians. We regard killing on United Nations' "peace-keeping-missions" as "necessary" and to be accepted as a fact of life.

At the same time, our murderous century views with horror God's law. God has no right, they hold, to require judgment. Modern theology believes God should represent love and "niceness," never justice and judgment. Humanistic sentiment wants evil-doers to be dealt with gently. As a result, we have a culture which tolerates criminals, hoodlums, and exploiters of welfare who believe that they have a "right" to pursue their evil ways. Men are intolerant towards the claims of God and tolerant towards evil.

In contemporary culture, toleration is extended downward to include all classes of evil. Toleration is not extended upward to include the middle class, capitalists, Christians, or anyone who has been a productive or godly member of society.

Least of all is their toleration for Christianity. Because the Bible sets forth God's law, and because God's law is not only the way of justice but a war against sin and evil, it is hated. Toleration has become essentially an anti-law faith, and too often it means simply, Thou shalt not condemn nor punish the evil-doers.

To take seriously texts such as this is seen as evidence of being a hate-monger, judgmental, and an enemy of man. Such persons, however, being at war with God, will naturally be at war with God's people.

Every society has its idea of what constitutes treason. The Marquis de Sade believed that Christianity is evil and treasonable to man because it insists on the fact that natural man is evil and fallen, and we need to become in Christ supernatural men. This is the heart of the problem.

Chapter Forty-Two
Treason, Part 2
(Deuteronomy 13:12-18)

12. If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities, which the LORD thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying,
13. Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known;
14. Then shalt thou enquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you;
15. Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword.
16. And thou shalt gather all the spoil of it into the midst of the street thereof, and shalt burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit, for the LORD thy God: and it shall be an heap for ever; it shall not be built again.
17. And there shall cleave nought of the cursed thing to thine hand: that the LORD may turn from the fierceness of his anger, and shew thee mercy, and have compassion upon thee, and multiply thee, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers;
18. When thou shalt hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep all his commandments which I command thee this day, to do that which is right in the eyes of the LORD thy God.
(Deuteronomy 13:12-18)

There are many churchmen who wish that texts like this one would disappear. Like Matthew Arnold, they want a religion of sweetness and light, not a strong and militant faith.

This text is again about treason. It does not call for searching out persons whose faith may be false, but for dealing with aggressive treason by covenant members against the covenant and the God of the covenant.

It calls for action because of a serious problem. "Certain men" are describable as "the children [or, sons] of Belial." The word *Belial* in Hebrew means *wickedness*. According to ancient Hebraic accounts, the sons of Belial had abandoned the faith and were uncontrollably lawless. Having denied the covenant God, they denied and violated the covenant law as a matter of principle. The word *Belial* occurs twenty-seven times in the Hebrew Bible. It is used to indicate radi-

cally lawless men, as in Judges 19:22-26, who demand homosexual rape and will take a woman and abuse her to the point of killing her. It is *not* a term used lightly. The sons of Belial are associated with hell. They are ready to be used against the godly, as in the insistence of the two men who gave perjured testimony against Naboth (1 Kings 21:10-13). Proverbs 19:28 says, "An ungodly witness scorneth judgment," and the word translated as "ungodly" is "Belial." It is a Belial witness who mocks justice. In 2 Corinthians 6:15, Paul asks,

And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

In 2 Corinthians 6:14 Paul prefaces his comment on Belial with the statement, "what communion hath light with darkness?"¹

Certain things are very clear about the biblical use of the term "sons of Belial." *First*, these sons of Belial are aggressively anti-God and anti-Christ. They are deliberately lawless because they hate God. One aspect of their lawlessness is their homosexuality. God's order is despised in all its manifestations, so that, whether it be sodomy or perjury, they are ready for it.

Second, as already indicated, they manifest a militant hatred of God and His law, and of God's people. They resent God's law and justice, and His holiness in anyone. Their aggressive aim is to humiliate and to defile all that is good. The term "sons of Belial" implies an uncontrollable and aggressive lawlessness. If permitted, they will take over a city or a society to remake it in their own evil image.

This should tell us why any text concerning "sons of Belial" is important. We live in a world where the sons of Belial are in high places, where they riot in the streets, and where they often command the media.

What the text does *not* prescribe is vigilante action. Rather, this is law, and its language is clear. When a city is taken over by the "sons of Belial," an investigation must be conducted. The authorities must "enquire," make a "search" for evidence, and "ask diligently" in order to gain all the information possible.

Such a city is at war against the covenant and the nation. Its actions have been aggressive and vicious. It is a perversion of the text to see it as a warrant for a fanatical attack on innocent people: *they*

¹ Theodore J. Lewis, "Belial," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1992), 654-56.

are lawless in every sphere. This is the meaning of being “sons of Belial.” To be indifferent to this threat is to surrender the nation.

We have in this chapter three kinds of subversion dealt with. *First*, there is the subversion by false religious leaders, vv. 1-5. *Second*, there is the enticement to apostasy by one’s family and kin, vv. 6-11. *Third*, the subversion by an entire city is treated. Shall the course be one of toleration to an aggressive lawlessness? *The simple question is, who shall survive?* The “sons of Belial” want the death of godly society. Is this to be treated with toleration?

Lawlessness is to be met with God’s law. Has the city worked against the punishment of criminal activity? Has it favored the lawless and the guilty against the godly and the innocent? A city was then a center for trade and for law. The surrounding countryside depended on it in both spheres, i.e., as a trading center, and as the locale of the courts of law. The lawless description of trade and courts means that the innocent are punished. This cannot be tolerated.

According to rabbinic thought, the problem was not only to be investigated but also brought to the attention of the entire nation. The war against God and His justice was and is of concern to all the people. The entire action was thus both public and juridical. It followed after a thorough investigation. It was by no means a matter lightly undertaken.

Once the evidence established the guilt of the particular city, it was placed under a ban, and total war was declared against it. The inhabitants and their possessions were to be totally destroyed. The city was to be burned and was not to be rebuilt.

No booty could be taken from the city. No man could profit from its destruction. This served a double purpose. *First*, God’s ban required such a total destruction. It was His judgment on the people and the city. *Second*, no man could profit from this destruction. This removed any incentive to promote a ban in the hopes of personal gain.

We have a reference to this law in the case of Gibeah, in Judges 20, 21. Although the assault and its aftermath indicate that Israel’s premises were somewhat mixed, i.e., not based solely on loyalty to God’s law, it does provide us with an incident where this law is applied.

It is interesting that G.T. Manley, in commenting on this text and its requirement of a thorough investigation, said, “Much of our British common law can be read back to the Mosaic legislation.”²

² G. T. Manley, “Deuteronomy,” in F. Davidson, with A. M. Slibbs and E. F. Devan, eds., *The New Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 211.

In the case of Gibeah, the outrage of the people was due to a murderous rape and the threat of sodomizing a Levite. According to Hosea 9:9 and 10:9, more was involved. Gibeah had apparently given itself over to idolatry and to lawlessness. Their hostility was directed against a Levite, a servant of God, and they demanded the right to sodomize and to kill him (Judg. 19:22; 20:5). We are again reminded that this law deals with aggressive lawlessness and a militant hostility to God. There seems to be an echo of this law also in Joshua 7:26, the execution of Achan.

Otto Scott has observed that decadence is the inability of a culture or people to defend themselves. This law requires such a defense, *not* as vigilante action, but as a premise of godly law.

Chapter Forty-Three
Holiness
(*Deuteronomy 14:1-20*)

1. Ye are the children of the LORD your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead.
2. For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth.
3. Thou shalt not eat any abominable thing.
4. These are the beasts which ye shall eat: the ox, the sheep, and the goat,
5. The hart, and the roebuck, and the fallow deer, and the wild goat, and the pygarg, and the wild ox, and the chamois.
6. And every beast that parteth the hoof, and cleaveth the cleft into two claws, and cheweth the cud among the beasts, that ye shall eat.
7. Nevertheless these ye shall not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the cloven hoof; as the camel, and the hare, and the coney: for they chew the cud, but divide not the hoof; therefore they are unclean unto you.
8. And the swine, because it divideth the hoof, yet cheweth not the cud, it is unclean unto you: ye shall not eat of their flesh, nor touch their dead carcase.
9. These ye shall eat of all that are in the waters: all that have fins and scales shall ye eat:
10. And whatsoever hath not fins and scales ye may not eat; it is unclean unto you.
11. Of all clean birds ye shall eat.
12. But these are they of which ye shall not eat: the eagle, and ossifrage, and the ospray,
13. And the glde, and the kite, and the vulture after his kind,
14. And every raven after his kind,
15. And the owl, and the night hawk, and the cuckow, and the hawk after his kind,
16. The little owl, and the great owl, and the swan,
17. And the pelican, and the gier eagle, and the cormorant,
18. And the stork, and the heron after her kind, and the lapwing, and the bat.
19. And every creeping thing that flieth is unclean unto you: they shall not be eaten.
20. But of all clean fowls ye may eat. (*Deuteronomy 14:1-20*)

These are dietary laws, but they are also laws of holiness. The reason they are given is plainly stated: "For thou art an holy people

unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar [or, unique] people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth" (v. 2). The emphasis is holiness. Scripture speaks again and again of the holiness of God. In the song of Moses, we read, "Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Ex. 15:11). Among other things, Scripture calls attention to *the reality* of God. He is the living God. As Psalm 96:4-5 declares,

4. For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods.

5. For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens.

The God of Scripture is the living God, whereas all false gods are fictions. They are, moreover, fictions which reflect the fallen nature of men. The best known examples of this are the Greek and Roman gods, immoral and often contemptible. There were moral rules in paganism, but their essential source was the state. The gods of paganism were on the whole not moral beings: their concern was *power*, not *morality*. To be a god was to be beyond morality. In this they reflected fallen men, whose quest is for power, not morality. In this perspective, power is the great virtue, and morality is for subjects and slaves, not rulers. Even the Latin *vir* reflects this. Our Latin meaning is usually *man*, but *vir* also means *soldier*, because it implies power.

God as the Holy One is beyond all men's "virtues." He is, in fact, the only source of morality and holiness. In Isaiah 40:25, we read, "To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One." God declares, "Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 20:7). Again, "Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2).

God's holiness mandates man's holiness, for God created man in His image, which means, among other things, holiness (Eph. 4:24). Man must therefore actively cultivate those things that lead to holiness. Dominion means holiness, righteousness or justice, and knowledge, *moral attributes*, whereas in paganism an amoral domination is commonly the goal. This is the premise of the laws given in this text.

God's laws of holiness in these twenty verses all have to do with the body, especially eating. The body, like all things else, is God's creation, and the Bible is the great Owner's manual for the proper

care of His handiwork. Since we tell our children how to eat, why should God not instruct us?

His first requirement in this text refers to tattoos, scarification for tribal or clan purposes, and ways of showing mourning by shaving off part of the eyebrows, and like markings. In Amos 8:10, God threatens Israel with a “baldness upon every head” as part of His judgment; what they do in violation of His law He will make a total judgment on all men and women. A like judgment is cited in Isaiah 22:12. In spite of God’s law, Jeremiah 16:6 tells us that such mourning practices were common; Ezekiel 7:18 has a like reference. Wearing black for mourning is a Christian substitute for self-mutilation or markings.

In v. 3, the general statement of dietary holiness is made: “Thou shalt not eat any abominable thing.” In vv. 4-6, the clean animals which can be eaten are cited. The pygarg is either the antelope or the bison. The chamois is here probably mountain goat or mountain sheep. These are all herbivorous animals, not scavengers or meat-eaters.

In vv. 7-8, the unclean animals are cited. Some of them, the camel, the hare, the rock-badger, and the pig, are cited because of their superficial characteristics that seem to make them clean. Among the unclean animals, the most commonly used is the pig, and the evidence against it continues to increase. Professor and doctor Hans-Heinrich Reckeweg, M.D., has related pork to numerous diseases, notably cancer, and has seen it as destructive of the immune system. He cites it as “a primary factor contributing to disease.”¹ Thus, failure to observe God’s laws of holiness is destructive of the physical and spiritual being of man. God’s laws have implications for all of life in every realm of our being.

In vv. 9-10, aquatic foods are discussed. The test here of clean food is fins and scales. This again excludes scavengers, bottom-feeders, and the like. This rules out eels, lampreys, catfish, shellfish, and the like. Some commentators are so determined to see all excluded foods in terms of superstitious practices that the forbidden foods in their eyes must have been banned because they were supposedly *sacred* foods! This bypasses the blunt classification of them as *abominable*.

¹ Prof. Hans-Heinrich Reckeweg, M.D., “The Adverse Influence of Pork Consumption on Health,” *Biological Therapy*, 1, no. 2 (1983).

In vv. 11-20, the unclean birds are named, and, in v. 19, flying insects are included briefly. Leviticus 11:21-22 excepts from this law the leaping as distinguished from the running locusts; v. 20 refers to this exception.

All these laws require a separation from paganism. Paganism sees death not only as a *grief* but also as a *loss*. In some areas, as in New Guinea, a woman mourner especially, cuts off a finger joint to show mourning. Death is a mutilation in pagan eyes, and so too is mourning. The forbidden foods when eaten are also a form of mutilation; in fact, every violation of God's law is a form of self-mutilation. J. A. Thompson wisely noted,

Finally, it was not the observance of food laws that distinguished Israel as holy, but a total attitude of willing allegiance to Yahweh in love and obedience. Jesus enunciated the principle that it is not what goes into a man that defiles him, but what comes out of him (Mk. 7:15).²

We can add that what comes out of the heart of a man is that which will determine what goes into him.

In a very real sense, all of the laws of holiness are their own reward. They equip us for life, health, strength, and more.

Scholars, Protestant and Roman Catholic, go far afield in trying to explain why these dietary laws came into being; they are unable to say that God gave them. One Roman Catholic scholar, who is dubious about the source of these laws, still could write:

Gradually these dietary laws, as they were developed and enlarged in early Judaism, became so ingrained in the Jewish religious identity that the first Christians had a difficult time conceiving of the possibility of genuine religion without them (Acts 15:29: Col. 2:21).³

A curious fact is that evidence and research exists which confirms the validity of the dietary laws. P. C. Craigie did report on the research of one man in these words:

Thus, an American doctor conducted a series of experiments to determine the levels of toxicity in the meats of the animals, aquatic creatures, and birds mentioned in Deut. 14; he discov-

² J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, [1974] 1978), 178.

³ Leslie J. Hoppe, O.F.M., *Deuteronomy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1985), 49.

ered that the various types of prohibited meats contained a higher percentage of toxic substances than those which were permitted.⁴

But evidence for the *validity* of the dietary laws from a medical perspective is very old. Add to that the fact that it is God who first requires it, and an interesting truth emerges. Over the centuries, men have had the best of reasons for keeping the dietary laws, but they have chosen to set them aside. The Pharisees had their own ways of making “the commandments of God of none effect” (Matt. 15:6; Mark 7:13), and churchmen have theirs. As a result, among other things, the dietary laws have been set aside by the “superior” wisdom of churchmen who believe that they can correct God or bring Him up to date. The grim reminder to all such men is that God Himself calls these the laws of holiness. Thus, *both holiness and life* are associated with these dietary laws.

⁴P. C. Craigie, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 230.

Chapter Forty-Four
Towards the New Creation
(*Deuteronomy 14:21-29*)

21. Ye shall not eat of any thing that dieth of itself: thou shalt give it unto the stranger that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien: for thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.

22. Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year.

23. And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always.

24. And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the LORD thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the LORD thy God hath blessed thee:

25. Then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose:

26. And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household,

27. And the Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee.

28. At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates:

29. And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest. (*Deuteronomy 14:21-29*)

In v. 21, the eating of any meat from an animal that died of itself is forbidden. It is *not* spoiled meat that is here referred to, but the meat of an animal killed by a beast of prey or dying of age or some ailment. Many pagan peoples had and have no objection to such meat. As long as there is no deception, such meat can be sold or given to an alien. Specifically, two kinds of aliens are mentioned: the resident alien, and

the nonresident foreigner. There is no attempt to compel these people to observe the covenantal laws of diet, nor were they persecuted for their alien faith and way of life.

To this day, in some parts of the world, when a sick camel seems certain to die, it is butchered and prepared for eating. Such a practice is forbidden to covenant members.

A kid is not to be seethed in its mother's milk. This was a pagan practice. This same law appears also in Exodus 23:19 and 34:26. In both these instances, it is given together with the law of offering of firstfruits, so there is a connection here which we are ignorant of. However, we are not told to wait until we understand before we obey. We are to obey first, and then to understand wherever possible.

In vv. 22-29, the concern is with tithing, and with one aspect of it, rejoicing before the Lord. This tithe is to be celebrated at the sanctuary, and then at home with others on every third and sixth year. It is to include our family, our employees, foreigners close by, widows, orphans, and the Levite. The place for this celebration was to be at the central sanctuary. If one's residence were too far away, the firstlings and the produce could be sold, i.e., converted into silver, and then the food could be purchased when one arrived at the sanctuary city.

Roy Lee Honeycutt Jr. has cited the basic holiness of worship structures. *First*, one's possessions were to be dedicated to the Lord (14:22-15:23). This meant living as God's stewards and according to His law. This included the tithes, and also granting a release to those in debt or in servitude on the seventh year. The covenant man finds release from bondage as he grants release to his covenant brothers. The laws of release are concerned with a future of freedom.

Then, *second*, the dedication of life meant a calendar governed by holy days, the Sabbaths, the Passover (16:1-8), Pentecost (16:9-12), and Tabernacles (16:13-17), and also by holy years, the sabbatical years, and the jubilee. A God-governed calendar gears man to God's reality rather than to man's cycles of defeat. The godly calendar also stresses the earth and its productivity under God's blessing. The biblical calendar is a calendar of hope, whereas the godless one is a cycle of despair.

Third, later, in this unit of laws, Deuteronomy 14:22 to 16:22, we are told that justice is essential to holiness. This is stressed in Deuteronomy 16:20,

That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Justice is a condition of life, and to frustrate justice is to work towards death.¹ To omit justice as a basic aspect of the godly life is therefore to omit holiness and to invalidate worship. The base forms of worship are not in and of themselves pleasing to God. The totality of man's life and work must reflect his faith. God's contempt for mere formalism is emphatic in all the Bible.

Verse 22 is emphatic: "Thou shalt truly tithe," or, "You must tithe." Tithing is not cited as an option but as a condition of life under God. The health of the family and of the community mandates it.

The tithe, or the tenth, means that we are in debt to God: it is His tax. Our status as citizens of His Kingdom requires us to be free of debt in this respect.

Not all the rejoicing tithe was used up in the trip to the central sanctuary. As a result, the rest remained in the local community, and, at the end of every three years, was used as the tither designated (v. 28-29). This did not mean it had to wait for the third year.

The stress (v. 29) is on blessings when tithing is done gladly and readily. St. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 9:6-7, tells us,

6. But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

7. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

Paul's image of the farmer sowing seed is a vivid one. The man who is stingy with his seed will have a thin and poor crop, whereas the man who sows freely reaps a good harvest.

We have here two tithes in effect merged to a degree: the rejoicing tithe, eaten at the central sanctuary, and the poor tithe, used locally. Our rejoicing tithe thus makes us mindful of the poor.

In v. 29, we are told that obedience leads to blessings. A people poor towards God means poor lives and a poor land, whereas a people rich towards God have a rich land. Such an obvious correlation between faithfulness and blessings annoys modern churchmen, but

¹ Roy Lee Honeycutt Jr., *The Layman's Bible Book Commentary*, vol. 3, *Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1979), 137-38.

the Bible is very clear that this is so (Deut. 28; etc.) We are blessed in our possessions only when we use them as God's stewards, not as self-sufficient lords. G.T. Manley noted:

The basic principle underlying the offering of tithes is the same as that of the Sabbath law. All man's wealth, as all his time, is God's gift, and held in trust for him (Dt. viii.18; Mt. xxv.14). To mark the sacredness of the whole, a definite proportion is to be set apart and dedicated at the sanctuary (23, 25).²

Charles M. Cooper has called tithing "the practice of pure religion," and also one of the "positive requirements of religion."³ This is sound terminology. The tithes were basic to the unifying of society, the advancement of God's Kingdom, and the cultivation of a grateful people. Tithing leads to gratitude.

C. Clemanse spoke of the triple use of property mandated by our text. The *first* use was for God's service (Lev. 27:30). Proverbs 3:9-10 declares,

9. Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase:
10. So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.

The imagery is one of exuberance: full barns, and a super abundance of new wine. When God is served joyfully, we are blessed, in time and in eternity.

Second, the next use of property was for family use. They were both to rejoice before the Lord (Lev. 23:40, etc.) and "to fear the Lord thy God always" (Deut. 14:23). God does not call us to a miserly life; sin has made this an evil world, but God's purpose is our prosperity in Him.

Then, *third*, another religious use and purpose in gaining property is to bless others as we have been blessed. The Levite is especially mentioned as one whom we must bless.⁴

John Peter Lange said of this chapter that the dietary laws led from sin and death to life in the Lord. The direction is "back to the

² G.T. Manley, "Deuteronomy," in F. Davidson, with A. M. Slibbs and E. F. Devan, eds., *The New Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 211.

³ Charles M. Cooper, "Deuteronomy," in Herbert C. Alleman and Elmer E. Flack, eds., *Old Testament Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, [1948] 1957), 314.

⁴ C. Clemanse, in H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 241ff.

original creation,” and, we can add, ahead to the new creation. This fact stresses their status as laws of holiness. We can add that the laws of tithing have the same function.⁵

⁵. John Peter Lange, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, reprint, n.d.), 133.

Chapter Forty-Five

The Year of Release (Deuteronomy 15:1-6)

1. At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release.
2. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD's release.
3. Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release;
4. Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it:
5. Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day.
6. For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee. (Deuteronomy 15:1-6)

The laws concerning diet and debt are repeated so often that one would think that there would be no misunderstanding about their meaning. Both sets of laws are commonly neglected, however. Debt on a long-term basis can lead to poverty, and a poor diet can mean ill health, but many seem more ready to risk bad health and poverty than to obey God.

Our text is concerned with another aspect of the Sabbath, one day of rest in seven, one year in seven for both men and the land, and the cancellation of debts in the seventh year.

David F. Payne, while not in agreement with this law, still wrote:

Here we see at its clearest that Deuteronomy's "laws" are not just fixed decrees but a "design for life." The climax of the passage is not the law about the cancellation of debts but the appeal to the heart in verse 11. The opposite of law is "crime"; the opposite of God's moral laws is "sin."¹

God's laws are indeed His design for life, and we neglect them to our loss.

¹. David F. Payne, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985), 94.

Peace with God means that we are mindful of our neighbor's needs. This does not mean statist welfarism but godly help.

The biblical premise is that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). Man is therefore under God's law and totally dependent on His grace and bounty. Life cannot be on man's terms but only on God's terms. This means obedience to His laws and a care for the earth and men. Deuteronomy 14:22-29 requires a second tithe for the care of the needy. Another aspect of that care is the cancellation of debts.

The *permitted* debts were short-term ones, for the time remaining until the next Sabbath year; there were thus debts from one to six years only, or for a matter of days, weeks, or months only. The seventh year was a year of release. It began at the beginning of the seventh year, as v. 12 makes clear.

If men obeyed these laws, v. 4 tells us literally "there *should* be no poor among you." Poverty results from the violation of God's laws.

Verse 2 calls the release "the Lord's release," or, as H. Wheeler Robinson rendered it, "a release (in honour) of Yahweh."²

An important aspect of this text is that it is emphatically stated that obedience is the key to prosperity. According to v.6, the results of obedience will be threefold. *First*, it will result in God's blessing, His protecting and prospering care. *Second*, in the economic sphere it will make God's people lenders to many nations and not borrowers. This has no reference to modern foreign aid but to business loans. *Third*, "thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee." Thus the faithful nation will be blessed spiritually, economically, and politically.

Without debt-free living, there can be no true rest. Because some in society will contract debt, the limitation to short-term indebtedness, plus a Sabbath year, means that all men will in one year in seven experience true rest. No debt nor any other related problem can in that year threaten any covenant member. True rest is not only the absence of labor but the absence of pressures. In a godless society, men seem determined to create pressures and burdens where there are none.

² H. Wheeler Robinson, *Deuteronomy and Joshua* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. C. & E. C. Jack, n.d.), 131.

An important aspect of the year of release is that it means a year of renewed opportunity. God does not allow men, if they obey His law, to destroy their future indefinitely. In Joseph Parker's words,

We must have the element of hopefulness in life: without hope we die. Tomorrow will be a day of ransom and liberty — if not tomorrow by the clock, yet tomorrow in feeling: already the dawn is upon our hearts, already we hear noises of a distant approach: presently a great gladness will descend upon the soul. The child will be better in a day or two; when the weather warms (the doctor assures us), the life will be stronger. When arrangements now in progress are consummated — and they will be consummated presently — the whole house will be lighted up with real joy and thankfulness. So the spirit speaks to itself; so the heart sings songs in the night-time; so we live by hope and faith....

We find in this year of release what we all need — namely, the principle of new chances, new opportunities, fresh beginnings. Tomorrow — said the debtor or the slave — is the day of release, and the next day I shall begin again: I shall have another chance in life; the burden will be taken away, the darkness will be dispersed, and life shall be young again. Every man ought to have more chances than one, even in our own life. God has filled the sphere of life with opportunities. The expired week is dead and gone, and Christ's own resurrection day comes with the Gospel of hope, and the Gospel of a new beginning, the Gospel of a larger opportunity; and the year dies with proclamations from heaven, and Life says, when it is not utterly lost, — I will begin again: I will no longer blot the book of life: I will write with a steady and careful hand.³

Parker rightly stressed that the meaning of God's law here is to give His covenant people fresh opportunities. Verse 3 makes it clear that this law does not apply to foreigners, i.e., people outside the covenant. Having no faith, they are by nature slaves. When a covenant people drifts away from the faith, the consequences will be debt-living and a contempt for God's law. The debt-slavery they then incur will be the logical consequence of their loss of faith. As Isaiah said,

20. But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.

21. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.
(Isa. 57:20-21)

³. Joseph Parker, *The People's Bible*, vol. 4, *Numbers 27 — Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 240-41.

It is interesting to note that, while all sources dealing with ancient Hebraic life tell us that the seventh year was a year of release, as the text says, and the debts were *permanently* cancelled, some modern commentators state arbitrarily that it could not have been so. They insist that debts were merely subjected to a postponement of payment for a year. They have no evidence whatsoever for their opinion, which goes against the plain statement of the text.⁴ If such scholars were logical, they would have to say that vv. 12-18, dealing with the emancipation of bond-servants, likewise refers to a year's release only!

J. A. Thompson has pointed out that ancient Babylon also had a year of release whose purpose was to establish justice. This law, however, is very different in that no class distinction is made by God's law. The Code of Hammurabi made distinctions between members of the aristocracy, priests, landowners, rulers, military leaders, and the underprivileged slaves. God's law sees all men as covenant members of a household of faith. God is concerned with the least as well as the greatest, and His law protects all of them.⁵ The Code of Hammurabi gave an advantage to the rich and powerful, whereas God's law erases the distinction to protect all.

G. T. Manley and others have rightly called this law "the Lord's release." It is not a humanitarian act but a religious one; its motivation is not pity nor sympathy but a godly faith. We too often forget what St. Paul said about the nature and purpose of work. In Ephesians 4:28, we are told,

Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

This goes completely contrary to the modern temper. The idea that a key purpose of work is to be able to give to the needy, and that this is God's holy purpose, is remote to us, *but it is God's requirement*. It is a key aspect of the Sabbath doctrine. We rest in the Lord, and we enable our fellow covenant members to rest also.

God's law protects all members of society. In the U.S., between 1960 and 1980, bankers had loan officers peddling loans from farm

⁴ See, for example, Richard Clifford, S. J., *Deuteronomy, with an Excursus on Covenant and Law* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier Inc., [1982] 1989), 91.

⁵ J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, [1974] 1978), 185-86.

to farm, persuading debt-free farmers to buy more land, or very costly equipment, and to go deeply into debt. Many family farms, owned by the same family from three to six or more generations, were lost, and some banks went under. God's laws concerning debt protect both the borrower and the lender by forbidding disastrous and immoral policies.

Chapter Forty-Six

Prayer and Alms

(Deuteronomy 15:7-11)

7. If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother:

8. But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth.

9. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee.

10. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto.

11. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.
(Deuteronomy 15:7-11)

These verses are very important to an understanding of the New Testament. Paul in Ephesians 4:28 sets forth a contrast. The Christian abandons a world based on theft for a work-oriented society. He works to accomplish the good, and “that he may have to give him that needeth.” We are told of the centurion Cornelius that he was “a devout man and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:2). When the angel appears to Cornelius, he says, “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God” (Acts 10:4). *Prayer and alms* are not an association made by the modern church. If it prays, its prayers are separated from action, whereas both Paul and God’s angel make an inseparable connection between prayer and alms or charity. The early church saw this connection, as did the medieval church in its healthy days, and the Reformation as well. Now, the modernists have substituted statist welfarism for charity, and the evangelicals have been content too often with prayers, not action.

The biblical requirement is not that either church or state should govern all things. Both are *limited* in their jurisdiction and income. The sanctuary received a tithe of the tithe, or 1 percent, and also a

variety of sacrifices and offerings (Num. 18:26). The civil order received a half a shekel from every male from age twenty up (Ex. 30:11-16). Thus, both church and state were strictly limited. The basic government and *charities* were in the hands of the people.

This is the doctrine of society which our text and all of Scripture sets forth. The good society requires a good people. The Levites, as the instructors of Israel, a clerisy (Deut. 33:10), received the most in order to instruct the people in governing themselves, and their society, and in caring for the needy. Our text, Acts 10:4, and other texts stress the connection between prayer, charity, and blessings. This is, in fact, a major stress of Scripture, as it was of the early church, and of the medieval and Reformation churches. Certainly it was important to John Calvin. Despite the biblical stress on this, it is now rarely preached or taught. It would startle many professing "Bible believers" to be told that prayer *and alms* are preconditions of blessings. The very idea of "private" or personal charity has been attacked by one non-Christian writer.¹

The biblical stress on Christian charity on the personal level was not stated in a vacuum. Rome had at the time a vast welfare system administered by a huge bureaucracy. This welfare system was a major drain on Rome and in part responsible for its collapse. Paul was undoubtedly familiar with the Roman answer, but he knew that God's answer was and is a radically different one.

Basic in our text is a biblical awareness of the nature of man. In v. 9, the covenant man is addressed in uncomplimentary language. His heart is "wicked," according to the English Authorized Version, but in the Hebrew it reads, "thy *Belial* heart." If we hesitate to help our covenant brother where we can, we have a *Belial* heart and are enemies of God. Our eye is "evil" against our covenant brother, and it is a "sin" on our part.

This does *not* mean that the poor are the good. This equation, common to modern politics, is alien to the Bible. The text is concerned with the legitimate and deserving poor, the unfortunate ones. The presupposition of all Scripture is man's depravity. Jeremiah 17:9, for example, tells us, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" or, in James Moffatt's words, "who can fathom it?" Because we are ourselves sinners, we

¹ See Teresa Odendahl, *Charity Begins at Home: Generosity and Self-Interest among the Philanthropic Elite* (New York, NY: Harper-Collins Basic Books, 1990).

are unwilling to face up to the full scope of evil. Our money is a stewardship from God, as are all our possessions. We dare not use them foolishly, nor selfishly. Charity is both a duty and a task.

Sir George Adam Smith rightly saw the centrality of our text, which he called “one of the most beautiful as it is one of the most characteristic passages in the laws” of Deuteronomy.² We can add that it is characteristic of the whole Bible.

In v. 7, both the families and the communities are addressed. The scope is more than local. “If there be any among you” addresses the whole community. “Within any of thy gates” refers to all the urban communities of the nation. While action is to be personal, the concern for action must be both civil and ecclesiastical; it must be manifested in all spheres. This means that the teaching ministry must be faithful in declaring the duty of prayer and alms. The civil ministry must be mindful that the nation will not be blessed if it is negligent in prayer and in alms.

In v. 7, “thou shalt not harden thine heart” is literally “you shall not be strong against your heart.” If you are a covenant man, in your heart you know what your duty is, and you must do it.

The text states a community obligation, because the consequences of failure to be charitable are disastrous for all. The condition to be dealt with is what Hirsch aptly termed “necessitous poverty.”³

In all our dealings with the poor, we must treat them with respect as a brother in the Lord. In Deuteronomy 24:10-13, a case law requires that, in lending to a poor believer, we must not enter his house to take his pledge or security. He is not to be shamed because of his poverty but given the same respect due to all godly men. Wealth gives us no prominence before God, nor does poverty.

Understanding the New Testament without a knowledge of the Old, especially the law, is difficult, and many simply skip baffling injunctions. For example, in Luke 6:30-31, (in the Berkeley Version), we read:

30. Give to everyone who asks you, and do not request your belongings back from him who took them.

31. Treat others exactly as you would like to have them treat you.

² Sir George Adam Smith, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, [1918] 1950), 201.

³ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 5, *Deuteronomy*, trans. Isaac Levy, 2nd. ed. rev. (London, England: Judaica Press, [1966] 1982), 275.

In our Lord's day, these words had a double significance. *First*, they referred to our text, to the year of release and loans in money or items of property to help the poor. *Second*, in first century AD Judea, the Roman forces had the right to commandeer men or possessions. Whatever the occasion, we must treat others as we would be treated.

God makes it clear in His law that poverty will disappear with an obedient people (Deut. 15:4). He knew, however, that they would be, on all levels of society, each in his own way, a disobedient people. Therefore, "the poor shall never cease out of the land" (v. 11). Deuteronomy 15:4, in the marginal note, makes it clear that the text can be rendered, "To the end that there be no poor among you." This is God's purpose.

Verse 10 tells us, "for this thing [our charity] the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto." Given this unequivocal statement, it is obvious that many Christians do not want to be blessed.

Chapter Forty-Seven
The Charitable Society
(Deuteronomy 15:12-23)

12. And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee.

13. And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty:

14. Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him.

15. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day.

16. And it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee; because he loveth thee and thine house, because he is well with thee;

17. Then thou shalt take an aul, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever. And also unto thy maidservant thou shalt do likewise.

18. It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free from thee; for he hath been worth a double hired servant to thee, in serving thee six years: and the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest.

19. All the firstling males that come of thy herd and of thy flock thou shalt sanctify unto the Lord thy God: thou shalt do no work with the firstling of thy bullock, nor shear the firstling of thy sheep.

20. Thou shalt eat it before the Lord thy God year by year in the place which the Lord shall choose, thou and thy household.

21. And if there be any blemish therein, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it unto the Lord thy God.

22. Thou shalt eat it within thy gates: the unclean and the clean person shall eat it alike, as the roebuck, and as the hart.

23. Only thou shalt not eat the blood thereof; thou shalt pour it upon the ground as water. (Deuteronomy 15:12-23)

According to God's law, no covenant man could be enslaved. Covenant faith also meant freedom in due time for an alien. The text is concerned with bondservants. These could be male and female. A man could be sentenced to bondservice to make restitution for an unpaid debt, or for theft. If the man to whom the sentenced man owed money needed his due gold or silver payment at once, then he

could sell the man's labor to someone else and so collect his money. Such a service could be up to six years. A release was necessary on the Sabbath or seventh year.

At times a man would find himself unable to make restitution for a debt by means of bondservice because it would increase his loss to leave his property and work. In such a case, according to Exodus 21:7-11, he could send his young daughter to be a household servant. She could not be used as a field hand, and her life was one protected by law.

On the year of release, such bondservants could not be sent away empty-handed. They were to be given of the man's produce in substantial forms, i.e., livestock, wine, or grain. The value of a bondservant was greater than that of a hired worker, because the bondservant, during his or her stay, was a part of the family.

The basis for such legislation is plainly stated. In v. 15, the people are told to remember their redemption from Egypt by God's sovereign grace. Having received grace from God we are to manifest it to others. This is the foundation of the truly charitable society according to God's law. Since we all have received in some way God's grace and mercy, we must all be God's instruments of mercy to others. The reminder here is of God's work; for us it is His salvation through Jesus Christ. This is the foundation of the charitable society.

The bondservant in a godly family was a member of the family. It was thus possible, and not uncommon, for a man who had a good master to choose to remain with him. His ability to survive on his own might also be limited. At the conclusion of his time of service, he could ask to remain as a permanent servant member of the family. If so, he had to undergo a ceremony marking his status. His ear was pierced; this is an ancient mark of a subordinated and protected status. Women have worn earrings to show that they are under a man's care and protection, and costly earrings have been a way of showing the wealth of their man. A permanent bondsman would show, by way of his pierced ear and an earring, his subordination to his master. Two ears were pierced for a woman, one for a man.

The ear, because of hearing, represents obedience. In the Code of Hammurabi, Law 282, we read: "If a male slave has said to his master, 'You are not my master,' his master shall prove him to be his slave and cut off his ear."¹ This signified disobedience.

¹ James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, [1950] 1955), 177.

The ear was pierced against the door of the house. This meant that, as the pierced ear bled on the doorway, it established a covenant whereby the man so accepted became a member of that house and family. Even before such an event, the man, as a member of God's covenant, is described as "thy brother" (v. 12).

If the bondservant chose to leave when his debt was worked off, he was to be sent away liberally provided with various goods. The master was required to endow such persons generously. "Thou shalt furnish him liberally" in v. 14 translates a Hebrew idiom meaning to make him a necklace. In antiquity, and, in some areas to this day, women in particular would wear necklaces of jewels, gold, and silver, and also bracelets. By analogy, the former bondservant, male or female, would manifest the wealth, liberality, and grace of his recent master.

If the bondservant chose not to leave, he or she thereafter was a member of the family for life. In case of illness, or the infirmities of age, they then received care as a member of the family. This meant that the *choice* of permanent bond-servitude paid off with real benefits, mainly a lifetime of security. Its price was a loss of independence; the man lost his freedom to be a covenant freeman in the nation; he had no voice in community affairs. He was a subordinate, not a freeman.

The command in vv. 13-14 to give liberally to the departing bondservant has also as its premise God's ownership of all things. All that we have is God's providence toward us. We are stewards before God, not lords and creators. As a result, God commands our use of all things, including ourselves. Grace must govern us, and, through us, all of society. It is a stupid and malicious error to see God's law as punitive only. *Among many other laws, the laws of charity tell us that God's grace is very much a part of His law.*

The charitable society denies neither grace nor judgment: both are essential to a godly society. Consider the context of these laws: someone has, by means fair or foul, ended up in court. The court does not wipe out his offense. Rather, he is sentenced to bondservice. As such a servant, he works off his debt or obligation, and, at the end of such work, receives his freedom with liberal gifts *if he has been a good servant*.

From start to finish, this law sets forth both justice and grace. The two are thoroughly intermingled. The charitable society cannot exist

if the claims of justice are denied, and we see God's remarkable ways even in these laws. Remember too that habitual criminals were executed; these laws do not cover them.

In vv. 19-23 we have the law of firstlings. At the time of a pilgrimage festival, the firstlings would be eaten. In the wilderness, the sanctuary was in the middle of the camp, so the firstling could be eaten on the eighth day (Ex. 22:30). Now, with Canaan ahead, this would not be possible for those living at a distance, and so we have these and related laws.

Blemished animals were not to be taken to the sanctuary but eaten locally, according to v. 23. Both those who were clean and unclean could share the blemished firstling, even as they shared the roebuck of the deer, but neither could eat the blood (v. 24). Since aliens would have no objection to the blood, this meant that, on a man's property and in his house, his faith and its law governed the foreigner who was a guest. Such an alien could practice his faith and diet at his house, but not in the home of a covenant keeper.

These laws have been important in our history. They were observed in America as long as bondservice was Christian; nominal Christians were ready to abuse such a plan.

Welfarism replaces godly charity and law with a doctrine of entitlements. The needy insist on their rights, and this leads, whether in Rome or today, to a cult of victimization. The poor or the needy see themselves as victims with rights and entitlements. In Rome it led not only to a right to welfare but to entertainment.

Slaves are such either by disaster or by nature. The slave who is a slave by nature expects to be taken care of: he sees it as a "natural right" that others should provide for him. This mentality has been common throughout history, and, when it dominates a society, the results are disastrous. It destroys both those who believe in the "natural right" to welfare, and also those who tolerate it. A return to godly charity is urgently needed, for we *must* be members one of another (Eph. 4:25).

Chapter Forty-Eight

The Festival of Passover and Unleavened Bread (Deuteronomy 16:1-8)

1. Observe the month of Abib, and keep the passover unto the LORD thy God: for in the month of Abib the LORD thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night.
2. Thou shalt therefore sacrifice the passover unto the LORD thy God, of the flock and the herd, in the place which the LORD shall choose to place his name there.
3. Thou shalt eat no leavened bread with it; seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread therewith, even the bread of affliction; for thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt in haste: that thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life.
4. And there shall be no leavened bread seen with thee in all thy coast seven days; neither shall there any thing of the flesh, which thou sacrificedst the first day at even, remain all night until the morning.
5. Thou mayest not sacrifice the passover within any of thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee:
6. But at the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt.
7. And thou shalt roast and eat it in the place which the LORD thy God shall choose: and thou shalt turn in the morning, and go unto thy tents.
8. Six days thou shalt eat unleavened bread: and on the seventh day shall be a solemn assembly to the LORD thy God: thou shalt do no work therein. (Deuteronomy 16:1-8)

Most persons reading Deuteronomy and the other books of the law for the first time are surprised, irked, or puzzled by the frequent repetition of law about the religious festivals. Two things, among others, puzzle them. *First*, there is the repeated and strong emphasis on the festivals. *Second*, people find it difficult to view them as festivals, because the idea of a festival to them suggests almost a carnival. The festivals of the Bible seem to them very remote from a happy time. It comes as a shock to some to learn that the Scots, both in Scotland and the United States, came together, several or many churches at one time, to celebrate communion. These events were often preceded by many days of preaching, and also eating together. The name for these events was *Holy Fairs*. Our ideas of a festival or

fair are very different. Incidentally, festivals were common to the medieval church also.

The history of festivals within Christendom and the West can be divided into three phases. *First*, the festival was a religious event, a *holy* day or days. The term commonly used was a *holy day*. The holy day was a celebration of the faith and the cosmic victory it represented. The Christian calendar celebrated victories of the faith. In the medieval era, saints' days marked God's mighty witness to the world in and through the lives of His servants. The holy days thus were times to rejoice in the victories of God's people. The Christian calendar reminded believers that the world moves to God's predestined purpose, and that time manifests His saving power.

Second, in time the religious, or, better, the Christian festival gave way to a secular and statist celebration. The holy days were supplanted by holidays. Days of national victories or deliverances now became important or more important than holy days. Each country developed its own canon of holidays. Bastille Day, Guy Fawkes Day, the Fourth of July, and so on. Man's joy and pride now rested in national achievements and men identified themselves religiously with their country and its heritage. The state had supplanted the church and the faith in the daily routines of life. The focus of life had shifted. The holiday meant national ceremonies and parades. Instead of the holy day governing the state, the holiday was now often honored by the church.

Then, *third*, the holiday became primarily personal. For example, Memorial Day is less and less celebrated in the older manner, with a decoration of the graves of the war dead, parades, and patriotic assemblies. It is increasingly a personal holiday, a time for rest or fun, partly because people are disillusioned with the state. Similarly, Christmas marks Christ's birth less and less for most people and is instead a family day at best. Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ for fewer people and spring break for too many. The governing premise of the reduction of the holiday to the personal level is that the function of the ancient idea of festivals should be happiness for man. The happy hour in barrooms has its analogue in happy days for the people. Given this development in modern society, the idea of a godly festival seems strange and remote, as does the fact that such events were once a great delight to people.

The impact on the calendar has been great. Instead of a Christian calendar, we now have one calculated to give men a long weekend, and more rest or pleasure. Congress has rescheduled national holidays to give men long weekends. This is accompanied by a moral bankruptcy and a loss of a true focus in living.

The Passover and the feast of unleavened bread were to be celebrated at the sanctuary. When Jerusalem became that center, it meant a journey to Jerusalem. Since Israel was not too large a country, it was not a difficult task for the people to assemble there. This was done in the month of Abib, later named Nisan, each spring, at March or April in terms of our modern calendar. The two festivals were really one. They celebrated Israel's deliverance from Egypt, as our Easter, Christ's resurrection, celebrates our deliverance from the power of sin and death. Passover marked also their adoption *by grace* into the household of God. It was therefore a family celebration together of all the families of the nation. They were the family of God. The Scots, until barred from so doing by a medieval pope, had a Passover dinner at Easter to celebrate the Christian's victory. The Passover was a celebration of salvation and freedom. In v. 3, the people are reminded of their deliverance from Egypt.

Here again we have an emphasis on memory: "remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life" (v. 3). People with no sound memory of the past have no good hope for the future; having no sound memory of past victories, they have no foundation for present and future triumphs.

The festival was thus governed by memory and therefore by expectation. The loss of memory is a kind of insanity, because a loss of one's past is also a loss of our todays and tomorrows.

There is another aspect to biblical festivals, and one which was once not uncommon to Christendom, *the fast*. The fast is a time of total abstinence, sometimes of partial abstinence, from food. Fasting and prayer are commonly associated in Scripture and history. The fast is, like the happy festival, related to the past and the present. It often means repentance for past sins, and, on other occasions, it means earnest prayers for present and future victories.

The focus of the fast and the festival is on history and memory. The person fasting biblically is one geared to action and one preparing himself for it. Just as one loses weight physically when fasting, so he divests himself of the baggage of sins by repentance. Fasting

and prayer means the active reassessment of one's past, present, and future. This is why, historically, the confession of sins to a priest or pastor often led to the imposition of fasting as a penance. Its purpose was to reorder one's life and focus, to reconsider one's priorities and goals.

At one time, American presidents set aside a day for fasting and prayer, and these were taken very seriously by many; the purpose was to clarify the national priorities and to cleanse its life.

I can vividly recall fasting as a child as our family commemorated the massacres of fellow Armenians and set aside the price of the food to aid the needy. Festivals and fasting give more than a purely personal meaning to time and to history.

Chapter Forty-Nine

The Days of Our Lives (Deuteronomy 16:9-12)

9. Seven weeks shalt thou number unto thee: begin to number the seven weeks from such time as thou beginnest to put the sickle to the corn.

10. And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the LORD thy God with a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give unto the LORD thy God, according as the LORD thy God hath blessed thee:

11. And thou shalt rejoice before the LORD thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place which the LORD thy God hath chosen to place his name there.

12. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt: and thou shalt observe and do these statutes.
(Deuteronomy 16:9-12)

We have again a festival which sets apart some time for rejoicing before the Lord. *First*, the time of this festival is not set by the calendar but by the harvest. In v. 9, the time is specified as seven weeks from the time the sickle is put to the grain. Normally, this counting to the feast of weeks was tied to the calendar in that it began two days after Passover. The fifty days allowed time for variations in the ripening of the grain. All the same, dating the feast of weeks, or Pentecost, by the harvest made men mindful that our lives are governed by a calendar which is not man-made. We live *in* time: we do not make it, nor did we create the world.

Second, neither the world nor time exist for our benefit but for the Lord's purposes. As a result, God gives us His pattern for our days in His Sabbaths and more. Our rejoicing before the Lord must include others, as vv. 11-12 make clear. God's law must govern our days. We must remember our past, and God's providence. Because of this, we must include in our community and celebration the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan. When the Lord centers our lives on Himself, He includes our neighbors in that rejoicing.

Third, this celebration of time is to be observed with "a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand" (v. 10). The word *tribute* occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament (i.e., the Hebrew word *misseb*). It

means “sufficiency” or “a *proportionate* offering.” According to C. H. Waller, this means “a free will offering, proportioned to a man’s means and prosperity.”¹ The command is simply, “None shall appear before me empty” (Ex. 34:20; 23:15).

Fourth, v. 11 begins with an unusual command: “Thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God.” We do not normally think of joy being commanded. The tendency of mankind, however, is too often self-pity, and self-pity is determined to be joyless. Those who are full of self-pity are aggressively resolute to see no good in the present or the future. For them, not God but evil men are in control; they do know that they are not! To command rejoicing means to require men to assess and recognize God’s providential care. This joy must be shared with one’s family, and the family too often feels a man’s joylessness rather than his contentment and gratitude. The servants, the aliens, the widows, and the orphans are included in this celebration of the feast of Pentecost to make us mindful, as we face them, of God’s bounty to us.

Passover should have made the covenant man grateful for his salvation. Now, Pentecost, or the feast of weeks, should make him thankful that he has something to share with others. This festival is known not only as Pentecost and the feast of weeks but also as “the feast of harvest” (Ex. 23:16) and “the day of the firstfruits” (Num. 28:26; cf. Ex. 23:16; 34:22).

It is not accidental that the Christian day of Pentecost is tied to the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church (Acts 2). The time of harvest becomes now the harvest of men and nations. The world harvest must be celebrated. Although the world harvest of all men and nations is not yet complete, we must celebrate it in advance and rejoice in the assured victory.

1 Corinthians 15:20ff. declares Jesus Christ “the first-fruits of the dead, the first resurrected person of the new creation.” The fallen world is therefore in its death throes, and the victory of Christ is assured. It is a matter of time, and so we celebrate time and its goal. We must be joyful, grateful, and generous.

Fifth, memory is again stressed in v. 12; by remembering past bondage and grief as God ordains it, we become a force for deliverance to those around us. Our gratitude for deliverance from our past

¹ C. H. Waller, “Deuteronomy,” in C. J. Ellicott, ed., *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.), 48.

we show by gifts to God and to man. The direction of our thanksgiving is thus twofold, upward and outward.

Pentecost marked the end of the grain harvest. It was therefore to be a time of celebration of the ultimate harvest at the end of time.

The celebration lasted for one day. Two loaves, the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, were waved before the Lord. Only then could any part of the new harvest be eaten. Gratitude had to precede everything else. Thanksgiving goes before enjoyment.

Although the feast of weeks was celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover, it was to be a time of joy throughout. Instead of any concern or wailing over the lightness of the harvest, there was to be joy that there was a harvest. Anxiety was to give way to gratitude.

It must be stressed that gratitude should not be confused with self-satisfaction. It is a sad fact that a modern Orthodox Jewish manual for this festival sees Moses's concern about Israel's waywardness as only *superficial*, not discerning. God supposedly saw Israel's "untainted spiritual potential" back in Egypt, and "that was sufficient merit for the redemption (Rashi)."² The manual writes about "Israel's enthusiastic — even angelic — acceptance of the Torah." We are actually told, "God created the universe on the condition that it could endure only if Israel were to accept the Torah... creation exists in our merit."³

This is Phariseeism, a very common evil. Today we have blacks who see virtue concentrated in their race, and whites who see it in their own people. Wherever we find this, it is phariseeism. As St. Paul so bluntly stated it,

For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?
(1 Cor. 4:7)

The biblical calendar requires us to focus our lives on God's time and on His works. The modern man's calendar requires men to set aside God's word in favor of the state's concerns and man's pleasures. The income tax day has become perhaps the most commanding day of the modern calendar. It is a fitting symbol of what happens when man's priorities go astray.

² *Shavous Treasury* (New York, NY: Mesorah Heritage Foundation, 1993), 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

The calendar is in part an expression of faith. Days such as tax days will only increase in their importance until the faith of men changes. The days of our lives reflect our priorities.

Chapter Fifty

Redeeming the Time (Deuteronomy 16:13-15)

13. Thou shalt observe the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine:

14. And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates.

15. Seven days shalt thou keep a solemn feast unto the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD shall choose: because the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands, therefore thou shalt surely rejoice.
(Deuteronomy 16:13-15)

The strong and repeated stress on holy days, and on time generally, is common to the whole Bible. Time is clearly of great religious importance. Time and change are inseparable in the human mind. We are sharply aware of the passage of time by the fact of change. We may say, with the fictional Tevye, that "I don't remember growing older," but a look in the mirror reminds us of the great changes in us. For pagan thought, time and change, or mutability, have been the enemy. Added to this has been the belief, as witness Aristotle, in cyclical history, in an eternal recurrence of all things.

Men have devised clocks to measure time, but they have been unable to define or understand time because the universal relativism of modern science makes definition difficult or impossible.

The word *clock* comes from the French *cloche*, meaning a bell. Time in the medieval era was, for the ordinary man, regulated by church bells. However heavy his work, its framework was God's world. Bells reminded man of time's pattern and meaning in relationship to Jesus Christ, the LORD of time and history. Music marked time, and musical notes had and have a time-value, and the value of time is religious and theological.

If God has no meaning, or, at best, minimal meaning for the life of man, then time also loses its meaning. If the ultimate fact of the cosmos is simply nothingness, then time also becomes a futility whose end result is nothingness. However much time is standardized by clocks, without God time soon becomes an empty and inexplicable thing. Events are dated and occur within the context of

time, and any loss of meaning for time means a loss of meaning for events and persons.

But the Bible stresses the theological nature of time. It is an aspect of His creation. Not only the fall but also redemption, restitution, and restoration occur within time. Time is a religious, a theological, fact. It takes us from creation to the new creation in all its fullness. It serves God's purpose.

This means that, while we live in time, it is not our possession nor property. Time is given to us by God as an aspect of His redemptive grace. It either blesses us or aggravates our reprobation.

Our text begins with a commandment: "Thou shalt observe the feast of tabernacles seven days" (v. 13). Our anniversaries, birthdays, and other commemorations cannot supplant nor obscure the fact that God commands our time, and His law-word and purposes must be central to it. The *first* commandment here is to *observe* the God-appointed times. Our time must be dominated by obedience to God and His law. We have not created either ourselves nor time, and our will therefore must not govern our time nor ourselves. When we are too full of ourselves and our hopes and plans, we have then little place for God's purposes, and we pay a price for this. *Time stripped of God is a living death.*

The feast of tabernacles comes after the harvest. God's order calls for this. The harvest precedes the feast in God's order; when men revolt against God's order, they often rebel against the natural order of things.

The *second* commandment is, "Thou shalt rejoice in thy feast" (vv. 14-15). *Rejoice* can perhaps be translated as *brighten up*. This is a *law*. We are not to view our lives and situations humanistically, but rather theologically. Whatever the personal, national, international, economic, or political problem may be, we are to rejoice because God is on the throne, and He is the Lord of history.

The life of Moses was a grim and difficult one, and this is reflected in Psalm 90. All the same, Moses also says,

12. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

13. Return, O LORD, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants.

14. O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad in all our days.

15. Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.
16. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.
17. And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it. (Ps. 90:12-17)

We have no right to time independently of God, nor to plan our days apart from His sovereign purposes. We are not our own, St. Paul tells us, for we have been bought with a price by our Lord (1 Cor. 6:19-20). If we are not our own, much less is time our own. If God be the Lord, as He declares Himself to be, to plan and to number our days apart from His calling is to abandon Him, and to be abandoned by Him.

In Ephesians 5:15-16, Paul also tells us,

15. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,
16. Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

To walk as fools is to walk like the ungodly, like those who say in their heart, "There is no God" (Ps. 14:1). The reference in the psalm is not to avowed atheists but to practical atheists, to people who leave God out of their thinking and planning. To redeem the time means to buy it back, to restore it to its place under God instead of under our direction or the devil's. Morally, the times are evil, and if we to all practical intent leave God out of the picture, we are fools. He must have priority in all things, and certainly over us and our time, alike His creation.

Then, *third*, our text commands the inclusion in the feast of our family, our servants, the widow, the orphan, and the alien (v. 14). Because time and history are not our possession, nor are we our own, we must serve God's purposes therein. This means charity. Having received from God, we must give to others. This is a command. Biblical charity is not a statist matter but a family concern. If we leave our future to the politicians, we will have only an intensification and expansion of our present evils. Only by assuming our responsibilities under Christ to exercise dominion in every sphere can we have godly order and freedom. *A responsibility surrendered is a slavery assumed.*

For us, the requirement of the central sanctuary has been fulfilled in Christ, our new temple and sanctuary as well as our high priest.

When men crucified Him, they destroyed the old sanctuary, which His resurrection reestablished in His person (Mark 14:57-58).

Fourth, our text tells us that faithfulness means that “the Lord thy God shall bless thee” in every sphere of our lives (v. 15). To seek or to desire God’s blessing without first giving Him His due obedience is not only to sin but to blaspheme. An antinomian approach to God is forbidden. As Paul writes,

1. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?
2. God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? (Rom. 6:1-2)

Antinomianism shows a consistent contempt for God. It confuses grace with a lawless acceptance, and it cheapens whatever it touches.

Godly society has a duty to redeem the time, to buy back and restore time and history to its rightful place under God. If charity is left to the state, the poor will increase and will be evil like those around them, and community and society will be superseded by the state.

Chapter Fifty-One
Time and Justice
(*Deuteronomy 16:16-22*)

16. Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty:

17. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee.

18. Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment.

19. Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous.

20. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

21. Thou shalt not plant thee a grove of any trees near unto the altar of the LORD thy God, which thou shalt make thee.

22. Neither shalt thou set thee up any image; which the LORD thy God hateth. (*Deuteronomy 16:16-22*)

Verses 16-17 give us a summary of the laws of the three festivals: the feast of unleavened bread, the feast of weeks, and the feast of tabernacles. Every covenant man is to go to the sanctuary to observe these festivals. In vv. 11 and 14, the family, servants, widows and orphans, aliens, and Levites are included. There is no contradiction here. Men, as heads of families, are the ones to whom the commandment is given. Males must observe the festivals; they are the authorities in the family, and, under God, time moves to their requirements with respect to work and rest.

The festivals celebrate God's control of time. To cite the two great holy days of the Christian calendar, Christmas and Resurrection day, these tell us that God has entered history in the person of Jesus Christ, and through Him God has destroyed the power of sin and death.

The world is sinful, fallen, and immature. Therefore time is a necessity, because time means change and a potential development of that which is good and holy. Because sin and death are totally obliterated by Christ's second coming, there is no change in the eternal

Kingdom; the fullness of Christ's victory means the perfection or full maturity of all things.

The goal of fallen man is to attain the perfection or maturity of the eternal order in time by means of a political order. The dream is of a perfect and changeless order in time, a contradiction in meaning. Within history, the only changeless state men and nations can attain is death. There is no true change in the grave, only decay. The quest apart from God by man for the perfect political order is a quest for death. No Towers of Babel can stand.

Man's concern should be rather the godly society, the Kingdom of God. There are two key steps necessary for the attainment of the Kingdom of God in some degree. *First*, every man shall give as he is able to the Lord's work (v. 17). This means the tithe and freewill offerings. The government by God's Kingdom requires financing. Then, *second*, in all the gates, meaning towns and cities, there must be godly judges and officers. These men must apply God's law, which *alone* is "just judgment" (v. 18). Justice must not be compromised or falsified. This means no respect for persons, and no bribery. The good life requires the administration of justice "that thou mayest live" (v. 20). Without justice, life becomes untenable and difficult.

The festival law requires the observance of holy days and holy living. Honest judges and officers of the law mean life is blessed by God's laws. This fallen world is reclaimed by God's covenant people through God's saving grace and His governing law. "That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (v. 20).

In vv. 20-21, we have laws against fertility cult worship, and against idolatry. The use or planting of a grove of trees near an altar was to provide the setting for fertility cult rites and practices. The use of images in any form was related to this. Both have to do with *holiness*. In paganism, man sees a divine force in the natural order, and in himself, which he can in various ways harness for his own use. Man sees himself as the center of the world, or at least related to it. As Bryan R. Wilson pointed out, "The Navaho traditionally saw the gods as existing for man's benefit: he need not abase himself, as conversionist Christianity, with its strong preoccupation with sin, demanded."¹ The Cargo Cults of the South Pacific believe that ships

¹ Bryan R. Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium* (London, England: Heinemann, 1973), 448.

will come bearing all kinds of gifts for them and bring in a millennium. In Wilson's words, writing of the Cargo Cult believers,

Their own time-sense in these respects was often hazy, but must have fed the immediate expectations of the natives, which conceived of creation as occurring only three or four generations in the past, and for whom the millennial future was imminent.²

We see again that time is not seen as an arena for growth and maturation but as the place for the gift of Utopia. Our political millennialists as well as some premillennialists in the church have in common with the Cargo Cult people no theological awareness of time's meaning. Again, with the Navaho's, they have a thoroughly man-centered view of time and history.

There is an interesting parallel between v. 17 and some ancient Near Eastern treaty requirements. As J. A. Thompson has written,

It was a common practice for suzerains to require their vassals to report to them periodically, in some cases three times a year, in order to renew their allegiance and to bring tribute.³

A people must be linked to their sovereign. Since the suzerain is their source of protection and order, the people must pay tribute or taxes to him, and their lives must be ordered by him. Since God is the sovereign over all creation, and also over His redeemed covenant people, their presence at His sanctuary or throne-room, and their tithes or tax, acknowledge His sovereignty. Failure to worship and to tithe means no recognition of His lordship.

Furthermore, to acknowledge God's sovereignty means to recognize His law as binding for us and to make it the law of the land. Antinomians are guilty of treason to God and His Kingdom by setting aside His law. No ruler is sovereign or lord if his law does not prevail and govern all things. Antinomian peoples, churches, and nations are traitors to the Triune God and will in due time be judged by Him. We cannot understand time and history apart from this fact.

Bribery is also a form of treason (v. 19). A bribe violates the workings of courts of law. It introduces a factor alien to justice and in fact confirms man's fallen nature. The court then instead of furthering justice denies it. Instead of being God's representative on earth, the judges then become sons of Belial and agents of the fall.

² *Ibid.*, 342

³ J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, [1974] 1978), 198.

There is no standing still in history. We either move forward in terms of the Kingdom of God and the great regeneration (Matt. 19:28), or we move in terms of the fall and the Tower of Babel, the kingdom of man.

Because this is a fallen world, we dare not confuse law and justice. Fallen men routinely make laws, but true law and justice come from God alone. We must therefore recognize that man's law reflects his fallen nature, not God's justice. As man-made laws abound, so too does injustice.

The goal of man-made laws is to arrest time and to create a permanent political order. From Plato's *Republic* to the present, men dream of a Tower of Babel order, totally planned and controlled by man. Time is their enemy; their goal is an unchanging humanistic utopia.

But God the Lord controls all things. Time is His creation and is totally governed by His purpose. His predestination of all things means that the goal and all the steps to it were ordained from all eternity. Because this goal is predestined, time moves in terms of God's ordained future. We experience time from the past to the present, whereas in reality it comes to us in terms of God's future purpose. Its direction is the reverse of our experience of it.

The absolute justice of God governs all time, and the meaning of time comes not from time but from God. Thus, no humanistic philosophy of history is valid.

Chapter Fifty-Two

Treason and Tyranny (Deuteronomy 17:1-7)

1. Thou shalt not sacrifice unto the LORD thy God any bullock, or sheep, wherein is blemish, or any evilfavouredness: for that is an abomination unto the LORD thy God.
2. If there be found among you, within any of thy gates which the LORD thy God giveth thee, man or woman, that hath wrought wickedness in the sight of the LORD thy God, in transgressing his covenant,
3. And hath gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, either the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded;
4. And it be told thee, and thou hast heard of it, and enquired diligently, and, behold, it be true, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel:
5. Then shalt thou bring forth that man or that woman, which have committed that wicked thing, unto thy gates, even that man or that woman, and shalt stone them with stones, till they die.
6. At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.
7. The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you. (Deuteronomy 17:1-7)

Modernist scholars believe that the Pentateuch represents the compilation of four major works, and many minor writings, over a period of centuries, and long after Moses. They arbitrarily, on the basis of *a priori* opinions, will divide a single verse into four sources. We know that Shakespeare at times had collaborators, but we cannot separate the strands of his text, yet modernist scholars claim the ability to do so with the Bible.

Moreover, these men view the books as miscellaneous in character, so that v. 1, dealing with sacrifices, has no relationship in their view to vv. 2-7. Again, this is absurd and an unthinking opinion.

In v. 1, we have a ban on all defective animals as sacrifices. Such sacrifices are called “an abomination unto the LORD thy God.” An *abomination* in Hebrew means something disgusting and idolatrous. By giving a defective sacrifice to God we declare that He is entitled to little more than the leftovers in our lives and possessions. It is an

insulting gift and/or sacrifice. It means that God does not have priority over us and in our thinking. This is an abomination: we have made an idol of ourselves.

Now vv. 2-7 are essentially related to this. The purely formal and thereby disgusting and defective gift to God is the precursor to open idolatry and treason to God's covenant.

This law applies only to professing covenant members: in v. 2, it is clear that the law governs those who have transgressed their covenant with God. The pagans are not covered by this law. The subject is *treason*. No society can long endure if it permits a disregard among its members or citizens for its fundamental law order. To allow every man the option of insisting on his own version of the law, or no law other than his own will, is to invite anarchy and a radical dissolution. Laws of treason protect the foundations of a society. When a society decays, its laws of treason, its self-protection, also wane, and tyranny replaces the law order. The root meaning of tyranny is government without God. A tyrant is one who claims sovereignty and is unrestrained by any law or by God. Treason has reference to a fundamental law which has been betrayed so that the people and land are threatened; tyranny has no basis in law but is rather a usurpation of sovereignty and power. The importance of treason wanes as tyranny replaces law.

When a country disregards treasonable activities because it has become a tyranny, it is because the old law order, whatever it was, is now being progressively disregarded, and obedience to a law order has been replaced by a tyranny, loyalty to a person or party.

Given this fact, we can understand why the biblical law of treason is doubly offensive. *First*, it requires the death penalty, and, *second*, this treason is disloyalty to and the betrayal of God's covenant and His covenant law. A generation unwilling to execute criminals will hardly be agreeable to executing those who violate God's covenant. The idea is remote and alien to them.

Like all laws, this law could be misused. Stephen was executed, according to Acts 7:57-58, according to this law. The penalty on Judea for misusing this law, and for crucifying its Lord and Lawgiver, was death.

The crime is also known as *apostasy*. The word *apostasy* comes from the Greek *apostasia*, meaning defection or revolt. Apostates are revolutionaries. It tells us much about our present world that an

apostate is now seen as one who disagrees with the church's doctrines whereas its true meaning is that he is a revolutionary, a person who lives, moves, and acts in terms of another law and another god than the God of Scripture. In terms of this, it becomes clear why an apostate is a radical revolutionary and why God's law regards apostasy so seriously.

In Deuteronomy 16:21-22, the law bans the religious use of trees, real or artificial. These were fertility cult symbols (*asherein*). The word in Deuteronomy 16:22 translated as *image* (*massebah*) means standing stones or obelisks. These, like blemished offerings, are an abomination to the Lord. What such things meant was false worship. In vv. 2-7, the reference is to deliberate and avowed apostasy. The progression is from syncretistic and false forms of worship to open revolt.

The words in v. 7, "So thou shalt put the evil away from you," means to burn out, purge out by fire, the evil in your midst. At the same time, the law makes it clear that no man is to be convicted by other than the testimony of two or more witnesses, or, forms of evidence. Even if the man is apparently clearly guilty, he *cannot* be convicted unless the law of valid testimony is met.

The witnesses cast the first stone to verify their adherence to their testimony. After them, members of the community took part. The law was God's, but the enforcement was the community's duty.

There is a clear reference to this law in 1 Corinthians 5:13, "Therefore put away from among yourselves *that wicked person*." There is probably reference to this law also in the Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:13, "deliver us from evil." This is, literally, from "the evil." It can refer to Satan, or to an apostate or apostates.

The law of evidence requires corroboration as essential to conviction. Because man's testimony can be untrustworthy, corroboration is basic to God's law. One of the problems with administrative law, and common to tyrannies, is that the requirement of corroboration is often bypassed. While courts deteriorate in tyrannies, more important is the fact that they are steadily replaced by administrative verdicts. Tyranny was routine in the nations of antiquity, and to all nations since who bypass God's law, whatever religion they may nominally adhere to. The shift to God's law in Christendom, never more than limited, has been basic to whatever freedom

men have enjoyed. God's covenant and His covenant law alone provide for true justice.

An interesting sidelight on this law comes from the ancient rabbis. The guilty man committed his offense with a knowledge of the consequences because, whatever else in the law might be forgotten, this penalty was likely to be remembered. According to Hirsch,

...he committed the act definitely under the presumption of such eventual consequence, (in contemporary colloquial terms "I'll do it if I hang for it"). So that he already has the verdict of death on him when he appears before the court....¹

In v. 5, we have a reference to the person charged as "that man or that woman." This is unusual in that it refers to a feminine offender. Then as now, women have pleaded that their subordinate status makes them less culpable. As "Flip" Wilson put it, "The devil made me do it," here can be, "My husband made me do it," and I did not fully understand what was involved. Such a plea is undercut by making both men and women equally culpable.

¹. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 5, *Deuteronomy*, trans. Isaac Levy, 2nd ed. rev. (London, England: Judaica Press [1966] 1982), 323.

Chapter Fifty-Three

The Supreme Court (Deuteronomy 17:8-13)

8. If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the LORD thy God shall choose;

9. And thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and enquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment:

10. And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the LORD shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee:

11. According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left.

12. And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the LORD thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel.

13. And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously. (Deuteronomy 17:8-13)

Our text now turns to the legal requirement for a supreme court. It must be, *first*, at “that place which the LORD shall choose” (v. 10). Those nations of antiquity which had courts of appeal vested that power in the king or the ruling civil hierarchy of the state. The state as the lawgiver also assumed responsibility for appeals. God having given the law requires that all appeals be in terms of His government, at the sanctuary city, God’s throne city.

Second, the supreme court had two kinds of judges. It was made up of priestly Levites, men who were experts in God’s law, and a presiding judge (and judges) who rendered the decision. The Levites, as experts in the law, decided what the relevant law was in that particular case, its meaning, penalty, and application. The non-Levitical judge decided on the guilt or innocence.

Third, the types of cases heard on appeal are cited in v. 8. “Between blood and blood” means that the Levitical judges decided whether or not the case involved manslaughter or murder. “Between plea and plea” has reference to property disputes. “Between stroke and

stroke” means cases calling for compensation for injuries, and “matters of controversy within thy gates” refers to various local disputes. The Levites established the nature of the case and the relevant law or laws, while the non-Levitical judge decided on guilt or innocence.

Fourth, the decision had to be a religious one. It had to be determined by God’s law to further God’s justice. In vv. 11-13, to reject a decision handed down in terms of God’s law means to act presumptuously. It means rejecting God’s justice in favor of man’s, and the penalty for this is death. The penalty in a case might not be death, but to set aside God’s law does require the death penalty because, however slight the case, justice must not be sacrificed. By analogy, this applies to the judges also.

Fifth, the non-Levitical judge could be the king if he sought to take part. In the book of Judges, it is the ruling judge of Israel. With the monarchy, we see the king presiding at times. In 1 Kings 3:16-28, we see Solomon presiding in the case of the two harlots. Amos 2:3 declares that God will bring final judgment on corrupt judges and princes, and Micah 5:1 has a similar reference. Because the law is God’s law, there is a severe penalty for “contempt of court.” Because the court is *God’s court*, the penalty falls on the judges who pervert God’s law.

Sixth, strictness in the enforcement of God’s law will become a deterrent. “And all the people shall hear and fear, and do no more presumptuously” (v. 13). Humanistic law has moved to drop the deterrence factor, and we see the consequences of this.

Seventh, Deuteronomy 19:17 makes it clear that there could be more than one non-Levitical judge on the court of appeals. In Exodus 18:13-26, we see the origin of such courts. In 2 Chronicles 19:5-11, we find that, basic to King Jehoshaphat’s reformation, was a return to such courts, with a strong emphasis not only on the use of Levites but priests also.

Eighth, these courts, the supreme court of the land, would at times be called to render a decision in cases the lower courts found “too hard” (v. 8). These were cases with unusual aspects which the lower court found puzzling or confusing. One such case appears in 1 Kings 3:16-28, where two harlots come before Solomon asking for a decision. This case is of particular importance because it makes it very clear that courts of justice must be open to everyone, whether

or not of bad character or criminal background. Justice must govern all situations.

Ninth, the decision of this supreme court was *final*. God's law was the basis of judgment, and the court was made up of Levites who explained God's law and judges who applied it. Although perfect justice is impossible in a fallen world, we cannot use the fallibility of the process to overturn all courts. God's law gives the best possible means of attaining justice. We cannot expect inerrancy of the fallible men who are the instruments of the law. To demand inerrancy is to invalidate all legal processes and to invite permissiveness and the triumph of evil.

Tenth, it was possible for the key judge, such as the king, to pronounce judgment upon himself. In the case of David and Bathsheba, a prophet, Nathan, exposes David's sin, and David acknowledges it. Nathan then pronounces judgment (2 Sam. 12:1-14). Because God's law, not man's, governed all, Nathan, appealing to God's law, could bring about a judgment. Ahab, an evil king, still knew that God's covenant law was ultimate. Elijah could thus rebuke him and make Ahab quail (1 Kings 17:1-21:29).

Eleventh, in 2 Chronicles 19:5-11 we see that Jehoshaphat's reform meant reestablishing these courts. An important insight is that on the local level the non-Levitical judges are said to be "chiefs of the fathers of Israel," i.e., tribal or clan leaders, heads of families. Thus justice on the local level brought family men and Levites together in a common concern. The presence of the Levites in the court helped prevent an exclusively clan-governed decision.

Twelfth, the courts were thus essentially *religious* courts because the Levites were there to make sure that God's law was the basis of judgment. The Levites defined the crime and also its punishment, whereas the clan judges simply decided on guilt or innocence. This kept the courts on a covenantal basis. Their waywardness was thus an offense against both God and man, whereas in modern, humanistic courts, corruption is held to be merely an offense against man and the state.

Biblical faith and law are the guard of justice. Apart from God's covenant law, there is no justice, and the state and its courts drift into corruption and injustice.

According to C. H. Waller, *presumption* "denotes a proud self-assertion against the law."¹

¹C. H. Waller, "Deuteronomy," in C. J. Ellicot, ed., *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, reprint, n.d), 51.

Calvin saw as basic to this text the sovereignty of God. He wrote,

But we must weigh well the things that are contained here. It is said that the Priest must judge according to the law of God. Wherein it is shewed that our Lord layeth not the bridle loose on the neck, either of all the priests together, or of the Judge which was in those days in stead of a king: but that all of them ought to be subject to the law; and that... God meant to reserve the sovereign authority to himself, so as men should receive definitive sentence as at his mouth, and that the persons which were to give the sentence, should be but as instruments of his holy Spirit, and expounders of his law. Therefore let us mark well, that God meant not here that men should do any thing on their own heads, but that his law should bear the sway.²

To deny God is ultimately to deny law, because man's will in some form then prevails, as does anarchy. God is the source of all law, and the supreme Judge. This is the meaning of the Last Judgment: there is absolute justice; and there is a final and full accounting. All men and nations shall face that perfect and total accounting either in Christ's redeeming atonement or in their own guilt.

There must be justice in the world, and man is the source of injustice. Man must submit to God's law or his societies crumble into anarchy. Larry Woiwode has written,

If you remove the law as the standard for measuring the effect of grace in a person's life, or as the measure of your acts, you remove the ethics from Christianity, and any possibility of an ethical culture.³

To remove ethics from a society is suicidal. The state cannot produce ethics: it normally refuses to be governed by it. The ethics of men and nations is seen in Genesis 3:5, the will to be one's own god and to determine for oneself good and evil.

² John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth Trust, [1583] 1987), 641.

³ Larry Woiwode, *Acts* (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 164.

Chapter Fifty-Four
Monarchy versus Theocracy
(Deuteronomy 17:14-20)

14. When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me;

15. Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother.

16. But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way.

17. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.

18. And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites:

19. And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them:

20. That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel.

(Deuteronomy 17:14-20)

Biblical law is *moral* law. It sets forth premises to govern immoral man morally. It covers situations and problems which many may find intolerable but which are still aspects of the human scene.

Modern statist law is not moral but *ad hoc* law, created in the context of a situation or crisis and intended to control it. *Ad hoc* means literally *to this*, so that *ad hoc* law does not concern itself with ultimate truth, although it may in a Christianized culture use such terminology. *Ad hoc* law seeks to control a situation, and the control is normally expected to advance the power of the state. Biblical law deals with God's order, justice; *ad hoc* law seeks to develop the power of the state.

Scholars with an *ad hoc* law mentality cannot understand such laws as this. Since the concern is with monarchy, they cannot believe that it was written within centuries before the Israelite monarchy came into being. Their *ad hoc* mentality leads them to relate everything in the Bible in terms of a crisis context.

Such a view means that history's crises, not God the Lord, determine history. The Bible therefore is reordered by them in terms of *ad hoc* crises which ostensibly led to the particular law or revelation. Not God but human experience becomes the ultimate determiner.

This disposition is common not only to biblical scholars but existed among the Israelites, as v. 14 tells us. The land and the law come from God, but the people will still look to other nations for examples and for guidance. Implicit in this is a disregard for God. Implicit in it also is the statement, if God gave them the land, cannot He keep it for them? If God gave the law, He is therefore their King. Can He not best rule over them? The demand for a king was an act of apostasy from God the King. As Samuel told them, centuries later,

And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the LORD your God was your king.
(1 Sam. 12:12)

God knew that in time the people would reject a *theocracy*, rule by God's law, in favor of rule by a *monarchy*, by a man and his law. When European monarchs used the Bible to vindicate monarchy, their use of texts was selective, and the Bible in the hands of the people unpopular. The Geneva Bible had many marginal notes on texts unfavorable to monarchs. There is, however, no such note on this text, perhaps because it would have been the first to which monarchists would turn, suspiciously.

Anticipating Israel's waywardness here as elsewhere, God laid down certain restrictions after stating that monarchy would be a form of apostasy, of rebellion against Him.

First, they could not choose a foreigner as their king. Since monarchy was a pagan practice and since it meant supplanting God as King with a mere man, at least they could avoid an alien.

Second, the king had to be one of them, a fellow Hebrew, so that there would be some degree of awareness of the covenant. Ignorance of this would lead, as it did when Jezebel took over the initiative

from Ahab, to evil such as that godless man did not dare to institute on his own.

Then, *third*, “he shall not multiply horses to himself” (v. 16). This is a very interesting requirement because it is in effect a ban of foreign wars. An infantry could effectively defend the homeland, whereas a cavalry was a necessity in the invasion of foreign countries. Horses in that era were primarily military animals. Oxen and asses were used for farming and travel, and, in some areas, camels.

Fourth, there should be no return to Egypt, in any way. Egypt was the great horse-breeding and selling country of antiquity, and it was a seductive idea to establish close ties with a nation so very important in military preparedness.

Fifth, the monarch should not “multiply wives unto himself” (v. 17). These would wean his heart away, we are told. Our modern tendency is to assume that this was simply sexual. The purpose of royal polygamy in antiquity was to establish international alliances. As recently as the 1930s, I was told by a missionary that if an African chief were not given a wife, or if he rejected a wife, from a neighboring ruler, it was tantamount to a declaration of war. The polygamous intermarriages established alliances. They also served to infiltrate a pagan religion into a country.

Sixth, the ruler should not “greatly multiply to himself silver and gold” (v. 17). The law banning false weights and measures *requires* the use of gold and silver (Lev. 19:35-37; Deut. 25:13-16). This is not a law against hard money. It has reference to Exodus 30:11-16, which limited the civil tax to half a shekel for all males twenty years of age and older. The ruler is forbidden to accumulate wealth because it is not God’s purpose that the king be rich but rather the people.

Seventh, the king must have a copy of God’s law, and he must study it constantly. It is imperative that he govern by God’s law, and, to do so, he must master it. He must learn to fear God, not man, to see God’s law over himself and all the people.

The reasons for this are then given. *First*, if the ruler does not see God’s law as over him, then his heart will be lifted up above the people; he will be proud and arrogant (v. 20). He will regard himself as a person apart, not as a minister of God’s government (Rom. 13:1ff.).

Second, this means that the ruler must not depart from God’s law to the right hand nor to the left. He must not be more severe than God’s law permits, nor more lax. He must apply it faithfully.

Third, only by God's law can a ruler prolong the days of his posterity and himself in peace and prosperity. The expression, to have his heart lifted up, means to act proudly and haughtily, as though he were above his people. The law makes it clear that the ruler is equally under God's law as the people, and even more so. Our Lord tell us,

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:48)

Such an expectation is basic to biblical faith.

Arrogance too readily goes with power. The desire in Israel for a monarchy was to increase the nation's efficiency and power. But power decreases efficiency because, as the power accrues to the civil rulers, they govern increasingly in terms of power goals rather than justice. Injustice then prevails, and efforts to remedy it by statist means only aggravate the problem. The arrogance of human power has a long history.

Monarchy is a form of human rule: it is rule by man. Whether it be monarchy, a dictatorship, a republic, or a democracy, rule by man is hostile to God's law and rule. It is a monarchy, whether of one, a few, or all the people, and it sets man's will and law against God's. The essential premise of man's rule is, *My* will be done, whereas in a theocracy, man says to God, *Thy* will be done.

Chapter Fifty-Five
Kingdom Support
(Deuteronomy 18:1-8)

1. The priests the Levites, and all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel: they shall eat the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and his inheritance.
2. Therefore shall they have no inheritance among their brethren: the LORD is their inheritance, as he hath said unto them.
3. And this shall be the priest's due from the people, from them that offer a sacrifice, whether it be ox or sheep; and they shall give unto the priest the shoulder, and the two cheeks, and the maw.
4. The firstfruit also of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the first of the fleece of thy sheep, shalt thou give him.
5. For the LORD thy God hath chosen him out of all thy tribes, to stand to minister in the name of the LORD, him and his sons for ever.
6. And if a Levite come from any of thy gates out of all Israel, where he sojourned, and come with all the desire of his mind unto the place which the LORD shall choose;
7. Then he shall minister in the name of the LORD his God, as all his brethren the Levites do, which stand there before the LORD.
8. They shall have like portions to eat, beside that which cometh of the sale of his patrimony. (Deuteronomy 18:1-8)

This text deals with the support of God's priests and the Levites, His clerisy. In my student days, I was told that the "primitive" conditions of Hebrew tribal life meant that salaries were paid in kind, in grain, meat, and drink. This is an absurd statement. Why then was the civil tax to be paid with half a shekel, a weight of precious metal (Ex. 30:11-16)? Why was civil rule provided for thus, and religious worship and instruction provided for differently? These are the kind of questions we need to ask.

Before doing so, we need to understand that in Israel the priests and Levites had a key position in the covenant nation. *First*, God's representatives in the worship and the instruction which were basic to covenant life had the most important part in the national life. They were the life-support system of the covenant people. Apart from the covenant, Israel was like all other nations under judgment and sentenced to death. The life of the covenant people *required* the support of the covenant's human spokesmen. In this respect, the priests and Levites were types of Christ.

Second, they were therefore entitled to physical support (vv. 1-5). They were to be given meat, grain, oil, wine, and wool. Since the priests and Levites provided the religious necessities, they were to be given life's necessities. Their income was not limited to such things, but these were basic. Worship and instruction are thus seen as necessities.

Third, vv. 6-8 tell us that all Levites, however isolated and rural their location, had the same privilege as all others of serving at the central sanctuary.

Our question now is answered. The priests and Levites were paid in kind because their services were essential to life in an especial way. Proverbs 29:18 tells us,

Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.

Very literally, this verse tells us that where there is no teaching of God's revelation, the people run naked.

The reference in v. 1 to no inheritance for the priests and Levites meant that, in the division of the land, the tribe of Levi could receive no section of Canaan as a tribal domain. They could, however, own property within the various tribes, but their income was to come from serving the Lord. Their essential inheritance was not territorial but religious, the duty of serving God. Their pay, their revenue, was primarily food, because their calling was to provide the religious and intellectual food to make life in its truest sense possible.

In vv. 6-9, it is clearly stated that there must be a common support, an equal support, for those in the country as in the city. The covenant faith has an equal necessity in every area. Verse 8 reads, "They shall have like portions to eat, beside that which cometh of the sale of his patrimony." The reference to *patrimony* means an inheritance from one's family. In a variety of ways it was possible for a priest or Levite to accumulate assets. No such assets could be used to diminish his income. This is in direct contradiction to the modern premise of over-taxing the successful and the rich. Every man had to receive his due salary no matter how independently wealthy he might be. To dishonor God's faithful clergy and clerisy is to dishonor God, because they are His representatives and servants.

The support of the clergy and clerisy depended on the faith of the people. A people lax in their faith would neglect to support the clergy and clerisy, and a religious decline would follow.

According to Numbers 35:7, the Levites, instead of an area of Canaan, received forty-eight cities and their suburbs. This certainly meant an important possession, but it was not worth much if the covenant people failed to support them.

The support of God's clergy and clerisy is the duty of God's covenant people. In times of faith, when the people tithed faithfully, both worship and instruction would be very well provided for, and God's servants would be well off. In times of apostasy, they would be in need. This fact should be an encouragement to sound preaching and teaching, so that God's will might be done.

The mission of the clergy and clerisy is to the world. It is thus a serious error for a church to see its ministry in local terms only.

This text is echoed in our Lord's charge to the disciples when He sent them out to preach to Judea (Matt. 10:1-42). In particular, in vv. 9-10, He says,

9. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses,
10. Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.

The support was to come from those served.

It is, moreover, to be the *firstfruits* (v. 4). God requires us to give priority to His work above our own. It is accordingly a *law* that the true tithe is paid before everything else, because God has priority over us.

As we have seen, in a time of faithfulness, God's clergy and clerisy prosper greatly. The work they do, as well as they personally, can be generously funded, whereas in times of unbelief or laxity they will be poor. There should be no envy for their prosperity nor disdain for their poverty.

Calvin, in his sermon on this text, said that all should apply to themselves the fact that God is our true and best inheritance. Christ has advanced us to the dignity of sons and daughters of God by the adoption of grace. "For we be linked to our Lord Jesus Christ, that He might dedicate us to God His father."¹ Ours is thus the duty to

¹ John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth Trust, [1583] 1987), 958.

serve and praise God. This text was given to us, Calvin said, in the time of figures or types. Its meaning, in addition to the obvious obligation to support God's servants, is to see the necessity of serving the Lord also, with all our heart, mind, and being. It is God's Kingdom we are to support, and it is therefore ours also.

Chapter Fifty-Six

Being Perfect (Deuteronomy 18:9-14)

9. When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations.

10. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch,

11. Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.

12. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee.

13. Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God.

14. For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the LORD thy God hath not suffered thee so to do.

(Deuteronomy 18:9-14)

This is both law and a warning. Israel is about to enter Canaan, and God tells them then why the Canaanites are being dispossessed *by God*. Israel will fight the battles, but God has determined the outcomes. “Because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee” (v. 12).

Again that word *abomination*. It is the Hebrew *to'web* or *to-ay-bah*: it means something physically and religiously disgusting and morally repulsive.

Twenty years or more ago, it was still possible for landlords to evict tenants for moral cause. When landlords learned of the practice of various perversions by tenants, they would evict them. On occasion, they would fumigate, spray, and repaint the apartment or house to rid it of its polluting past. In effect, this is what God is here saying. All men and nations are tenants under God, and their occupancy is in time terminated by God when He holds them to be abominations. Dispossession then follows.

God here tells Israel that He is dispossessing the present evil tenants of Canaan. He had given them a few centuries to repent, but now He has His new tenants, and the Canaanites are *finished*.

This text is God's warning to the new tenants. Being God's chosen people gives them no privileges and no exemptions where God's occupancy rules, *His law*, are concerned.

The offenses, by no means a full list, here cited are mainly concerned with *gaining power or control illegitimately and not morally*. They are: Moloch worship, divination, a soothsayer or observer of times, charmer, a consulter with familiar spirits or a medium, a wizard, or a necromancer, one who claims to reveal the future by communicating with the dead.

Moloch worship was state worship. It required the dedication of all children to the state by being passed over the altar fire before emblems of the state. On occasion, actual human sacrifices took place. In any case, the life of all children was made state property soon after birth. This practice can be called analogous to circumcision or baptism: it placed the child in covenant with the state.

Divination is the attempt to gain knowledge of the future apart from God. The diviner assumed that there were powers who could assist him in the quest for such knowledge, and he claimed some control over these powers. Fortune tellers are poor relations to ancient diviners. Rulers often had official diviners for consultation. A variety of means were used to make predictions, among them being astrology. *A common assumption* was that the universe was an arena of conflicting trends, so that *no divine decree of predestination controlled reality*. Divination was an effort to read trends and directions; forecasting was seen as a necessity of state. The assumption was that not God and His moral law govern the cosmos, but random trends and forces. Divination was thus a logical consequence of disbelief in the God of Scripture.

Soothsayers, or observers of times, are condemned in Leviticus 19:26. The rabbis saw this as referring to astrology, because astrology makes judgments in terms of the planetary positions. We see today horoscopes in newspapers telling people the implications of each day in terms of one's birth date. This is observing times. It means that God does not determine His creation: the planets and stars supposedly do. Its appeal is again the same, a quest for determination outside of God.

Augurs read the future in terms of unexpected events and omens. A flight of birds overhead, an unusual event, a strange coincidence, all such things and more were held to be important. Augurs held a

high place in Rome and were officers of state. A dislike for the strange and the unforeseen led men to see a special meaning in such events. They were portents of coming events. This meant that not moral conduct but a knowledge of portents was most important. This meant again that God and His law were not seen as determinative but rather the strange coincidences or events of nature.

The witch was someone who determined events as a dealer in drugs, some of which were poisons. These were used to control or eliminate people. This was a routine practice in antiquity, and it was revived with the Renaissance. Cesare Borgia used poisons to achieve a variety of desired ends. In our time, there is much confusion about the meaning of witches, but the fact is that they were drug dealers who sold their services to those who could pay.

The charmer offered protection and power by means of a secret knowledge and the supposed power to impart healing or protecting power to amulets and the like. Those who go to a charmer gain supposed powers or powerful trinkets that will ward off evil. The idea is that protection can be purchased, and the wearer can ward off evil. Again, the trust is in something man can buy or control. *The charm is a pagan substitute for prayer.*

Mediums, or persons who supposedly established communication with the dead, are regarded as a means of information. Supposedly, the dead know things we do not know. Contact with them can also be sought as a comfort by bereaved persons. In any case, the resort is to something other than God the Lord.

The necromancer is similar to the medium, but the necromancer seeks knowledge about the future.

It can be seen that these various practices interlock. In our time especially the overlap is great. These practices are common to a dying age because they presuppose a loss of true faith, a radical moral decline, and a desire, not to change the future by moral and religious reformation, but by knowledge of it. Knowledge is seen as the saving power, not God the Lord. All these forbidden practices stress either power or knowledge or both. They are aspects of man's will to be his own god and to determine his life on his own terms (Gen. 3:5). Where God's word and power are obviously in control, these practices nevertheless assume that men can prevail.

Because of these practices, the Canaanites were being set aside, and Israel would replace them. But Israel would face a like judgment if it sinned in the same way.

Verse 13 declares, "Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God." In the New Testament, with the same command (Matt. 5:48), perfect means mature. Here, it means complete (*tawmeem*), come to the full, accomplished. The meanings are similar. We are to be mature, complete, in our trust in God. We are not our own: we are God's creation and His tenants on earth. A culture that transfers the power to make moral decisions from God to man is doomed. It has assumed lawmaking powers, and it will therefore meet the judgment of God's law. All these ancient practices, together with modern statist controls, are saying in essence that the determinative power in the universe is nature or man, not God. This is a declaration of moral and legal anarchism. It is known in law as *positivism* because it denies all validity to all absolute and eternal truth and law and affirms man's changing will as law. At one time, when the state was still Christian, all such practices, from simple palmistry on up, were illegal because they were an affront to the doctrine of law. Such practices promoted the concept of a law-free, morality-free universe in which chance prevailed rather than God. The ban on such practices rested on the premise that it is immoral and dangerous to a society to encourage disbelief in the ultimate power of God and His law. The legal status of these practices is now secure, even to the killing of animals to determine or forecast someone's future; this legalization has been done under the pretense of religious freedom, and under the guise of permitting religious sacrifices, but the practice is a form of humanistic attempted control over destiny. If law does not reflect the fact that God is the Lord and Sovereign, it will reveal the premise that man and the state are gods. No more dangerous gods have ever been affirmed by man.

Chapter Fifty-Seven
Prophets
(Deuteronomy 18:15-22)

15. The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;

16. According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not.

17. And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken.

18. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

19. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

20. But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.

21. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken?

22. When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

(Deuteronomy 18:15-22)

According to Acts 3:22 and 7:37, vv. 15-19 are a prediction of Christ, the Great Prophet of God, so that the Christian interpretation of the Great Prophet has the validation of the New Testament. This Prophet is described, *first*, as coming from the midst of Israel. He is one of them while more than one of them. *Second*, this Prophet is like Moses, “like unto me” (v. 15). He represents God and is the Prophet of the law of God. *Third*, “unto him ye shall hearken” (v. 15). Obedience to the Prophet is required. *Fourth*, this Prophet meets the demand of Israel: at Mount Sinai, they were afraid because of the nearness of God in His presence and majesty. They wanted a mediator. Moses was at the time their mediator, but the proximity of God was still too much for Israel. The Great Prophet will thus reveal God on more understandable terms. *Fifth*, this Great Prophet will speak the very word of God. “He shall speak unto them all that

I shall command him” (v. 18). *Sixth*, any who fail to hearken, i.e., to hear and obey the words spoken by the Prophet, will be judged by God. The test is obedience to this Prophet. *Seventh*, the reference is to Horeb or Sinai, to the giving of the law, so that the Prophet comes as a greater Moses to reinforce the revelation given through Moses.

In vv. 20-22, we have *other* prophets cited. These are men whom God calls to His service, but it also refers to false prophets with a pretended message from God. In Jeremiah 28, we have a reference to one such false prophet, Hananiah. A true prophet could predict good or bad, but the main thrust of false prophesy was to please man. Its content was not God’s moral law but the expectations for deliverance by ungodly men.

God makes it clear that the prophet is not an expert to be consulted but a servant or messenger from God who must be obeyed. God sends His prophets to recall men to His covenant and law, so that the true prophet’s words are God-centered, not man-centered.

This means that a true prophet is not a welcome person. He calls attention to the apostasy of men from God’s covenant and law. This fact creates a market for false prophets who speak encouraging words where judgment is required. In Isaiah 30:9-11, we see a description of the false prophet’s message:

9. That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD:
10. Which say to the seers, See not: and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits:
11. Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.

The goal of false prophets is to supplant the word of God with the word of men. Antinomianism *demand*s false prophets because it re-sents the law-word of God.

Verses 21-22 tell us that, because the false prophet seeks, as Isaiah 30:11 makes clear, the death of God, God requires the death of the false prophet. The goal of the false prophet is to destroy the foundations of covenantal society, and hence his death penalty. The false prophet might claim to speak in the Lord’s name, or in the name of some other god; in either case, he claims to be a prophet.

God gives a test for the prophetic word. *First*, does he speak God’s word? Is he faithful to the law-word given at Sinai? *Second*, if his

prophecy is predictive, does it come to pass (v. 22)? Is his a true or false prophecy? Now this test applies only to those claiming to be prophets. A man may predict an election return, or an economic development; right or wrong, if his statements do not presume to carry authority, he is simply a man trying to see certain consequences, *not* a true nor a false prophet.

The kind of prophet Moses here refers to is not a trained professional. Elisha's school of the prophets was a ministerial training center. The word prophet can mean a preacher who speaks for God, but it means in our text someone whose calling is directly from God to proclaim God's word. In this sense, prophets are an Old Testament and New Testament phenomenon. God's law made a place for professional teachers and scholars, but His prophets were not professionals nor a part of an institutional organization. It is clear from the Old Testament that prophets were disliked as a disruptive force. The true prophet both preached demanding covenant loyalty and predicted in terms of God's orders.

The priesthood had as its purpose stability and order in the religious life of the covenant people, and the civil government was to provide justice. The prophets were God's servants in rebuking both church and state in terms of the law-word of God.

The function of the prophets was to recall the people to the covenant and its law.¹ The prophets saw a dissolving covenant, and they sought to recall the people to that bond. They spoke of the judgment God inflicts on covenant breakers. For them, true worship was *totally* related to the covenant and its law. In Clements' words, the prophets declared that for the covenant God, "no worship could please him which was not expressive of obedience to his covenant law."²

All men are tenants on God's earth. His covenant and its law, obedience, the tithe, faithfulness in all things, all this and more were and are the conditions of man's tenancy on God's earth.³

Prophecy was a theocratic office. It was God's way of keeping the covenant people aware of the transcendental and supernatural frame

¹R. E. Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant* (London, England: SCM Press, [1965] 1993), 16, 76, 99.

²*Ibid.*, 44.

³R. E. Clements, *God and Temple* (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 9.

of reference to man's life. Man could not settle into an institutional world and forget God.

The Holy Spirit is closely and essentially related to prophecy, and the prophets are men through whom the Holy Spirit speaks.

Jesus Christ, as the Great Prophet, fulfills this purpose. Christ being very God of very God, and very man of very man, we cannot with success absorb Him into an existential realm. The supernatural cannot with any success be separated from Him. As the Prophet to the end of time, He compels men to reckon with Him. History is theocratic, not humanistic. Justice is not something invented by man but the revelation of God's nature. It is an inevitable necessity that Jesus Christ is the Lord of the Last Judgment. As the prophetic voice to all men and nations of God's government and justice, He is also the Judge over all. The false prophets before Hananiah and since are anti-judgment because they are anti-God. Our Lord, the Great Prophet, does not let us forget that, for all covenant breakers, *judgment* is the governing and overruling fact of history. Man's goal, however, is history without judgment, history as an experiment, not as a test. But history without judgment does not exist. Because God made heaven and earth and all things therein, history is a continuing test and judgment. History concludes therefore not in the city of man but in the victorious City of God and the Last Judgment. The mission of the prophets and of our Lord is to recall men to God and to His justice or law. Men, however, prefer their will to justice, and therefore they hate prophets. This only aggravates their judgment.

The word *prophet* means, *first*, one who proclaims God's word, and, *second*, one who predicts the future. By means of God's word, we can all be prophets in both senses. We declare and believe God's word, and we predict that the wages of sin are *always* death.

The Coming of the Great Prophet

As mentioned earlier, in Deuteronomy 18:15-19 we have a prophecy of the incarnation. God declares through Moses that He will send His Great Prophet in due time. Certain characteristics will mark this Prophet and will separate Him from all other prophets of God.

First, God says (v. 15), this Prophet will be "like unto thee," or "like yourself." This statement tells us that the Prophet will indeed be like other men, but that fact is enough to tell us that He is unlike

other men also. Israel's problem was its terror at Horeb at the various manifestations of God's presence, the fire and earthquake, and above all, the voice of God. They were too afraid to be able to hear God, so God was going to send them the Great Prophet who would be outwardly a man like themselves. Moses simply relayed God's word. The coming Prophet would speak it. He would be raised up "from among their brethren" (v. 18), but God would put His word into the mouth and being of the Prophet.

Second, Israel had a duty to hear this Prophet: "unto him shall ye hearken" (v. 15). All the prophets spoke for God, but this, the Great Prophet, would represent God in a particular way. Israel expected this Prophet, and, at the feeding of the five thousand by our Lord, the people said, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world" (John 6:14). The miraculous feeding had occurred in the wilderness (Matt. 14:15). It clearly recalled Moses in the wilderness and the manna. In this instance, our Lord's very words created the miraculous feeding, so that He appeared to the people as the God who gave manna, as the Great Prophet foretold by Moses. Because this Great Prophet was present in the flesh, they tried to capture Him by force and make Him their king. They wanted to control and use God's power. The incarnation was for them the opportunity to seize God. Instead of hearing Him, they wanted to control Him and to compel God to hear and obey them. Their faith was radically humanistic; confronted with God in the flesh, they tried to capture and control, as false theologies have done ever since.

Third, in Isaiah chapters 42, 49, 56, and 61, we have that prophet's reflection on this text in Deuteronomy. This Great Prophet is the Messiah who shall come to save and to rule the world. His coming will mean the ingathering of the Gentiles; He shall be a standard for the nations. Isaiah 61 in particular gives us the great task of regeneration which this Prophet-Messiah will inaugurate.

Fourth, this Prophet-Messiah was expected by Jews and Samaritans alike. In John 4:25-26, the Samaritan woman at the well declares,

25. ...I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.

26. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.

John the Baptist had been asked if he were the Prophet foretold in Deuteronomy 18:15-19, and he answered, no. We are told, in John 7:40, that the reaction of many people to our Lord was, "Of a truth

this is the Prophet.” Our Lord referred His critics, the religious leaders, to Moses’s prophecy, saying,

45. Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust.

46. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.

47. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words? (John 5:45-47)

Their claim to trust in Moses was not true, for they refused to believe what Moses had predicted. They who claimed to be followers of Moses had no regard for Moses’s words.

Fifth, the prophecy of the Great Prophet is preceded in vv. 9-14 by a prohibition of all occult and nonbiblical attempts to gain access to God, power over men and nature, and knowledge which God bars to men. God was dispossessing the Canaanites because of their dedication to these things. The goal of these esoteric efforts at knowledge is with us still in educational practices as well as in occultism. The motto is “knowledge is power,” and what is meant is not godly knowledge but any and every form of gaining power over men and nature. Occultistic efforts separate knowledge from ethics, and this is also the perspective of modern education and science. The summons is to *obey* the voice of God as it comes to us through His Great Prophet. This obedience is a moral fact, whereas the practices described in vv. 9-14 bypass ethics in favor of power, the power to control. The revival of occultism follows the decline of true Christianity. We cannot understand our times without knowing this.

Sixth, the references to this text are many. Some are John 1:20, 45, which identifies Jesus as the one of whom Moses spoke; John 6:14 and 7:40; Acts 3:20, 22-23; Acts 7:37; and so on. In Hebrews 3:1-6, we have an exposition of the implications of Moses’s prediction and its meaning for Christ’s calling.

Seventh, while orthodox theologians have agreed as a rule that this prophecy refers clearly to Jesus Christ, they have also seen it as a continuing promise, in v. 18b, to Christ’s faithful followers. The Geneva Bible declared of that verse that it “is not only made to Christ, but to all that teach in his name,” and Isaiah 59:21, which says of all who are faithfully the Redeemer’s men,

As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD;
My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in

thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever.

As He had blessed Isaiah, so God promises to bless His true church. E. J. Young stated this beautifully:

The Lord is declaring that His eternal truth, revealed to man in words, is the peculiar possession of His people. In the times of the Old Testament, this consisted of revelations made unto the fathers and the prophets. Today, the treasure of the Church is the Holy Scripture, the Word that cannot be broken, inerrant and infallible, the very truth of the eternal God. This Word and the Spirit will never depart from the Church, for the Church as the body of the Head is to declare the truth to all nations that the saving health of God may be seen by all.⁴

The power and the glory are not in the church but in the incarnate and the enscriptured Word.

Eighth, this text ends with a grim warning: "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him" (v. 19). These are blunt words for a text that promises the coming of God's Great Prophet, the Messiah. They do not suit modern man's version of Christ's Advent. What men want of Jesus Christ is sweetness and light, whereas this statement warns of the certainty of judgment. Today, Jesus Christ is left out of Christmas; carols are sung in schools and on television omitting all references to Him, and men calmly assume that God will continue to favor them and indulge them.

A prophet in the biblical sense is one who speaks for God, and it can also mean one who predicts the future in God's Name. This prophecy involves both meanings, because the Great Prophet speaks for God as none other can, and He predicts judgment on His enemies and blessings for those faithful to Him. There can be no valid belief in a Santa Claus redeemer, one who offers us only good things and never any chastening or judgment. It is not surprising, therefore, that this prediction of Christ gets so little attention.

At the feeding of the multitude, the crowd sought to take our Lord, whom they recognized to be the Great Prophet, by force to make Him King, to compel God to serve man. Today, as we see modern man's version of the Christmas miracle, we see the same effort at

⁴ Edward Joseph Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 442.

exploitation for humanistic goals. The result for Judea of this blasphemy was judgment. Without repentance, the world of our time will see the same judgment. Christ is the King, not man's errand boy.

Chapter Fifty-Eight

The Cities of Refuge (Deuteronomy 19:1-10)

1. When the LORD thy God hath cut off the nations, whose land the LORD thy God giveth thee, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their cities, and in their houses;
2. Thou shalt separate three cities for thee in the midst of thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it.
3. Thou shalt prepare thee a way, and divide the coasts of thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee to inherit, into three parts, that every slayer may flee thither.
4. And this is the case of the slayer, which shall flee thither, that he may live: Whoso killeth his neighbour ignorantly, whom he hated not in time past;
5. As when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour, that he die; he shall flee unto one of those cities, and live:
6. Lest the avenger of the blood pursue the slayer, while his heart is hot, and overtake him, because the way is long, and slay him; whereas he was not worthy of death, inasmuch as he hated him not in time past.
7. Wherefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt separate three cities for thee.
8. And if the LORD thy God enlarge thy coast, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, and give thee all the land which he promised to give unto thy fathers;
9. If thou shalt keep all these commandments to do them, which I command thee this day, to love the LORD thy God, and to walk ever in his ways; then shalt thou add three cities more for thee, beside these three:
10. That innocent blood be not shed in thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and so blood be upon thee. (Deuteronomy 19:1-10)

We have, in other contexts, dealt with the cities of refuge. Now we can apply their meaning to our world today. In vv. 9-10, we are told the meaning of this law. *First*, they are to love God by keeping His commandments, “to walk ever in his ways” (v. 9). The stress here again on the love of God *and* obedience to Him tells us that this is an important law. We cannot set it aside as inappropriate to our time. It is true that blood feuds no longer exist, except in rare areas,

in the Christian world, but this does not exhaust the meaning of this law. The law remains, but its application may vary from age to age.

Second, God's *purpose* in this law is justice, "that innocent blood be not shed in thy land" (v. 10). Justice is a perpetual concern, and we cannot treat a law pertaining to justice as obsolete. This law has a clear purpose, the protection of the innocent. Under normal circumstances, the function of the courts of law might take care of most cases, but, in every society, there are instances where the legal system fails: then some recourse is necessary to avoid injustice. Where injustice prevails in and through the justice system, the results are deadly. The instruments of justice are compromised; they become agencies of evil. This poisons the social order. We see it in our time in such statements as, "You can't fight city hall." The justice system is assumed to be corrupt and beyond redemption. If there is no appeal except *within* the system, cynicism and injustice prevail. We see today a very prevalent distrust and even contempt for our justice system. The courts on all levels are radically politicized and distrusted. They move in terms of technicalities, not in terms of justice, all too often. Even lawyers are commonly cynical about the system.

Third, God requires this law "that innocent blood be not shed in thy land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and so blood be upon thee" (v. 10). He reminds us that our land is an inheritance from Him, because all peoples and nations have their places and the bounds of their habitation as a gift from God; they exist by His grace (Acts 17:26-27). God can at any time dispossess any nation, people, or race. Because of His overlordship, God does not tolerate the shedding of innocent blood: sooner or later, His judgment follows. Men and nations may believe that some people's blood can be shed without consequences because they see them as insignificant and trifling, but not so the Lord. He is mindful of *all* injustices, great and small.

Failure to protect innocent blood means *guilt*: if innocent blood is shed, there will be blood-guiltiness upon a people. God requires that justice prevail, and, where it does not, in God's time that people is judged and set aside. Obviously, this means that this law is as relevant as ever, and God *requires* us to obey it and to put it into practice.

Failure to keep this law is arrogance, in that it is an assertion that our legal system provides the full measure of justice. This law militates

against a self-contained legal system that assumes that it dispenses full and complete justice. This is a prevalent sin of state.

From the standpoint of humanism, dissatisfaction with the existing system has led to such agencies as the ombudsman. These have had minor benefits but a major defect: they do not have a definition of justice apart from a humanistic code. What good they accomplish is a relic of a Christian morality. The Marquis de Sade was right: without God, justice is a myth. For Karl Marx, the law and its justice merely represented a class interest. Marx was right in seeing that, if God be denied, law and its justice will inevitably reflect nothing more than some special interest. There will then be a struggle for power, with the victor imposing his will on the losers.

Because of the survival of biblical law in Western nations, there are remnants of belief in an absolute justice, in God's law. This makes the problem of establishing a naked power state more difficult than in Cambodia, China, or Vietnam. At the same time, the Western world is marked by a vehement hostility to God's law. It is rightly recognized that it is irreconcilable with humanism and its legal systems.

The cities of refuge were *religious* centers in that they were to be governed by God's law in dealing with refugees. We are told that *the congregation* was to decide in each case. The cities of refuge were all Levitical cities (Num. 35; Josh. 20-21). This meant that God's clerisy, in assembly, determined in each instance whether or not the refugee deserved the protection of the city.

In the context of our time, we have a growing tyranny because of our growing power states. These states have no regard for God's law. They are increasingly evil.

In a Christian state, there should be regional assemblies of appeal to which men may go, or to which they can appeal for a restraining order against the state. At present, we see many, many illegal seizures of money and property. We have seen innocent people murdered by agents of the state. The fact that some of these people have been heretical or unbelieving makes no difference: under God, they are to be given *justice*.

This is the meaning of this law concerning the cities of refuge. A Christian society must not only govern by God's law, but it must also provide sanctuary and refuge from its own human limitations.

The cities of refuge mean that justice has priority over the affairs of state. The justice system needs an escape valve, a check on its failings.

God is not content with pastoral justice. He demands that men and nations work for full justice, "that innocent blood be not shed."

The implications of this law are routinely bypassed because they challenge the humanistic premises of our fallen world. Human justice is fallible, but, *even more*, the justice system can be evil. If a society has only man's justice system to rely on, it sooner or later deteriorates into tyranny and evil.

Man needs a city of refuge as against man and his systems. For centuries, all churches were cities of refuge; the refugee was tried in terms of God's law, and agents of state could present their case before the court, as could the refugee and his witnesses. The court's decision was binding upon the crown and the state. There is now no escape from the state's legal system, the cost of which is prohibitive. Those who refuse to accept God's law in time shut the doors on justice. The anti-theonomists pay a heavy price for rejecting the law of God.

Chapter Fifty-Nine

Abuses of Law

(Deuteronomy 19:11-14)

11. But if any man hate his neighbour, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally that he die, and fleeth into one of these cities:

12. Then the elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die.

13. Thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shalt put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee.

14. Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmarks, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it. (Deuteronomy 19:11-14)

The subject of these verses is *the abuse of law*. The cities of refuge were established in order to give men a recourse from legal tyrannies. Men are all too prone to abuse laws by using them to evade justice, or, in other cases, to use the law to establish lawlessness and tyranny. Sinful men do not want justice, and, as a result, they will use the best of laws for evil purposes.

The cities of refuge represent a strong concern for justice. Their purpose was to avoid feuds and injustices by establishing a means whereby a man could get a godly court to hear his case. Verses 11-12 deal with cases of men who kill, and then pretend that the killing was an accidental one. Men still go to great lengths to stage murders as accidental deaths. In so doing, they commit two crimes. *First*, they commit murder, and the penalty for this is death. This is a very ancient penalty; God ordered this punishment for murder at least as far back as Noah (Gen. 9:5-6), although we see the existence of a death penalty as far back as Eden (Gen. 2:17). Then, *second*, the man who abused the legal system in an attempt to evade the penalty for his crime was also striking out at law: he was in effect trying to mollify or kill the law. His resort to the cities of refuge was an abuse of the law, a very serious abuse.

The penalty for this was a grim one. The city elders (or, aldermen) had the duty of sending for him. They would provide the evidences of willful murder, and, after a trial, the guilty man would be handed over to the city elders. They in turn handed him over to the kinsman, or avenger, who prosecuted the case to see to the execution.

Thus, all attempts to *use* the law for lawless purposes are here condemned. This is especially pertinent to our time because technicalities of a trifling nature are routinely used to abuse justice. With many lawyers, but by no means all, the abuse of the law is a way of life. But this law makes it clear that God regards it as injustice for men and societies to abuse the law, whether it be criminal, corporate, welfare, or any other sphere of law. To abuse the law is to practice a most flagrant injustice. Verse 13 forbids pity for those who abuse the law. We are also told that it will not go well for a people who permit these abuses of the law.

The abuse of this law of the cities of refuge is called in Numbers 35:34 a *defiling* of the land. It is in particular a great pollution because God declares that He dwells in the land which is covenanted to Him. He dwells among His people, so that the abuse of law is not only a pollution of the land but an offense against God. This means that God takes vengeance, in His time, on all such pollution, and who can escape God?

Verse 14 forbids “removing” landmarks, or falsifying boundary lines. Stones in antiquity marked the boundaries of fields, and these were easily moved. In our time, for certain types of properties, fences mark property lines. Violations of this law still exist. Some years ago, a man who surveyed rural properties told me that such offenses were not uncommon. At times, a ranch surveyor did his work in a bar, sitting with the owner, and setting boundaries at his instruction. At other times, in refencing an area, a fence would be moved a foot to the fencer’s advantage, adding some acres to his range. This would be done when the rains came, so that traces of the shift would be obliterated.

Such a theft constitutes not only 1) stealing, but is also 2) a form of perjury. In antiquity, some peoples considered it 3) a form of murder, because it struck at the life and livelihood of another man. According to Keil and Delitzsch,

Landmarks were regarded as sacred among other nations also; by the Romans, for example, they were held to be so sacred, that whoever removed them was to be put to death.¹

The simple fact is that in our time properties are not often surveyed. This means that falsifications often continue for generations before they are caught. There is a long history of such stealing that goes unreported but is known by oral report.

¹ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 3, *The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949 reprint), 399.

There are references to this law both in Proverbs and in Hosea:

Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.
(Prov. 22:28)

The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound:
therefore I will pour out my wrath upon them like water.
(Hosea 5:10)

In both instances, we see a broader application of this law. As case law, it is applied generally to mean any and every breach of God's law. When men and nations, rulers and peoples, alter God's law, or, by reinterpretation, weaken or alter its meaning, they have then falsified *God's boundaries*. They have made His righteous law into an instrument of injustice. Certainly this judgment applies especially to churchmen who by their antinomianism dispose of *God's landmarks, His law*. God's law establishes boundaries which men and nations are not to transgress. Serious as it is to rob a neighbor by falsifying the boundary lines, it is far more serious to set aside or falsify God's law. But this is precisely what both church and state, as well as school, are now busily doing. God's landmarks are being triumphantly set aside as a sign of great enlightenment. By removing God's landmarks, men plan to initiate a golden age of freedom. But, as it approaches, the golden age looks more and more like the fires of hell.

Ancient Rome and other countries required the death penalty for all falsifications of boundary lines. Very obviously, God's law regards this as a more serious offense than did Rome, but it prescribes no penalty *by man*. This is a very important fact and is basic to God's law. When the destruction of land boundaries *and* moral landmarks becomes a part of the lives of a people, then no human agency can cope with the problem because it is a part of the problem.

God thus reserves judgment for violations of this law to Himself. This offense is also an abuse of law. Few things are more commonplace in our time than this, the use of the law or law-system to advance evil and to subvert good. Hosea makes it very clear what removing landmarks means, and yet there is no preaching on these texts. Pulpits all over the world *must* call attention to these texts lest they too are judged as faithless men by the Almighty. Politics and churchmanship today are extensively concerned with overlooking this evil. We must echo the words of Psalm 119:126: "It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law."

Chapter Sixty
Perjury
(Deuteronomy 19:15-21)

15. One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.

16. If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong;

17. Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days;

18. And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother;

19. Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you.

20. And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you.

21. And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

(Deuteronomy 19:15-21)

The abuse of justice is a religious offense. As a result, this law specifies that all cases of perjury must be tried before a court of priests and judges (v. 17). The false witness has done more than attempt to destroy a personal enemy: he has attacked by his perjury the justice system, and he has in effect declared the God of justice to be irrelevant or nonexistent for him.

False witness has as its basis, *first*, a desire to destroy an enemy by testifying falsely against him. Malice and hatred outweigh any concern for justice. The paramount concern is to discredit and condemn a personal enemy.

Second, false witness can have as its motive personal gain. Bribery for perjury is not uncommon. I recall, some years ago, being told quietly by a bank teller that great sums were spent to bribe witnesses and gain an acquittal for a flagrantly evil man.

Third, a man can perjure himself in order to deflect evidence of his own guilt.

A lax attitude towards perjury warps and destroys a legal system. The laws against perjury in the Western world come from the Bible, from the Ten Commandments, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor" (Ex. 20:16; Deut. 5:20). Without a biblical faith, such laws cannot stand, and non-Christian cultures routinely resort to torture. In biblical law, the oath and this law against false witness replace torture. Faith, conscience, and the sanctity of an oath provide the assurance of honest testimony. As Christian faith wanes, perjury and then torture replace it. In Proverbs 6:16,19; 21:28; and 24:28, God's hatred for the false witness is spelled out. In the New Testament, this law is again affirmed in Matthew 15:19 and Luke 18:20, also in Matthew 19:18 and Romans 13:9. In Proverbs 19:5 and 9, it is emphasized that the punishment of perjury is mandatory.

At one time, in Texas, in cases involving capital offenses, the punishment for perjury was death.¹

In 1937, in California, we find the following judgment:

It is time the citizens of this state (California) fully realized that the Biblical injunction: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour," has been incorporated into the law of this state, and that every person who, having taken an oath that he will testify, declare, depose, or certify truly before any competent tribunal, officer, or person, in any of the cases in which such an oath may by law be administered, willfully and contrary to such oath, states as true any material matter which he knows to be false, is guilty of perjury, and is punishable by imprisonment in the state prison for not less than one nor more than fourteen years. *People v Rosen* (1937) 20 Cal. App. 2nd 445, 66 P2d 1208, 1210 (McComb, J.)²

Without a biblical foundation and faith, and a knowledge of the sanctity of God's law, a society begins to disintegrate into anarchy, and coercion and torture arise. Every society needs cohesion: if religion does not supply it, then coercion and torture will. Churches which are antinomian have contributed substantially to our growing anarchy.

The penalty for perjury is, in God's law, exactly what the trial called for against the accused. If restitution was required, the perjurer made similar restitution to the innocent party. If the case called for the death penalty, the perjurer was executed. In v. 21, the so-

¹ H. B. Clark, *Biblical Law* (Portland, OR: Binford & Mort, [1943] 1944), 235.

² *Ibid.*, 234n.

called *lex talionis* simply holds that the false witness paid the price equivalent to what the innocent party paid if found guilty.

Perjury could also be used to defend a guilty man, to save him from the consequences of his offense. In such cases, both the accused and his false witness paid the penalty.

Despite the insistence of some scholars that the *lex talionis* was literally applied in Israel, i.e., an eye torn out for another man's lost eye, there is no evidence whatsoever that this was the legal practice.

The stipulation of at least two or three witnesses, or, more than one form of evidence, rests on the fact that all men are both sinners and also fallible. Corroboration is thus necessary.

The integrity of the judicial system is a moral and a religious fact. In the long run, legal reform without religious reform is not a tenable hope. There must be a religious reformation before there is judicial or civil reform, or the alternative is coercion. Coercion eventually produces greater evils.

The goal of the false witness is the miscarriage of justice. He wants to alter the outcomes to favor evil where it suits him. He wants God's creation to move on his terms.

In v. 20, we are told why the strict punishment of perjury is necessary. The rest of the people will fear; they will be afraid of treating the justice system lightly. Here, as in Deuteronomy 17:13, we have clearly affirmed the doctrine of deterrence. Men will be more apt to obey God's law when they see it faithfully enforced.

The literal reading of v.16 is very telling. The "false witness" is, literally, a violent witness, or, a witness of violence. Although his offense is a matter of words, he is doing violence to God's justice system. The words, "that which is wrong," can be rendered as, "that which is apostate," or, apostasy. In other words, perjury means abandoning the faith; it is an act of violence against man, and against God's justice system. This is the meaning of the commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness" (Ex. 20:16; Deut. 5:20).

In v. 19, "as he had *thought* to have done unto his brother," i.e., his fellow man, is literally "as he had *purposed*." In other words, perjury is a deliberate and purposive offense whose intention is evil.

Matthew 5:38-39 is sometimes cited to hold that our Lord set this law aside; this is in direct contradiction to His declaration in Matthew 5:17-20 that His purpose is to *fulfill* or enforce the law, *not* to nullify it.

Because perjury is a serious and a revolutionary offense, we are told plainly in v. 21 that we are to have no pity for a perjurer. His offense strikes at the foundations of justice.

It needs to be added that this law deals with perjury, not with errors. In the course of testimony, some witnesses, frightened and intimidated, sometimes confuse details. Such errors do not mean a sustained false testimony but an incidental error, a very different thing.

The law depends on trustworthy testimony, and perjury is an offense against the life of the law. The religious trial, before priests and judges, underlines this fact. The integrity of the law must be preserved, and the false witness, sometimes even more than the criminal, threatens the very existence of justice. This is why v. 18 states that the judges must investigate diligently every case dealing with perjury. Not to do so would be an act of contempt on their part both for justice and their office.

In our time, we see that more and more agents provocateurs are used, people who urge others to commit acts they had not intended to commit. Such agents push foolish men into violence and their arrest. This too is an abuse of justice, a form of aiding and abetting crime.

Chapter Sixty-One

Warfare

(Deuteronomy 20:1-9)

1. When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.
2. And it shall be, when ye are come nigh unto the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people,
3. And shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them;
4. For the LORD your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.
5. And the officers shall speak unto the people, saying, What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it? let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man dedicate it.
6. And what man is he that hath planted a vineyard, and hath not yet eaten of it? let him also go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man eat of it.
7. And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her.
8. And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart.
9. And it shall be, when the officers have made an end of speaking unto the people, that they shall make captains of the armies to lead the people. (Deuteronomy 20:1-9)

J. A. Thompson has cited the biblical texts governing godly warfare. *First*, no such war could be conducted apart from God's word or orders (1 Sam. 28:5-6; 30:7-8; 2 Sam. 5:19, 22-23). *Second*, there had to be a consecration to the task by the men of Israel (1 Sam. 21:5; 2 Sam. 11:11; Isa. 13:3). All that would offend God must be separated from them (Deut. 23:9-14), because God dwells in the camp with His people (Deut 23:14; Judg. 4:14). *Third*, the Lord can deliver His people by many or by few (Judg. 7:2ff.; 1 Sam. 13:15ff.; 14:6, 17). *Fourth*, God can and does send panic into the ranks of the enemy and thereby bring about their defeat (Josh. 10:10; Judg. 4:15;

1 Sam. 5:11; 7:10; etc.). *Fifth*, the spoils of the war belong to God, not to man.¹

One of the Dead Sea Scrolls is entitled, *The War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness*. Its concern was with the great war with God's enemies at the end-time. These laws had their influence. Throughout the Christian era, much has occurred in the way of efforts, both successful and unsuccessful, to limit injustices in war-time. Although the history of Western warfare is not good, it still is different from the ferocity of most pagan conflicts, until recently.

In v. 1, God stresses through Moses that He is with them: therefore, "be not afraid of them." This is a command: to believe in God means to trust in His word.

As a result, two kinds of exemption from military service are granted. *First*, all those whose minds are distracted and preoccupied by their affairs at home, i.e., a new house as yet not dedicated nor used, a bride betrothed but not taken, or a new vineyard finally producing but as yet unharvested. All such men, however willing to fight, are to be sent home, both as a merciful act and also to eliminate distracted minds (vv. 5-7). *Second*, all who are fearful and fainthearted are also to be sent home. Their presence in the army is a threat to their fellow soldiers.

These exemptions are to be declared by a priest. They are religious exemptions and are therefore to be set forth by a *priest*. According to numerous texts, a campaign was to be preceded by burnt offerings (Judg. 6:20-21, 26; 20:26; 1 Sam. 4:3; 7:9; 13:10ff.; 14:18; 23:4, 6, 9; 30:7ff.). These verses also tell us that attempts to replace obedience with the presence of the ark led to disastrous results.

The exemptions applied to all ranks of soldiers. If, therefore, clan leaders dropped out because of some kind of exemption, then captains of armies were to be made out of the remaining men. The officers were thus named by the men of courage.

The army must then trust in God, not in the size of the army. Wars are not outside of God's providential government, and the most necessary equipment for battle is a trust in God.

It is clear from all this that military service was voluntary, not compulsory. The covenant people were to place their hope in God,

¹ J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, [1974] 1978), 218-19.

to use godly soldiers, and to eliminate from the ranks of the volunteers all men who might be for any cause double-minded.

Morecraft noted,

When wars are fought in the defense of justice, in the suppression of evil, or in defense of the homeland, they are godly, and are part of the work of restoration. Such wars are “wars of the Lord,” Num. 21:14.²

Again citing Morecraft, v. 2 indicates that the priest accompanied the army; this was the origin of chaplains. Moreover, the exemptions make it clear that the family has priority, together with exercising dominion over the earth under God.³

Deuteronomy deals with warfare in chapters 20:1-20; 21:10-14; 23:9-14; 24:5; and 25:17-19. Even a modernist like Anthony Phillips has called the laws “humanitarian.”⁴

In v. 9, the officers speak “unto the people.” Instead of a drafted army, the soldiers are *the people*, come together to defend their cause or their homes. This is basic in Deuteronomy. Instead of a state decreeing war as a matter of policy, we have a people ready to fight for their cause. Instead of men drafted, made soldiers by compulsion, we have a gathering of the clansmen to defend their cause. The first step before battle is to send home some of these men.

The *captains* or commanders were, according to A. D. H. Mayes, apparently chosen on the same basis as were elders in cities and in the temple life of the people, captains over tens, twenties, hundreds, and thousands.⁵ The original commandment for this is cited in Deuteronomy 1:9-15.

P. C. Craigie’s comments on this text are very telling. He states,

Israelite strength lay not in numbers, not in the superiority of their weapons, but in their God. The strength of their God was not simply a matter of faith, but a matter of experience.⁶

² Joseph C. Morecraft III, *A Christian Manual of Law: An Application of Deuteronomy* (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Christian Training Center, n.d.), 61.

³ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁴ Anthony Phillips, *Deuteronomy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 135.

⁵ A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, [1979] 1981), 293.

⁶ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 271.

The legitimate wars were godly wars because their purpose was to remain secure in their possession of the land and their exercise of godly dominion therein. Again quoting the admirable Craigie,

The basis of these exemptions becomes clearer against the background of the function of war in ancient Israel. The purpose of war in the early stages of Israel's history was to take possession of the land promised to the people of God; in the later period of history, war was fought for defensive purposes, to defend the land from external aggressors. The possession of the promised land, in other words, was at the heart of Israel's wars, and the importance of the land, in the plan of God, was that Israel was to live and work and prosper in it. The building of homes and orchards, the marrying of a wife, and other such things were of the essence of life in the promised land, and if these things ceased, then the wars would become pointless. Thus, in these exemptions from military service, it is clear that the important aspects of normal life in the land take precedence over the requirements of the army, but this somewhat idealistic approach (in modern terms) was possible only because of the profound conviction that military strength and victory lay, in the last resort, not in the army, but in God.⁷

Israel's military muster included all men between ages twenty and fifty, but not all were used.⁸ In Judges 7, we see how Gideon reduced his army in terms of this law. Our Lord applied this in selecting His army, the apostles and other disciples, and He sent home all who were not totally dedicated (Luke 9:57-62). In Luke 14:18-20, our Lord makes it clear that the law of exemptions from military service did not apply where men are summoned into the Kingdom (Luke 14:18-20).

Verse 4 states that "God is he that goeth with you." This has also been rendered as "God who marches with you."⁹

We see here as elsewhere that there is nothing outside of God's government. Work, worship, war, eating, sanitation, and all things else are subject to His laws. He is totally the Governor of all things. The marginal note to this text in the Geneva Bible tells us, "God permitteth not this people to fight when it seemeth good to them." We are in all things totally under His government.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 274

⁸ Ellicott, *idem*.

⁹ W. Gunther Plaut, "Deuteronomy," in W. Gunther Plaut, Bernard J. Bamberger, and William W. Hallo, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York, NY: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), 1474.

God's *laws* of warfare view legitimate warfare as the defense of the family and the land. Modern warfare is waged for *political*, not covenantal, reasons. Moreover, nonbiblical wars are waged more and more against civilians, as were pagan wars. Thus, there is a great gap between political wars and those permitted by God's law.

Chapter Sixty-Two
Rules of Warfare
(Deuteronomy 20:10-20)

10. When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it.

11. And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee.

12. And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it:

13. And when the LORD thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword:

14. But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the LORD thy God hath given thee.

15. Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities which are very far off from thee, which are not of the cities of these nations.

16. But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth:

17. But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee:

18. That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should ye sin against the LORD your God.

19. When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in the siege:

20. Only the trees which thou knowest that they be not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy and cut them down; and thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee, until it be subdued. (Deuteronomy 20:10-20)

The rules of warfare are further cited in these verses. In vv. 10-15, distant cities, outside of Canaan, are the subject, and, in vv. 16-20, the Canaanite cities. In the first instance, even though the armies are on foreign soil, it is defensive warfare against a city-state which had attacked the covenant people. In the second instance, it is a war of

seizure and occupation against the Canaanite peoples. This warfare was legitimate because God the Lord was dispossessing them as tenants of His earth. Outside of Canaan, only Amalek was to be treated similarly (Deut. 25:17-19). Amalek was God's enemy also and had to be treated as such.

Apart from these peoples, the practice of total war is strictly forbidden (vv. 19-20). God's purpose for the earth is that it become His Kingdom in faith and obedience, and He requires that His law protecting all fruit trees be faithfully observed. Only non-fruit trees can be used to build siege works against a city. This law applies to warfare against any people.

This law is especially important because an ancient and modern practice of war is to destroy fruit trees. This left an area somewhat unproductive for some years. The Assyrian kings at times boasted of this practice. Roman generals such as Pompey and Titus applied this strategy rigorously. Mohammed destroyed the palm trees of the Banu Nadir, and he claimed to have done so by revelation. Modern warfare concentrates on civilian populations and their food-producing abilities. This law was observed in the conquest of Canaan. An exemption was made, by God's command through Elisha, in the case of Moab, centuries later (2 Kings 3:19, 25). We are not told the reason for this exception, but it is clear that it was not simply a prediction by Elisha but an order. Apart from this, when war was waged, it was to be against enemy soldiers, not the trees of the field. The future was to be protected by respect for the fruit trees.

In vv. 16-18, the radical destruction of the Canaanite cities and their inhabitants is ordered. These peoples were radically at war with God. They had been a source of disease and death to Israel before their entrance into the land. They were to be put under the ban, to be devoted totally to God. The people could not touch their wealth nor protect the persons of the Canaanites. They were under a ban or taboo. The Hebrew word is *herem*, which is related to our word *harem*, a secluded women's quarter. There are two kinds of bans. *First*, some persons and things are banned as an abomination to God. *Second*, others are consecrated to Him and are therefore banned from man's possession or control.

The following are declared in God's law to be banned. *First*, the false worship of God is banned because it is offensive and an insult to God. There is a religious contamination to such false worship.

Those under a ban contaminate all things (Josh. 7:24-25). *Second*, the seven Canaanite nations were banned: the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites (Deut. 7:1-2; 20:17). *Third*, whatever a man devotes or promises to God is irrevocably God's property, and no man can legitimately promise something to God and then go back on his word.

In the Christian era, a form of the ban has been proscription and excommunication, not always wisely used. The biblical ban has reference to God and His law, not to an institution. Proscription in Western history has been an act either exiling or reducing a man to an outlaw status. Beginning with the Temple in late post-exilic times, proscription could mean the expropriation by the Temple treasury of one's assets.¹ But men have no right to assume the power of God in any sphere, not to add to or to diminish God's law to any degree.

When men are indifferent to God's ban, and they see no importance in obedience to God and His law, they replace God with a human agency, most commonly now the state. The modern state increasingly places a ban on many of its citizens for very arbitrary reasons. Their properties, money, and assets are confiscated at will. This is less and less by due process of law and more by the state's fiat will. God's ban is spelled out in His law. Man's ban is an act of arbitrary will and hate.

In vv. 10-15, the rules of war laid down by God require that, whatever the aggressive acts of the enemy, on reaching their city-state to besiege it, it was *mandatory* to offer terms of peace to it. These rules stipulate that, *first*, these people became thereafter a subordinate state. This meant that they would become part of the Hebrew realm. *Second*, "they shall serve thee" (v. 11), i.e., there would be labor levies of their men. Such labor levies could be hard, as with Israel in Egypt, or, they could be comparable to the French monarchy's *local* levies (not the levies to build Versailles). The people would repair their local roads and bridges as a community venture, usually agreed upon in the local church. Of course, a king like Louis XIV, like Pharaoh, worked to death countless thousands to build Versailles. Thus, the labor levy of a city-state which surrendered could be light or severe. In Solomon's latter years, they were severe toward his own people.

¹ Haim Hermann Cohn, "Herem," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 8 (Jerusalem, Israel: Keter Publishing House, 1971), 346.

If they rejected the offer of peace, then, on losing, all the males would be killed. Their women and children, their cattle, and all their wealth, went to the people of Israel.

Similar rules of warfare, coming from Deuteronomy, governed Europe at least through the seventeenth century. Their use was generous or brutal, depending on the generals and their armies.

The city-state that surrendered became a vassal realm. To further its compliance, it could be and often was treated well. According to Hirsch, the word “males” in v. 13 refers to all capable of waging war. Of v. 20, Hirsch noted,

...our text becomes the most comprehensive warning to human beings not to misuse the position which God has given them as masters of the world and its matter to capricious, passionate or merely thoughtless wasteful destruction of anything on earth. Only for wise use has God laid the world at our feet when He said to Man “subdue the world and have dominion over it” (Gen. 1:28 et seq.).²

Warfare is always a brutal matter, and never more so than in our time, when it is waged against civilians, against churches, and against monuments of the past. In World War II, as in Iraq, the U.S. went out of its way to destroy churches.

Verse 18 gives us a practical reason for the destruction of the Canaanites, “That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should ye sin against the LORD your God.” There was virtually no sexual practice which was not a part of the Canaanite worship. Evil was made into virtue. For Israel to tolerate the Canaanite way of life was to reject God. There was no legitimate way to reconcile God’s law-word with the Canaanite lifestyle. Then as now, all too many want to reconcile good and evil, God and Satan. To all such, God’s clear commandments seem harsh because they are uncompromising.

The productivity of the earth, in the form of fruit trees, vines, and the like, was not to be a target of warfare. The dominion mandate (Gen. 1:26-28) called for such an exercise of man’s efforts to turn this earth into God’s Kingdom. In waging war against other men, for men to destroy the fruits of dominion by anyone was to wage war against God’s law, and therefore against God.

² Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 5, *Deuteronomy*, trans. Isaac Levy, 2nd ed. rev. (Gateshead, London, England: Judaica Press, [1966] 1982), 395.

Chapter Sixty-Three

Unsolved Murder (Deuteronomy 21:1-9)

1. If one be found slain in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it, lying in the field, and it be not known who hath slain him:
2. Then thy elders and thy judges shall come forth, and they shall measure unto the cities which are round about him that is slain:
3. And it shall be, that the city which is next unto the slain man, even the elders of that city shall take an heifer, which hath not been wrought with, and which hath not drawn in the yoke;
4. And the elders of that city shall bring down the heifer unto a rough valley, which is neither eared nor sown, and shall strike off the heifer's neck there in the valley:
5. And the priests the sons of Levi shall come near; for them the LORD thy God hath chosen to minister unto him, and to bless in the name of the LORD; and by their word shall every controversy and every stroke be tried:
6. And all the elders of that city, that are next unto the slain man, shall wash their hands over the heifer that is beheaded in the valley:
7. And they shall answer and say, Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it.
8. Be merciful, O LORD, unto thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel's charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them.
9. So shalt thou put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you, when thou shalt do that which is right in the sight of the LORD. (Deuteronomy 21:1-9)

This is a very important law because it makes clear God's requirement that justice prevail, and that every crime be atoned for. The law concerns the discovery of a murdered man; the body is found outside a city. There must then be a jurisdiction established. Which city is closest to the body? If there is any doubt, the distance must be measured. No crime can go without resolution, and, with murder, the rite requires that a heifer be killed to indicate their efforts to locate and execute the murderer. The heifer dies in the stead of the killer, the innocent for the guilty. This points to Christ's atoning death. It also tells us that unsolved crimes punish the innocent.

There were apparently a few chosen spots for this ritual. It was to take place in some small valley or draw which was neither planted

nor plowed. "A rough valley" is a better rendered "a valley with running water." There was to be running water. The heifer had to be one neither bred nor yoked for work. Involved in the ritual were both the local elders or aldermen, and the priests. Unsolved crimes must be a matter of concern to both church and state, because they indicate at the least a hiatus or a break in the operation of justice. Failures in the justice system are an indictment of both church and state. They mean that evil is out of control, that justice is faltering or failing. Thus, neither civil nor religious leaders can overlook the fact of unsolved *and* unpunished crimes. The ritual requires them to acknowledge the crime but disavow their part in it. This can only be done by this ritual. No unsolved murder can be bypassed. While the priests and elders declare themselves innocent of the actual murder, by this ritual they also acknowledge their responsibility to keep their community faithful and obedient to God's law-word.

In v.6 the elders must wash their hands to declare their innocence. This is the ritual which Pilate, who knew at least this item of God's law, used to declare himself innocent of Christ's blood (Matt. 27:24). He misused the law since he signed the death warrant. We have references to this ritual washing of hands to declare innocence in Psalm 26:6 and Psalm 73:13.

The premise of this law is that the whole community is involved in blood-guiltiness where an unsolved murder occurs, unless there is an awareness by church and state of how serious the problem is, and that God's requirements must be met. There is no past, dead, and meaningless history in God's sight. Men may forget the varieties of crimes and murders committed ten years ago, but God does not forget. It is His law and justice that have been violated, and He will in His own way exact His vengeance. *The past can be forgotten by men but never by God.*

The judges apparently took part together with the elders and priests, but their part was singly to determine which city had jurisdiction. It is interesting to note that, even though the body of the victim were found just outside a city, and miles from any other, in Judea it became mandatory to measure the distances.¹

David F. Payne very ably summarized the four basic elements of this rite. *First*, the whole community, represented in its elders and

¹ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 5, *Deuteronomy*, trans. Isaac Levy, 2nd ed. rev. (London, England: Judaica Press, [1966] 1982), 398.

Levites, acknowledged responsibility. They were not the criminal but they were the justice community. By an oath, personal responsibility was disavowed, and the outlaw or murderer condemned.

Second, by the death of the heifer they declared that a murderer must die. His life must pay for his crime, for the life taken. Even where the murderer is unknown, a life must be taken, blood must be shed. This ritual did not prevent the execution of the murderer if he should later be known and caught.

Third, by the use of water, innocence was affirmed. Innocence must mark a community, whereas blood-guiltiness condemns them in God's sight if no atonement for the crime takes place.

Fourth, because men cannot bring about perfect justice, they must recognize God as the source of all justice and invoke His mercy to keep the community from degeneration. In 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 Paul asks the Corinthian church to deal with offenders as God requires and thereby meet God's requirement of justice.² Morecraft commented:

The entire community has a responsibility when crimes are committed or injustice done. A community cannot be indifferent to any sin, crime or injustice in its midst, or else it bears the guilt as well as the offender and is under judgment. When a community shuts its eyes to any evil in its midst and refuses to deal with it justly and in accordance with God's law, then the whole community is under God's condemnation.³

Forms of this law existed until this century. In Britain, a fine was levied on the district in which an unsolved crime of murder occurred.⁴ Unsolved murders were seen as a national reproach.

In v. 8, we have a prayer for mercy for all Israel. Not only the district where the crime took place but all the country must view an unsolved murder as a burden of guilt until atonement is made. In Judges 19 and 20, we have an account of the rape-killing of a Levite's concubine (a wife without a dowry). Although it was an evil era, all the other tribes or clans reacted by declaring war on Benjamin when

² David F. Payne, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985), 121.

³ Joseph C. Morecraft III, *A Christian Manual of Law: An Application of Deuteronomy* (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Christian Training Center, n.d.), 63.

⁴ C. H. Waller, "Deuteronomy," in C. J. Ellicott, ed., *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, reprint, n.d.), 58.

that tribe refused to surrender the guilty men. This incident reflects this law.

Unpunished murder makes a land unclean. A moral dereliction in all is charged to their account. Unless the people protest such a lawlessness, unless they appeal to God for justice, all are guilty in God's sight.

This ritual is *not* performed by either the Levites or the priests. It is the duty of the city elders, because the law of God must be of concern to the civil authorities as well as to the clergy. Action had to be taken where crimes were unsolved. This rite did not end the investigation into the murder: it simply established the necessity for justice as a social fact. Without justice, no society can endure indefinitely. Guilt does not go away. It must be removed by expiation, either by the execution of the killer, or by this substitutionary death of the heifer. The city elders could not postpone this rite to the end of the year and then have one ceremony for all unsolved murders. This would cheapen the meaning of individual life. *Every* unsolved murder pollutes the land, according to Numbers 35:33.

Murder is a crime against God and His law. It destroys God's image bearer. In very ancient Greece, murder was a crime against the family. God declares it to be against Him and His law.⁵

God requires full and perfect justice, in eternity, if not in time. There is no hiding place from God. Our Lord says, "every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:36). God renders not partial but full and perfect justice. His grace and mercy do not nullify His law and justice. The cross is witness to that.

⁵ J. H. Hertz, ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, (London, England: Soncino Press, [1936] 1960), 834.

Chapter Sixty-Four

War and Women

(Deuteronomy 21:10-14)

10. When thou goest forth to war against thine enemies, and the LORD thy God hath delivered them into thine hands, and thou hast taken them captive,

11. And seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and hast a desire unto her, that thou wouldest have her to thy wife;

12. Then thou shalt bring her home to thine house; and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails;

13. And she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and shall remain in thine house, and bewail her father and her mother a full month: and after that thou shalt go in unto her, and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife.

14. And it shall be, if thou have no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go whither she will; but thou shalt not sell her at all for money, thou shalt not make merchandise of her, because thou hast humbled her. (Deuteronomy 21:10-14)

This is both a law of marriage *and* of war. Its purpose is to bring moral order to the brutality of warfare. In this century, the treatment of women during war, and in the aftermath, is a grim story of barbarism. This law is designed to prevent the misuse of captive or enemy women.

It must be noted that the captive girl who is desired cannot be raped, nor can she be made a concubine, i.e., a wife without a dowry. She is *deliberately* called a *wife* and must be treated as such. It is her standing under law.

No Canaanite women could be married (Deut. 7:2). The law deals with non-Canaanites. The captive woman either trimmed her hair, or shaved her head, according to some, to indicate her changed status. Paring her nails was ritual of purification as was cutting the hair.

She could *not* be treated as a concubine nor as a slave. If, either during the month prior to marriage or at some point after, the man decided not to marry, or decided to divorce her, he had to treat her honorably. Ancient Hebrew law forbade divorcing her when she was ill. She was not to be sent away empty-handed. The protection given to the captive girl was thus a deterrent to rash decisions, before and after she was taken captive. The law prevented her use merely for sexual purposes. She was to be seen as a *wife* from start to finish. The relationship had to be a legal one. As Hoppe noted, on divorce, “she

does not revert to her former status but is given the freedom due to any Israelite woman.”¹

This law makes it clear that the “purity” of Hebrew blood was *not* a factor. Moreover, whereas in modern Jewish practice, the woman, the mother, determines whether or not the child is Jewish, in Hebrew practice the child’s status was determined by the father. Here as elsewhere there is often a gap between biblical law and modern Jewish practice.

If the husband rejected the captive woman, he had to send her “whither she will” (v. 14). The determination rested with her. If there were children, loss of them would be a deterrent to the husband. Her freedom is insisted on by this law, and this was a check on arbitrariness by the man.

The Bible recognizes only one kind of lawful sexuality, within marriage. As Erdman noted, “The regulation was designed to allow no other form of union other than that of lawful marriage.”²

With marriage, the captive girl ceased to be a captive and became a wife in the covenant community. As Morecraft noted,

This law limits a person in authority, i.e., the head of the house, in his authority over his wife. Because men are sinners, God gives laws to govern and to limit and to guide him in his use of authority, lest he abuse it as a tyrant. Here we are taught that a husband is not to treat his wife as a slave, or a “thing” to be used and discarded at will, disregarding her personality, character, personhood, and welfare. His headship is to be a loving headship.³

The children went with the innocent party in a divorce. The captive girl made wife “had all the rights” of every covenant woman and the same standing in the law.⁴ The usual practice among other peoples of antiquity and more recently has been to regard all captive women either as slaves or as nonpersons with no standing before the law.

John Gill’s studies of Hebrew texts indicated that the captive woman could be a widow or a virgin. The month’s delay thus was

¹ Leslie J. Hoppe, O.F.M., *Deuteronomy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1985), 66.

² Charles R. Erdman, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1953), 62.

³ Joseph C. Morecraft III, *A Christian Manual of Law: An Application of Deuteronomy* (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Christian Training Center, n.d.), 64.

⁴ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 5, *Deuteronomy*, trans. Isaac Levy, 2nd ed. rev. (London, England: Judaica Press, [1966] 1982), 409.

also to give time for her instruction in and conversion to the faith.⁵ The month's delay would also give time to determine whether or not the woman was already pregnant.

Calvin saw this law as "a toleration" on God's part as well as a regulation.⁶

A very important aspect of this law is in the concluding words to the husband requiring that the captive woman made a wife had to be treated as any Hebrew woman. The law states that the reason for this is "because thou hast humbled her" (v. 14). This is a term normally reserved for cases of rape and seduction. The capture of a woman, and then marriage to her, meant that she had to be treated well precisely because she was a captive woman originally.

In Exodus 22:16-17, the seduced girl had to be given a dowry even if the father of the girl rejected the seducer as her husband. The term "humbled her" is used in Deuteronomy 22:24 for a case of adultery. In Deuteronomy 22:28-29 it applies also to cases of seduction, and no divorce is allowed. At the very least, in all cases where the term is used, the law militates against the man. Marriage normally is not to begin with a "humbling" of the woman, and the man is penalized in all such cases. G. Ernest Wright observed, "there is no exact parallel to the law; its thoughtful forbearance and consideration contrast with the cruelty one otherwise associates with war."⁷

Shaving or trimming the hair, and paring the nails, was at times a sign of mourning. It was, however, also a ritual signifying conversion from one religion to another.⁸ Many rabbinic commentators assumed that the month's delay provided time for instruction. A captive woman would logically be receptive to it because it would enhance her status. Moreover, religious affiliations among pagans were not personal decisions; they were aspects of membership in a particular family, clan, and city-state. Given this fact, conversion could both be easy and superficial, although in the marriage of Ruth, a non-captive girl, it was a profound and intense faith.

⁵ John Gill, *Gill's Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, [1852-1854] 1980), 766.

⁶ John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth Trust, [1583] 1987), 742.

⁷ G. Ernest Wright, "Deuteronomy," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1957), 461.

⁸ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary... on the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982 reprint), 670.

Rules of warfare have never had much success, least of all in times such as ours and the Renaissance, times of little or no faith. A people's words mean little without God's authority behind them.

There is another aspect to this law that must be noted. It stipulates marriage, not promiscuity, where enemy women are concerned. The Bible, very plain spoken, tells us of the rapes of Hebrew women by foreign armies. At the same time, while unsparing of Hebrew sins, it does not record like offenses by Hebrew soldiers. Laws with respect to the treatment of women were too often capital offenses. For this reason, even the very militant modernist commentators discuss this law with respect.

Modern readers are troubled by the possibility of polygamy. Leviticus 18:18 properly translated can mean, "Neither shalt thou take one wife to another...." Polygamy is forbidden by God's law but still regulated. Its actual incidence was low; only the very wealthy could afford it. The law limits sexuality to marriage and, while regarding polygamy as wrong, still sees marriage as a condition to be vastly preferred to promiscuity. Leviticus 18:18 has no penalty for polygamy; perhaps polygamy is its own punishment.

Chapter Sixty-Five
Inheritance
(Deuteronomy 21:15-17)

15. If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated:

16. Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn:

17. But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.
(Deuteronomy 21:15-17)

This is a part of the laws of inheritance. Some believe its presence here is due to the preceding law, Deuteronomy 21:10-14, with respect to captive women. It assumes possibly that the man's bad conscience might lead him to hate that woman and her son.

This law assumes the existence of polygamy. This is forbidden in Leviticus 18:18, but God's law controls even that which it forbids because it recognizes that men are sinners. The reverse attitude was that of the Soviet Union, which viewed prostitution as a product only of capitalism and therefore nonexistent in a socialist country, even though widespread. God's law deals realistically with mankind. Practically, in any society, only a *very* small minority have ever been able to afford two wives, let alone more than that.

If there are two sons, one by each of the wives, *and both are godly*, the older of the two, if the son of the hated or less liked wife, cannot be set aside. He must receive a double portion, so that, with two sons, the elder receives two-thirds of the estate plus the care of the elderly, and the other son receives one-third.

In vv. 18-23, we are told that it is the parental *duty* to denounce an evil son, an habitual offender, to the authorities. This is not only a form of disinheritance but also a step towards execution. Personal preference could not be determinative, whether in inheritance or in surrender of a delinquent son to the authorities. Faith takes priority over blood.

The words in v. 15, “beloved” and “hated,” are sharp to indicate greater or lesser feelings of preference. God’s law *must* take priority over personal feelings.

This law is important in the context of history, in that, whether in Europe or Asia, the exaltation of personal preferences over any law led to a long history of bitter and murderous struggles over succession. However, the later decision in Europe to be governed *strictly* by primogeniture meant that crowns well deserving of good men went to evil or mentally defective elder sons. God’s law requires character in the heir while protecting an orderly succession.

Morecraft has given an able summary of the major references to inheritance. *First*, as Paul sums it up in 2 Corinthians 12:14, it is a parental duty to provide an inheritance for one’s children when possible. *Second*, parents are forbidden to set aside a godly oldest son (Deut. 21:15-17). *Third*, they are forbidden to favor an ungodly son (Deut. 21:18-21). *Fourth*, where there are no sons, or no godly sons, the inheritance goes to the daughters (Num. 27:1-11). Normally, the dowry provided by the husband was a form of inheritance for the daughter. *Fifth*, where there was no son nor daughter, the next of kin could inherit (Num. 27:9-11). *Sixth*, the son of a concubine, a wife without a dowry, could inherit (Gen. 21:10; 25:1-6). *Seventh*, a maid *could* be her mistress’s heir, but this was disapproved of (Prov. 30:23). *Eighth*, a slave could inherit (Gen. 15:1-4). *Ninth*, inheritance could not be transferred from one clan to another (Num. 36:1-12). *Tenth*, rulers or princes could give land to their sons, but not permanently to servants (Ezek. 46:16-17). *Eleventh*, the state cannot seize nor confiscate the properties of the people (Ezek. 46:18).¹

The words in v. 17, “he shall acknowledge the son,” are a technical legal term.² To prevent the abuse of this law, at some point in Hebrew history it was forbidden to a father to dispose of his assets before his death to circumvent this law.

The premise is that God’s purpose outweighs ours. God wants the future of His Kingdom to be capitalized by His people. To violate this law by favoring an ungodly son, or setting aside God’s purpose for a private one, is a sin. It decapitalizes God’s Kingdom.

¹ Joseph C. Morecraft III, *A Christian Manual of Law: An Application of Deuteronomy* (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Christian Training Center, n.d.), 64-65.

² A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, [1979] 1981), 304.

Displacement of an heir on religious grounds has a long history in the Bible. Esau was set aside in favor of Jacob, and Adonijah in favor of Solomon. Esau's line, the line of Herod (Acts 12:21-23), claimed to be the Messianic line, but God had ruled otherwise. In Esau's case, he was favored by his father, but not by God.

Thomas Scott rightly pointed out that this law is not restricted to the sons of two wives, nor even of two wives who succeed one another. It is valid wherever two sons, or more than two, are in a family.³ The purpose of the law is to prevent discrimination on personal grounds against the godly older son.

Modern commentators come to this text sometimes blinded by the reference to "two wives" (v. 15). The basic concern is the family under God. This law safeguards the godly heir: he cannot be set aside on arbitrary grounds. If the son is faithful to God, the father must be faithful to him. God's law is the standard, not personal feelings.

On the other hand, as vv. 18-21 make clear, an ungodly delinquent son has no standing whatsoever. As an incorrigible criminal, he must be denounced to the authorities by his own parents, tried, and, if found guilty, he must be executed.

The family in the Bible is clearly God's basic institution, but the family is not its own end. Its purpose must transcend itself; it must serve God, not itself.

Paganism worshipped gods who at best were irresponsible, if not evil. Homosexuality in the Greek religion existed in Olympus among the gods, as witness Ganymede, the cupbearer to the gods. A Greek vase in the Louvre shows Zeus pursuing Ganymede.⁴ His kidnapping by Zeus is given to us in flowery language.⁵ Many scholars who speak of Scripture with scorn write with loving words of the sodomite gods.

In the present century, the abolition of all inheritance has become a social goal, one widely approved by intellectuals of the left. This has led to a marked hostility to the Bible and its stress on a theologically governed doctrine of the family and inheritance.

³. Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible, ...with Explanatory Notes, etc.*, vol. 1 (Boston, MA: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1830 ed.), 571.

⁴. *Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* (New York, NY: Prometheus Press, 1959-1960), 105.

⁵. *Ibid.*, 158.

Since the Enlightenment, the societal emphasis has been shifted from the family to property. John Locke had an important part in this. This shift, however, by stressing property rather than the family, has been conducive to moving family property into the hands of the state. The slighting of the family which began with Locke has led to a belief in the incompetence of family ownership in favor of state ownership.

This revolution has gone hand in hand with the sexual revolution. The old revolutionary slogan before World War I was, "True love in a free state," meaning an anarchistic or a Marxist state.

It is not surprising that this text is seen as a relic of a "primitive" past. Many commentators pass over it with a few words which treat this law as a curiosity. It is, on the contrary, a very relevant law. Inheritance is basic to any man's view of the future. A future-oriented people always recognize the importance of inheritance, and the *necessity* for a religious perspective on the subject.

A present-oriented society prefers to use the potential inheritance of the next generation on present and short-term activities. Our failure to consider the religious dimension of inheritance is a case of willful unconcern.

As we have seen, this law is routinely assumed to refer to a polygamous situation. Such an interpretation is a possible one, but by no means the only one. We can grant, *first*, that the law covers the problem of heirship in a polygamous union. *Second*, this law can and does cover cases of successive marriages by a widower. In a marriage of the 1870s, in the United States, both the husband and the wife had lost their spouse by death; they came into the union, each with children, and then had a child together. All were godly children. The mother's children had some inheritance by her deceased husband. The father's preference was for the son by the second marriage, but his firstborn son was a fine young man whom he could not with justice set aside. This and like cases are covered by this law. Then, *third*, divorces nowadays complicate the picture. Many a divorce is followed by a migration to another part of the country. Some children of a second marriage have not met their older half brothers and half sisters. Such cases are definitely covered by this law.

Then, *fourth*, there is still another factor. Which heir is the godly seed, most deserving of a double portion, and best suited to caring for the elderly mother or both the aged parents? In terms of the criterion

of faith and character, Ishmael was passed over in favor of Isaac; Jacob was given preference over Esau, and Reuben, the eldest, was replaced by Judah.

Fifth, this law places the focus not on the mother but on the son. The father may, with good reason, hate the one wife, late wife, or ex-wife, but the important thing is not the woman but the son. The laws of inheritance are designed to compel us to view the future under God. The godly man must seek to capitalize the future. The common bumper sticker of the 1970s and 1980s, "We are spending our children's inheritance," is disgusting. It is the mask of an existentialist and a barbarian, someone with no sense of the future under God nor any love for his posterity. Such an attitude saturates every sphere of life. Our politics is dedicated to spending our children's future. We are not a nameless people. According to Genesis 2:19, even the naming or identification and classification of animals is important in God's sight. Our modern politics strips a country's wealth and inheritance for existentialist purposes and robs our children of a future.

Chapter Sixty-Six
Habitual Criminals: A Defiled Earth
(*Deuteronomy 21:18-23*)

18. If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them:

19. Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place;

20. And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard.

21. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear.

22. And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree:

23. His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

(*Deuteronomy 21:18-23*)

The law of vv. 18-21 is basic to what was once the law in the United States, namely, the execution of incorrigible criminals. After the third or fourth offense, depending on the state, the criminal was declared to be a habitual offender and was executed. By this means, a criminal class was severely limited. This was still the law in many states through the 1960s. Abandonment of this law led to a great proliferation of crime by habitual criminals and a large criminal class.

Crime is a form of warfare against a society. The law-abiding citizenry becomes the target of assault by the criminal element: thefts, rapes, murder, and a general contempt for the people mask the criminal mind.

The humanist sees the criminal as misguided, or as a victim of society, whereas the criminal sees society and its peoples as his victims. Failure to recognize the reality of sin and evil leads to the inability to assess reality for what it is.

The habitual criminal justifies his behavior. He insists that all of life is amoral, that business is a form of theft, and that he is more honest than most men because he lives without hypocrisy, supposedly.

Prison is for him an occupational hazard, and he often takes it lightly. *To view the criminal as a victim is to reverse the moral order.*

It is true enough that the criminal has a very low level of literacy in our time; what this means is that he rebelled against studying very early and favored instead lawless activities. Crime, however, is not limited to the functionally illiterate. It is prevalent in high places, although often unpunished.

This law, however, is not only about habitual criminals; it is also about the family. *Not blood but faith must be the determining factor.* The family, having the fullest knowledge, under normal circumstances, of a son's criminality, has the moral obligation to report him to the authorities. He is a *stubborn* son; in the Hebrew, the word *sarar*, translated by Robert Young as *apostasizing*, can mean also refractory and a revolter, one who is, in modern terms, antisocial in life and deeds. *Rebellious* is *marah*, which we have in the name *Mary*, which means bitter, to rebel, to provoke, to resist.

Then the word *glutton* is applied to him; this is the Hebrew *zalal*, morally loose, worthless, riotous, or vile. The English Revised Version rendered it as "riotous liver."

Those who hate this text insist on calling the *son* a child, or a baby, and of accusing Scripture of demanding that little children be executed. The text is clear that the son is an adult who is in total war against society in word, thought, and deed. He resists radically any attempt by the family to control him.

The parents have the duty to take the lead in the son's arrest and prosecution. A choice is required of them. The son may be living elsewhere, but their status as parents requires them to choose God's justice against the family's solidarity. If the family, God's basic institution, does not favor justice over blood, neither church nor state is likely to be strong.

This means that *lesser* steps must have preceded this radical step. The parents had the duty, where and when possible, earlier, to rebuke and chastise their child. In some instances, it could mean requiring the son to leave the family's home if the rebelliousness continued. The law simply summarizes all this. In following these steps, the parents make it clear that their loyalty is to God's future, not to a wayward family member.

Roman law gave fathers an arbitrary and lawless power over their children; in many ancient cultures, children could be sold into

slavery by the parents. This law severely limits parental power to the limits of God's law. The restriction is that of justice.

The parental duty to initiate the legal proceedings could come after some criminal offense. Even if the son were apprehended by civil authorities, the parental duty to file the charges remained. This established the *religious* dimension of the family and its importance to the justice system.

At present, the family has no such place. The state, by insisting on the girl's "right" to an abortion without parental knowledge, places the family *outside* the legal system and irrelevant to it at key points.

Modern scholars seem willfully to misunderstand this law. David F. Payne, for example, writes, "In a peasant economy, few households could possibly afford such a son; hence the very severe penalty, which was no doubt meant as a warning, not as an inflexible or frequently applied ruling."¹ No society can afford habitual criminals in its midst. In fact, perhaps the more complex the society, the greater the potential destruction.

In v. 21 we read that *all the men* of the community had to participate in the execution. They thereby affirmed *the primacy of justice over the family*. Their part in the act meant that they upheld God's law as binding even where the closest ties existed.

C. Clemance held that a bad son is a state peril.² This is true, certainly, but he is also a religious peril and a family one.

In vv. 22-23, we have a law against the public display of executed persons. Even into the nineteenth centuries in some European countries, executed persons were displayed in public places. In many instances, the bodies would remain until they disintegrated. This was done in the belief that such an exhibition of bodies would restrain other criminals and traitors.

This is strictly forbidden in God's law. No matter what the crime, at sundown the body had to be taken away for burial. The reasons for this are very important. *First*, as Sforno rendered the clause in v. 23, "For he that is hung is a reproach to (the image) of God."³ The Jewish Publication Society of America, in its translation of the Masoretic

¹ David F. Payne, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985), 123-24.

² C. Clemance, in H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 342.

³ Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz, trans./ed., *Sforno: Commentary on the Torah*, vol. 2 (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1989), 821.

text, in the 1961 edition, renders it, “he that is hanged is a reproach unto God.” Even though the criminal is a depraved and evil man, he bears God’s image, and it is *offensive* to God to have His image-bearer treated with contempt. Justice, yes; but not contempt.

Second, to treat the human being or his body with contempt is to *defile* the land. The land is an inheritance from God. Both unsolved murders and contemptuous treatments of the human body *defile* the land. The Hebrew word for *defiled* is *tamé*; it means contaminated, polluted, or unclean. Deuteronomy 28:15-68 tells us of the curses God brings on a defiled and unrepentant land. God as the landlord evicts those who defile His earth.

Chapter Sixty-Seven

Holy Order (Deuteronomy 22:1-4)

1. Thou shalt not see thy brother's ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt in any case bring them again unto thy brother.
2. And if thy brother be not nigh unto thee, or if thou know him not, then thou shalt bring it unto thine own house, and it shall be with thee until thy brother seek after it, and thou shalt restore it to him again.
3. In like manner shalt thou do with his ass; and so shalt thou do with his raiment; and with all lost things of thy brother's, which he hath lost, and thou hast found, shalt thou do likewise: thou mayest not hide thyself.
4. Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again. (Deuteronomy 22:1-4)

To understand this text, we must recognize that our "brother" mentioned here is anyone, whether we know him or not, i.e., our fellow man. In v. 2, this is clear when we are told that the person who has lost something is our *brother*, "if thou know him not."

This text deals with our responsibility to our fellow men, to our neighbor or *brother*. It uses examples of a simple sort, ones common to my childhood and youth. From time to time, farm animals would escape and wander off. If they were recognized, they were returned to their owner. If not, they were held, and word was passed around that a wandering animal was being held for its owner.

This law obviously concerns *the restoration of lost property*. It refers to any kind of property. Animals are cited, but also lost garments. It refers to any property holder, friend or foe, and we are morally obligated to help. This law is related to Exodus 23:4-5:

4. If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again.
5. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him.

The practical result of such help will be to heal animosity and bring people together.

It is worth noting that a fallen animal, which must be helped up, was not of necessity overloaded. When roads were dirt paths, men and animals easily slipped and fell. A loaded animal could not get up readily without help. The alternative was to unload him, help him up, and then reload him, a slow process.

There is another matter here, *property*. Whether a garment or an ox, the lost item was someone's property. The eighth commandment says, "Thou shalt not steal" (Ex. 20:15). Simple theft means taking that which belongs to another. There are many other ways of depriving people of their properties, such as by taxation, but an indirect means is to refuse neighborly watchfulness. To see a neighbor's ox, cow, or horse go astray and do nothing means that the stray animal may be injured or stolen. This is a form of theft. To see his property unprotected because it has been mislaid or in some other way lost, and to do nothing, is to help in its theft.

Biblical laws respecting property are many. In this life, property is closely tied to our existence, to our calling, and to our freedom. All these things are endangered or at least limited when our property is lost, destroyed, or stolen. We are thus required to treat every man as our brother where his person *and* property are concerned. This is a necessary aspect of social order.

We see in Leviticus 6:1-7 that failure to restore a lost article is declared to be theft. The item must be restored, plus a fine of one-fifth of the value.

The expression in v. 1, not to "hide thyself," has been rendered by the Revised Standard Version as "withhold your help."

The ancient understanding of this law has been that no reward was to be received for restoring the stray or lost property to its owner. To perform a neighborly moral duty is not to be seen as rendering a payable service. We are *commanded* by God not to withhold our help. There is another aspect to this law. In v. 1, "go astray" is literally, as C. H. Waller pointed out, "being driven away." This could be by a wild animal or by a thief.¹

There is an issue here which modern law has not fully come to terms with, some court decisions favoring one side, and some the other. H. B. Clark wrote,

¹ C. H. Waller, in "Deuteronomy," in C. J. Ellicott, ed., *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.), 60.

176a. The doctrines of Biblical law are not altogether satisfied when one merely refrains from injuring his neighbor, for the law “requires the doing of good at all times.” And so, while one should not consider himself as his “brother’s keeper” and thus perhaps cause himself to be hated, he should doubtless help his neighbor, as well as his beast of burden, when the neighbor calls for help or when it is seen that he is in distress or is about to suffer injury, and one can give assistance without serious inconvenience or injury to himself. Such a duty would seem to be implicit in the Golden Rule and in the commandment of Jesus to a “certain lawyer” that he “go and do” as did the good Samaritan. But difficulty arises when it is sought to assess the liability of one who, like the “certain priest” and the Levite, passes by “on the other side,” for as the law awards no material compensation to the Samaritan so it seemingly imposes no penalty upon one who fails to do right by his neighbour as a good man.

The secular law imposes no duty to become a good Samaritan and prevent injury to others; it is said that

“A bystander may watch a blind man or a child walk over a precipice, and yet he is not required to give warning. He may stand on the bank of a stream and see a man drowning and although he holds in his hand a rope that could be used to rescue the man, yet he is not required to give assistance. He may owe a moral duty to warn the blind man or to assist the drowning man, but being a mere bystander, and in nowise responsible for the dangerous situation, he owes no legal duty to render assistance.” *Buchanan v Rose* (1942) 138 Tex. 390, 159 SW2nd 109,110 (Alexander, CJ)²

In recent years, doctors have found that rendering emergency medical aid as a good Samaritan can be legally dangerous. As a result, we have created an irresponsible society because the courts have been receptive to immoral lawsuits.

These verses indicate a double-edged aspect of the law of God with respect to our neighbor. *First*, we must love our neighbor; we must do him no evil, and we must see our enemies as included in this just treatment (Lev. 19:13, 18, 33-34). *Second*, not only must we do him no harm, but we must not hide ourselves or withhold our help when need arises, as this law indicates.³

² H. B. Clark, *Biblical Law* (Portland, OR: Binford & Mort, [1943] 1944), 120-21, par. 176a.

³ David F. Payne, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985), 126.

We come now to another aspect of this law which was once basic to our law and still is there to a degree. Ownership does not cease when our property is lost or stolen. We alone can transfer ownership of our property, according to this law. In some areas, as with respect to title to ownership of an automobile, our civil and criminal laws are reasonably protective of our ownership. In other spheres, without any crime on our part, the state can and does seize properties. In so doing, the state becomes a thief in the sight of God.

In v. 1, the expression “hide thyself” is a very literal translation of the Hebrew. Peter C. Craigie’s comment is superb:

Unlike Babylonian law, it [this law] is not concerned primarily with a criminal act such as the illegal appropriation of lost property; rather, it deals with shouldering responsibility as a member of the covenant community. A man was not to “hide himself” from responsibility, or to take no notice of the happenings around him that required some positive action of his part.⁴

Here we have an essential aspect of God’s law. Instead of a “finders-keepers” attitude, the law demands responsibility on our part *for God’s order*. Its *primary* concern is not our neighbor’s property, important as that may be, nor our own character, but rather our responsibility to God to establish and further His order. God’s ordering of life as set forth in His law is a *holy* order, and we are responsible for the maintenance and extension of that order.

As some have said, neighborly kindness is certainly required by this law, but its purpose is above all the development of a responsibility to God, and in God, to our fellow men. Its purpose is a *just and holy order*.

Calvin saw this law as the positive counterpart to the prohibition of theft. The law requires preventing loss to our neighbor by the loss of his property in the manner the law describes, for it is “abominable to God” for us to refuse to be a good neighbor to our fellow men:

Therefore let us mark well, this law in forbidding theft hath also bound us all to procure the welfare and profit one of another. And indeed it is a rule to be observed of us in all cases, that God in forbidding any evil, doth therewith command us to do the good that is contrary to it. Thou shalt not steal, sayeth he. And why? For he that doeth his neighbor any hurt or harm, is abominable before God. Then is it to be concluded,

⁴ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 287.

that as I would have mine own goods preferred, so must I be chary of other men's also, and every man must do the like on his own behalf.⁵

There is no penalty attached to these laws of vv. 1-4; the penalty comes from God in the form of anarchy and disorder. However, because of its closeness to other laws carrying a penalty, there could be punishment in terms of a related law.

This law was the background and basis of one of the best known parables of our Lord, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). He related its meaning to the love of God and the love of our neighbor. Whereas the law of Deuteronomy 22:1-4 refers to *property*, our Lord applies it to the case of a man, a victim, in order to make more clear the meaning of a disregard for God's law order.

⁵. John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth Trust, [1583] 1987), 767.

Chapter Sixty-Eight

God's Order

(Deuteronomy 22:5-12)

5. The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God.

6. If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground, whether they be young ones, or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young:

7. But thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, and take the young to thee; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days.

8. When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence.

9. Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, be defiled.

10. Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together.

11. Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woollen and linen together.

12. Thou shalt make thee fringes upon the four quarters of thy vesture, wherewith thou coverest thyself.

(Deuteronomy 22:5-12)

There are seven laws in these eight verses, and there is an inner unity to them.

The *first* law, in v. 5, prohibits cross-dressing at the very least, and this is declared as "abomination unto the Lord." Where the word "abomination" is used, we know that we are on serious grounds. This law can mean a) that transvestite dressing is barred, whatever the reason for it; b) that some pagan cults, celebrating chaos, required cross-dressing and perverse sexual acts as a part of worship, and God's people are not to imitate them in any way; c) and that not only cross-dressing but also engaging in work that properly belongs to the other sex is forbidden. (It was long ago seen as barring combatant war roles to women); d) the law of v. 5 means all these things and more. God has created us male and female, and we must honor the God-ordained distinction. This was an anti-Canaanite law, among other things, because Canaanite practice was hostile to the distinctive places of men and women. This view marked Rome in its

degeneracy, and more than one emperor tried to obliterate the sexual distinction in his own life. Ritual emasculation was one way among many of denying the clear-cut sexual distinctiveness of male and female.

The expression in v. 5, “that which pertaineth,” or, *anything* that pertains to a man or a woman means clothing, weapons, utensils, and tools. Then and now, transvestism is associated with homosexuality, and it has always had anti-biblical religious connotations.

Verses 1-4 set forth the God-declared fact of property as His ordination. Now, in v. 5, we see that our sexuality is a property that we must not attempt to divest ourselves of, for to do so is an abomination in God’s sight. It is filthy behavior.

The *second* law, vv. 6-7, concerns birds. In antiquity, and in many areas to this day, birds have been an important part of life. For two decades after World War II in some parts of Western Europe, even sparrows were routinely trapped for food by the poor, according to one American soldier’s wife. We have here a law governing such hunting, and any use of birds. The assumption of the law is that these are clean birds. The destruction of the species is in effect forbidden. The mother bird must be allowed to live, to conserve the species. There is a promise for obedience to this law, “that thou mayest prolong thy days” (v. 7). This is, of course, the same promise attached to the fifth commandment: “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee” (Ex 20:12). We honor God, the Creator of all life, when we honor the immediate sources of life. This is a God-required duty. Parents who make it difficult for their children to honor them thus bear an especial guilt, as do children who will not honor their parents.

In Deuteronomy 20:19-20, fruit trees are protected from wartime destruction. Here, mother birds are protected. A curious fact is that these laws, and others like them, are used to give Deuteronomy a date almost a thousand years after Moses by modernist critics. Their reasoning is that these laws are, like these scholars, “enlightened” ones, and therefore they had to come after mankind had grown out of some of its superstitions.

Some have seen this law as protective of fertility. However, the fertility protected is that of clean birds.

The *third* law (v. 8) refers to the flat-roofed houses of the time. In warm weather, a great deal of evening activity, dining, entertaining,

and even sleeping, took place on the rooftop. The law requires a railing around the roof to prevent anyone from falling off and injuring themselves, or being killed.

There is a similar law in Exodus 21:33-34. If a man made an excavation, in the process of some kind of construction, and the excavation was where a neighbor's livestock could fall in, he was liable for damages. The excavation had to be covered or fenced in. This law is still widely used, especially in urban construction of large commercial buildings. Failure to build a balustrade left one open to blood-guiltiness in case of an accident.

In our times, we have substituted a variety of codes and regulations for this law, and building restrictions and licenses. God's law eliminates all this because it makes clear the serious liabilities for failure to comply. At least a manslaughter, if not a murder charge, depending on the circumstances, was incentive enough for sound building practices. God's law does not create a bureaucracy. It establishes a liability which gives men the incentive to comply.

The *fourth* law forbids sowing one's vineyard with divers seeds; such mixed sowing will *defile* the field. This can occur a) by bringing together plants that will crossbreed to the detriment of both. Gardeners learn in time to keep certain plants apart; and b) certain fruit trees and vines find their strength sapped by certain kinds of plantings.

The temptation to do this comes when an orchard or vineyard is newly planted. This means there will be no harvest for a few years. In order to have some income from the farm, the owner may plant between the rows certain vegetable crops. Some of these can and do harm or devitalize the vines or trees.

The first law bans cross-dressing; this law bans cross-planting, as it were. Both require us to see the integrity of God's creating purpose. Their relationship is obvious. The laws concerning birds and battlements or balustrades protect life. We must recognize the integrity of God's creation. These are thus not merely miscellaneous laws but related ones. The fifth and sixth laws again stress the integrity and separateness of God's creative designs.

The *fifth* law (v. 10) forbids plowing with an ox and an ass together. There are differences of strength and kind between these two. Moreover, the ox is a clean animal, and the donkey is not. There is an obvious injustice to both animals in trying to work them together.

Verses 9-11 give us three laws against unjust or unnatural combinations. The world is not what we want it to be but what God ordained concerning it. We must work under God, not against Him. The unequal strength of the ox and the donkey means that the combination of the two is harmful to both, and therefore to the owner. It is an amazing fact that to this day Palestinians insist on yoking an ox and a donkey together, despite centuries of experience that it is unwise to do so.

The *sixth* law prohibits wearing garments of contrary materials, such as wool and linen together (v. 11). Most of our modern synthetic cloth violates this law, although some scientists have seen the combinations as bad for one's health. Leviticus 19:19 forbids cross-breeding (as a horse with a donkey), sewing a field with mingled seed, and using garments of mixed wool and linen. Hosea 2:5, 9 associates such mixed yarns with Baal worship. It was a rebellion against God's order. In each of the laws of vv. 5-11, this is the case. Which order shall prevail, God's or man's?

The *seventh* law (v. 12) requires the fringes on the garments, a practice common among Orthodox Jews. As H. Wheeler Robinson, by no means anything but a modernist, observed early in the twentieth century, these are "memorial tassels."¹ According to Numbers 15:37-41, these were a reminder to keep God's law. Very early, the cross became the Christian reminder, and the cross appeared in or over the church, in one's home, or on one's clothing. We live in a physical world, and physical signs to remind us of who God is, and what we are, are surely needed.

Symbols of faith are thus important. Our current war against Christianity is making the use of symbols difficult or impossible. To wear a cross in public is to invite hostility. Sadly, even some Protestants, Zwinglian in their views, are averse to crosses in or over a church. The ringing of church bells is banned in many places.

The relationship between property and person was known to Marxist interrogators in prisons. At times, to break a man of all resistance, he would be stripped of all clothing and questioned in a cold room. The interrogator would be warmly dressed, drinking coffee, and smoking, while the naked prisoner shivered, his resistance to tyranny lowered by the indignity to his person.

¹ H. Wheeler Robinson, *Deuteronomy and Joshua* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. C. & E. C. Jack, n.d.), 168.

Chapter Sixty-Nine
Fidelity and Truth
(Deuteronomy 22:13-21)

13. If any man take a wife, and go in unto her, and hate her,
14. And give occasions of speech against her, and bring up an evil name upon her, and say, I took this woman, and when I came to her, I found her not a maid:
15. Then shall the father of the damsel, and her mother, take and bring forth the tokens of the damsel's virginity unto the elders of the city in the gate:
16. And the damsel's father shall say unto the elders, I gave my daughter unto this man to wife, and he hateth her;
17. And, lo, he hath given occasions of speech against her, saying, I found not thy daughter a maid; and yet these are the tokens of my daughter's virginity. And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city.
18. And the elders of that city shall take that man and chastise him;
19. And they shall amerce him in an hundred shekels of silver, and give them unto the father of the damsel, because he hath brought up an evil name upon a virgin of Israel: and she shall be his wife; he may not put her away all his days.
20. But if this thing be true, and the tokens of virginity be not found for the damsel:
21. Then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die: because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father's house: so shalt thou put evil away from among you. (Deuteronomy 22:13-21)

This is not a popular text with feminists because it so clearly gives priority to the family *and* to the parents. The father in particular is seen as centrally important, and the matter of *honor* is stressed.

The seriousness of the matter is seen by the fine cited in v. 19, 100 shekels or weights in silver. In 1 Samuel 9:8 we see that a quarter of a silver shekel was a good gift. A half a shekel was the extent of the poll tax to maintain a civil order (Ex. 30:15; cf. Neh. 10:32). The fine of 100 shekels of silver was virtual confiscation of an estate. (A shekel was a weight of silver, not a coin.) Obviously, the honor of a family and its daughter could not be lightly impugned. This was not the only penalty. The husband making a false accusation was also to be chastised or beaten (v. 18). To question the honor of a family and its daughter was not something done casually or frequently. The man

making the false accusation was not killed because he had to support the wife whose honor he had questioned.

This was to an extensive degree a self-enforcing law. The penalty was such that no man dared question his wife's premarital virtue unless there were certain proof of it. The evidence was not limited to the cloth used when the hymen was broken.

The family is in God's order the basic institution in society. It has priority over church and state. It is man's first and basic government and the primary area of worship and the practice of religion. To undermine the family is to undermine society, a fact well known to our immoralists of today.

There is an important fact about this fine; it is twice as severe as the fine for seduction in vv. 28-29, which is fifty shekels of silver. Deuteronomy 22:28-29 and Exodus 22:16-17 are cognate texts. The payment in Exodus 22:17 is called "the dowry of virgins." From this we can assume that in such cases, as a penalty, the dowry was set somewhat higher than was normally the case. Thus, fifty shekels of silver was a large sum, one equivalent to a total income of perhaps three years, the traditional reckoning of the dowry. This helps us to appreciate the significance of the fine. To defame one's wife deliberately and wrongfully was a very serious offense.

In vv. 20-21, we are given the penalty if the husband's charge is true. The wife is executed near the door of her father's house. This is death for the wife and dishonor for her parents. The husband who is guilty of slander lives as the virtual slave of his father-in-law, who now commands his wealth. He remains alive to support his wife and children. The wife who is guilty dies because her duties can be assumed by others.

In terms of modern, humanistic law, marriage and the family constitute a private arrangement between two people. The societal implications are increasingly neglected, and the personal and peripheral nature of sexuality and marriage are stressed. The Christian family is seen by many as the great roadblock, together with the church, to a new world order. As a result, the legal aspects of family life are trivialized. Since World War II, it has increasingly been the practice to reject substantial reasons for divorce unless a wealth of assets is at stake. Only then will such matters as adultery be considered, and, of late, even in such cases it is waning.

If marriage is essentially a private arrangement, this is logical. If it is basic to social order, the present trend is suicidal.

The woman who goes into marriage unchaste is said to have “wrought folly in Israel” (v. 21). This means it is an outrage, a case of the worst kind of disorder. It is an assault on social order; it is *treason*.

It is significant that in this case the husband does not secure a divorce. According to Deuteronomy 24:1-4, divorce was not difficult to obtain. If the divorce represented simply willfulness on the part of the husband, he could not get the return of the dowry, a substantial sum. Only by challenging and proving the wife’s prenuptial unchastity could he regain the dowry. The penalty for adultery is death, and in effect the wife’s offense is prenuptial adultery; it is contempt for both her parents and her future husband.

All of this is done by a court of law. A marital offense on the part of either husband or wife not only dishonors their respective families but also the nation. The sin strikes at the family, the nation, and God.

After a judgment against the husband, he could not divorce her. She could continue to live with him, or return to her parents; in either case, her support was guaranteed for life. This, however, did not make her immune to the penalty for adultery. She was not now free from the required obedience to God’s law in all things. Not only family honor but national honor was at stake in her actions. If sinful, it was “folly in Israel,” an outrage and a fundamental disorder. It means a refusal to recognize moral and religious laws; it is an assertion of a private desire over the entire social order and against God.

Personal acts have social consequences, but it is basic to the modern outlook, and to sin in every generation, to insist on “purely” private costs having no social consequences, or, if they do, they must give way to personal choices. Such thinking is anarchistic, and it produces a society of a pragmatic and lawless character.

The modern attitude is that in instances such as this it is none of society’s business what a woman, or a man, for that matter, does. One scholar uses the word “vulgar” in discussing this text.¹ One can say, perhaps, that all sin is vulgar and in bad taste, but it is no less serious.

There is another aspect to this law: it tells us how very serious defamation of character is in God’s sight. This is a stress made also by

¹ Charles M. Cooper, “Deuteronomy,” in Herbert C. Alleman and Elmer E. Flack, eds., *Old Testament Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, [1948] 1957), 320.

our Lord in the New Testament. Thus, this law is concerned not only with “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:14), but also with “Thou shalt not bear false witness” (Ex. 20:16).

Lange observed, “Man is free only as he maintains veracity; the lie destroys his true freedom.”² A lie moves a man from the real world into a world of fiction, and his life begins to rest on falsity. Truth gives us a freedom in the real world God has made. We are to live all our life in God and therefore in truth. Because a lie moves men and nations from the free world into fiction and slavery, men and nations must require a true witness or else theirs is a course of disaster and ruin.

². John Peter Lange, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, reprint, n.d.), 167.

Chapter Seventy
The Family and its Centrality
(Deuteronomy 22:22-30)

22. If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel.

23. If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her;

24. Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you.

25. But if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her, and lie with her: then the man only that lay with her shall die:

26. But unto the damsel thou shalt do nothing; there is in the damsel no sin worthy of death: for as when a man riseth against his neighbour, and slayeth him, even so is this matter:

27. For he found her in the field, and the betrothed damsel cried, and there was none to save her.

28. If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed, and lay hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found;

29. Then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away all his days.

30. A man shall not take his father's wife, nor discover his father's skirt. (Deuteronomy 22:22-30)

As Tacitus and other Romans saw the depravity of pagan Rome, they idealized the pagan tribes of Germany whose moral conduct was clearly evil. One of the appeals of the church to Romans was its moral superiority, but, in time, the church began to resemble old Rome. Shortly before the fall of Rome, Salvian wrote,

The Church herself, which should be the appeaser of God in all things, what is she but the exasperator of God? Beyond a few individuals who shun evil, what else is the whole assemblage of Christians but the bilge water of vice? How many will you find in the Church who are not either a drunkard or a beast, or an adulterer, or a fornicator, or a robber, or a debauchee, or a

brigand or a murderer? And, what is worse than all this, they do all these things almost unceasingly.¹

Augustine tended to concentrate on the sins of paganism, but Salvian was unsparing of all sinners. He and other church fathers saw Rome's fall as due to the destruction of the family and the view of sex as recreational.

The biblical perspective was echoed by them, although with non-biblical ascetic overtones. In biblical law, most of the death penalties are associated with offenses against the family because the family is the basic institution in God's sight. Treason in biblical law is against the family.

Some sociologists, notably C. C. Zimmerman, have stressed this same centrality of the family as basic to the survival of civilization. This has not stopped an increasing assault on the family, nor the moral decline. Now we have a growing number of men who are unsure of the paternity of their children, and the psychological and social results are devastating.

The *first* of the five laws in our text (v. 22) concerns adultery, mutually consensual adultery. The penalty for both is death. The statement, "so shalt thou put away evil from Israel," means that a way of life contemptuous of consequences, and of God and man, must be broken. The modern existentialist temper rejects all social, religious, and familistic considerations in favor of a totally personal desire. This limitation of concern is a danger to society, and it is to be "put away" as *evil*.

The *second* case involves a man and a betrothed virgin. Their offense occurs within the city, *where help would be available had she screamed for help*. Because she was silent and consented, she is guilty. Both the man and the woman are sentenced to death. It is especially an offensive act on the man's part because the woman was betrothed; "he hath humbled his neighbor's wife" (v. 24), we are told.

The *third* law (vv. 25-27) deals with a case of rape in the countryside, where no cry for help would bring rescue. The man only is guilty, and the penalty is death. In terms of Deuteronomy 22:19 and 29, and Exodus 22:16-17, the man in such cases must also pay the

¹ Salvian, *The Governance of God*, bk. 3, sec. 9, in *The Writings of Salvian, the Presbyter*, trans. Jeremiah F. O'Sullivan (New York, NY: CIMA Publishing Co., 1947), 83.

equivalent of a dowry to the girl. The money or livestock could come out of his estate.

The *fourth* law (vv. 28-29) concerns an unbetrothed virgin. This is the same law as Exodus 22:16-17. Because the girl is not betrothed, if the father agrees, then, on payment of a dowry of fifty shekels, the two can be married. He can never divorce her. The father is the decision-maker; this is a fundamental fact of God's law. The father must be responsible, protective, and the defender of his daughter. Covenant children must have covenant morality. Deuteronomy 23:17 declares, "There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel."

The *fifth* law forbids all sexual acts with a stepmother. This is a law we find also in the Code of Hammurabi. In Ezekiel 22:10, this is one of the offenses charged to the Judeans.

If the family is indeed the fundamental institution of society and basic to civilization, then these laws are basic to the life of nations. But the family is now under unsparing attack. Statism cannot flourish where a strong family basis exists in a society. The dissolution of the family precedes cultural decay.

According to Matthew 18:20, our Lord declares, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." This is usually taken as referring to the church. However, Clement of Alexandria, in *Stromate* (bk. 3, sec. 10), refers this to the *family*. Tertullian, in *On Repentance* (chap. 10), declares, "In a company of two is the church; but the church is Christ." This is *not* an equation of the church with an institution. In *On Baptism* (chap. 6), Tertullian writes, with respect to Matthew 18:20,

Moreover, after the pledging both of the attestation of faith and the promise of salvation under "three witnesses," there is added, of necessity, mention of the Church; inasmuch as, wherever there are three, (that is, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,) there is the Church which is a body of three.²

This definition of the church is more than institutional, and it centers on the triune God. Moreover, the fact that the early church saw *the family* as a church is simply a reflection of the familistic nature of biblical faith.

How biblical this view of the family is appears in 1 Peter 3:7.

² *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1880 reprint), 672.

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life: that your prayers be not hindered.

This is a remarkable text, commonly misunderstood. For one thing, there is undue concentration on the wife as “the weaker vessel.” However, as John Brown of Edinburgh some generations ago pointed out, the term is comparative. It requires *both* the man and the wife to see themselves as weak creatures or vessels in God’s sight. In Brown’s words, “Both are weak; but the woman is weaker.”³ The Christian family is an area of grace and therefore a manifestation of the great church in Christ.

In the early church, chastity was an expression of the life of faith. The chaste family was a separated family. Tertullian, in *The Chaplet, or De Corona* (chap. 3) tells us that the holiness of everyday family life was basic to the Christian’s family life. He tells us,

At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary activities of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign.⁴

The sign of the cross permeated the family’s life; the house was seen as a kind of church. This may distress some Protestants, but its meaning was very important. *Liturgy had been made basic to the life of the family and the house*, including the reading of Scripture and prayers. Sexuality was a sphere thus also set apart in terms of God’s law for holiness.

The whole of family life became an area of high seriousness. Not surprisingly, the results were remarkable, and the strong family culture became in time basic to Christendom. When, as in Salvian’s day, a Christian profession of faith could be helpful to advancement, decay set in, and collapse; “Christians” had become pagans.

C. C. Zimmerman was right. The future of civilization depends primarily on the family. Zimmerman and Cervantes were right in stating,

³ John Brown, *Expository Discourses on the First Epistle of the Apostle Peter*, vol. 2 (Evansville, IA: Sovereign Grace Book Club, 1956 reprint), 229.

⁴ *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, 94-95.

From birth to grave, there is scarcely any great action of consequence that can be performed by a person, even in our free society, that is not guided and colored by family relations. The individual in his family meaning is the real unit in society. Detached or nonfamilistically guided individuals exist only in imagination or in discolored surroundings such as prostitution, crime, or skid row.⁵

Our humanistic age and its scholars are working to put our culture on skid row. Naturally, they hate God's law.

⁵. Carle C. Zimmerman and Lucius F. Cervantes, *Marriage and the Family* (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Co., 1956), 31.

Chapter Seventy-One

Membership in the Congregation (*Deuteronomy 23:1-6*)

1. He that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD.
2. A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the LORD.
3. An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever:
4. Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee.
5. Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee.
6. Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever. (*Deuteronomy 23:1-6*)

The assembly of the Lord referred to in this text means the covenant community, both civil and ecclesiastical. These laws therefore have reference to church and state equally. They do *not* govern faith but simply membership. All of the excluded persons could become believers, and, indeed, were welcomed into the covenant community. The book of Ruth gives us a beautiful illustration of this.

To “enter into the congregation” means to become a potentially governing member of the covenant, an elder or ruler, for example. We would call it voting membership and eligibility for office. The purpose of these laws is to protect the community from becoming diluted by people whose moral background is a poor or bad one. In v. 2, for example, a bastard is excluded to the tenth generation. This did not exclude success and eminence on the part of the descendants of a bastard. For example, David was the tenth generation after the birth of Pharez, a bastard. His was a distinguished ancestry in spite of this fact, and David’s father Jesse was a wealthy and notable shepherd; his great-grandfather, Boaz, was clearly a man of great character. The purpose of the law was to protect society. It was not an infallible protection, but it was still a good one.

It is interesting to note that Jewish and Christian scholars have done much to confuse the meaning of the word *bastard* (*mamzer*). Some hold that it refers to the children of incestuous unions, while others refer it to the interracial unions. We can safely assume the usual meaning of the word.

Another problem is relating it to Western American history. Some years ago, on the American frontier, isolated ranchers were far from a town where a marriage license could be obtained. A circuit rider or a Sunday School missionary then performed the service. There was then no civil record of a marriage nor of the births of their children. Within my lifetime, some people, on discovering this fact, were horrified and concluded that they were bastards. This was *not* true, religiously or civilly. These were stable marriages, and the states recognized them.

In v. 1, the law bars eunuchs from membership; they could not be eligible for office in church nor state. While eunuchs have in history at times been great leaders, normally their lack of a stake in the future has made them present oriented and practical existentialists. Castration was forbidden in the covenant community. For their faithfulness, God makes remarkable promises to eunuchs in Isaiah 56:3ff. In Acts 8:27ff. we read of the conversion of a prominent eunuch, a high officer under Queen Candace of Ethiopia.

These laws have been called Israel's immigration laws. They are emphatically not that. Immigration laws protect a nation by state discrimination, which can be good or bad, whereas these laws established the discrimination on the *family* level. The key to survival is the family and its integrity. Membership in the covenant community is through the family, and therefore these protective laws apply to the family. If the family does not maintain standards, the nation cannot.

In vv. 3-6, we have the very specific exclusion of Ammonites and Moabites for ten generations. This refers to Ammonite and Moabite families, not apparently to girls of these peoples who married into the covenant people and abandoned their earlier beliefs. In the case of Ruth, we see that the bastardy status barred office to the tenth generation, David, of all Pharez's descendents. At the same time, Ruth, having abandoned the Moabite faith to become a covenant believer, was regarded as a mother in Israel. The patriarchal nature of the family in those days meant that the woman took the man's

status. The ban on “mixed” marriages, or on unequal yoking, applied where the wife was not a convert.

The ban on Ammonite and Moabite to the tenth generation is important. (The Berkeley Version reads, “No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the congregation of the Lord down to the tenth generation.”) The reasons given for this are, *first*, we see that, although they were a people closely related by blood to the Hebrews, they sided with the Canaanites against their kin. They refused to provide Israel “with bread and water in the way,” as they moved from Egypt to the borders of Canaan (v. 4). *Second*, Ammon and Moab hired Balaam to curse Israel (v. 4). Both countries were still aware of the faith of Israel and their own ancestral faith. For this reason, they sought out Balaam, who still had a semblance of Jehovah worship. They thus sinned with knowledge, in that they recognized the reality of the true faith while seeking a life in freedom from the true God.

Third, we are told,

Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee. (v. 5)

This verse confronts us with *the curse*. Modern man wants to believe in a purely this-worldly causality, whereas the curse bluntly confronts us with God as the absolute cause of all things. Too often people relegate curses to the Old Testament, but we see St. Paul, in Galatians 3:10-13, declaring that to break God’s law is to place ourselves under His curse. Christ’s atonement frees us from that curse to make us His people. This, however, does not make the law null and void *except* as a “handwriting of ordinances” (Col. 2:14), i.e., a legal bill of indictment against us. The law to the redeemed is their charter of freedom, “the perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25). Deuteronomy 28:15ff. gives us the meaning of the curse on a lawless society.

Ammon and Moab are under God’s curse because they refused to give a very simple form of help, either freely or for money. Their ill-will led them to hire Balaam to curse Israel. But their perspective was humanistic. They believed that the power to curse rests especially with certain seers and psychics rather than with God. Their premise was that God can be manipulated and controlled by man. This meant a control of God by this world, a belief that the primary determination of all things is from man rather than God. We have this

premise with us still in Arminianism, scientism, sociology, and other spheres of thought.

Leviticus 26:14-46 also gives us the premise for God's cursing, namely, disobedience to His law. Psalm 1 gives us the two ways of life; the way of blessing is a "delight in the law of the Lord" (v. 2), whereas the ungodly are accursed and "are like the chaff which the wind driveth away" (v. 4). Endurance and permanence in history are with God's blessed ones.

Finally, we are told, with respect to the accursed, "Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever" (v. 6). The Berkeley Version reads, "Never in all your days may you seek their peace or prosperity." We are not permitted to help God's enemies. Modern foreign, commercial, and personal policy is to favor those who can further our purposes, irrespective of their evil character. Writers on foreign policy routinely demand that we set aside all considerations other than national self-interest in dealing with the nations. They see moral standards as an impediment. So far have we strayed as a nation.

There is an important sidelight on v. 1. At the time of the early church, non-Christians knew that the castrated were not permitted to enter the clergy although welcome in many pagan cults. As a result, the clergy were often castrated to disqualify them from their calling. At the first Council of Nicea, AD 325, Canon 1 ruled that such men could continue in their work. If, however, they castrated themselves (to conform to pagan demands and avoid death), they had to be demoted. Much later, the Apostolical Canons (nos. 21-24) restated this ruling although it made an exception for men born eunuchs, for which there is no biblical warrant.¹

There is an interesting history to the law concerning bastards. It was routinely violated in early medieval Europe by monarchs who made their bastards into abbots and bishops, and also kings. They also felt free to practice various sexual vices, including homosexuality. Freedom from the law was called a *royal privilege*. Whereas God requires greater faithfulness where there is greater responsibility, the concept of the royal privilege meant freedom from accountability. In time, the nobility adopted the concept; during the Renaissance,

¹ Henry R. Percival, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*, vol. 14 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd ser., Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956 ed.), 8, 595.

Brontome tells us that the nobility saw incest as their privilege. Popes made cardinals of their bastards, and Christians mourned. After the Enlightenment, and especially with Romanticism, the royal privilege, exemption from God's moral law, became the privilege of artists and then actors. This separation of responsibility and accountability from authority and rank is an aspect of the fall. When men see themselves as gods they will then behave like the pagan gods. More than a few Roman emperors saw their status as one which exempted them from moral limitations, so that their incipient divinity required flagrant immorality.

Chapter Seventy-Two

God in the Camp (Deuteronomy 23:7-14)

7. Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother: thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian; because thou wast a stranger in his land.

8. The children that are begotten of them shall enter into the congregation of the LORD in their third generation.

9. When the host goeth forth against thine enemies, then keep thee from every wicked thing.

10. If there be among you any man, that is not clean by reason of uncleanness that chanceth him by night, then shall he go abroad out of the camp, he shall not come within the camp:

11. But it shall be, when evening cometh on, he shall wash himself with water: and when the sun is down, he shall come into the camp again.

12. Thou shalt have a place also without the camp, whither thou shalt go forth abroad:

13. And thou shalt have a paddle upon thy weapon; and it shall be, when thou wilt ease thyself abroad, thou shalt dig therewith, and shalt turn back and cover that which cometh from thee:

14. For the LORD thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy: that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee. (Deuteronomy 23:7-14)

These are very practical laws of holiness. In vv. 7-8, we see clearly the biblical perspective on various alien peoples; here two are specifically named, Edomites and Egyptians. *First*, the Edomites are a people related to the Hebrews and are therefore not to be hated. The Hebrew word translated *abhor* (*taw-ab*) means to loath or detest. Such nationalistic or racial hatred against Edomites and Egyptians is condemned. The Edomite is a related person. The Egyptian is to be treated honestly and kindly “because thou wast a stranger in his land” (v. 7). As the covenant people, they must represent a higher standard. *Second*, this does *not* mean that the sins and shortcomings of such aliens are to be overlooked. Their religion and morality makes them culturally a lower people in terms of God’s standard. No more than we are allowed to be hateful and bigoted towards them, are we allowed to disregard their serious offenses against God and His law. Thus, while we must give them godly respect, we must

also recognize that time is required before they are on the same level as the covenant people. Their children of the third generation of faithfulness to the covenant may then enter the congregation, i.e., function as covenant members. Isaiah spoke of the Egyptians becoming, in time, members of God's covenant (Isa. 19:18-25; 45:14).

In most of history and certainly now, the attitude towards aliens has been unrealistic. It has gone from hating them for their failings to accepting them uncritically as though morality requires that we overlook their sins and shortcomings. To hate other nationalities and races is to forget that only God's saving grace makes us any different. To refuse to recognize that differences exist because of a bad heritage of faith and morals is both to blind ourselves and lower ourselves. If we refuse to recognize the moral delinquencies of others it is because we are unwilling to face up to our own apostasies and failures. To fail to see sin is itself a sin, and a fatal one. The "see no evil" policy is morally wrong.

Verses 9-14 are essentially one law whose theme is holiness in the camp. Wartime is usually the occasion of a lessening of morality both on the war front and at home. All too often, it takes a generation or more for a country to recuperate from the lowered wartime moral behavior.

As against that, this law insists on an intensified moral standard during the war. This requirement begins with the troops. If it applies to them, it applies to all who are at home. As a boy, (in Detroit, Michigan, in the 1920s) I recall a neighborhood boy whose uncle insisted that the best time of his life was in Europe in World War I. He stated that he had more "freedom" and more fun, meaning that he was free from his family's standards. This man also insisted that many veterans agreed with him but felt that it was impolitic to say so. However true his opinion was, it is a fact that only rarely do men in wartime show a high moral standard.

A notable exception was Cromwell's army, of whom Macaulay, not favorable to Puritans, all the same wrote:

The troops were now to be disbanded. Fifty thousand men, accustomed to the profession of arms, were at once thrown on the world: and experience seemed to warrant the belief that this change would produce much misery and crime, that the discharged veterans would be seen begging in every street, or that they would be driven by hunger to pillage. But no such result followed. In a few months there remained not a trace indicating

that the most formidable army in the world had just been absorbed into the mass of the community. The Royalists themselves confessed that, in every department of honest industry, the discarded warriors prospered beyond other men, that none was charged with any theft or robbery, that none was heard to ask an alms, and that, if a baker, a mason, or a waggoner attracted notice by his diligence and sobriety, he was in all probability one of Oliver's old soldiers.¹

Cromwell's army moved in faithfulness to God's law and our text. Its chaplains worked to make the men mindful of what v. 14 tells us, "the LORD thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp." The origin of the chaplaincy itself is in the requirement that God's covenant people require holiness in the military camp.

The law requires, *first*, separation from the camp if any man is in any way involved in any "wicked thing" (v. 9). We see an example of how strictly this was applied in the case of Gideon, in the time of the Judges. In the case of Gideon, the separation was from fearful men, who were asked to go home. Twenty-two thousand did, with ten thousand remaining. Of these ten thousand, only three hundred were retained because they alone were serious and militarily observant (Judg. 7:1-8). Failure to take their soldiering seriously had eliminated the rest. Every evil or wicked thing included also failure to take one's duties seriously.

Then, *second*, nocturnal sexual emissions required a separation until evening, with bathing (cf. Lev. 15:16). This law seems strange until we recognize that holiness in a strong sense is required of the men. Their military duties involve the risk of their lives. This closeness to death requires strict standards of holiness. If the cause is worth dying for, it certainly requires *holy living*. Recognizing this fact is basic to knowing the meaning of this law. American chaplains in the War of Independence strongly stressed holiness.

Third, strict sanitation is also required. The "paddle" referred to (in v. 13) was more like a spear or bayonet head designed to make digging possible. Feces were to be covered, so that digging before and covering after were mandatory. The cleanliness of the camp was a religious duty as well as a sanitary one.

Epidemics among soldiers have been common over the centuries. Troops maintaining the discipline of God's law have been normally

¹ Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James II*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, PA: Porter & Coates, n.d.), 147-48.

free of this problem. In Israel, a safe area outside the camp was designated for such purpose.

In v. 14, we have the reason stated for these laws. Certainly the human benefits are very real and important. Clearly, the health of the men is safeguarded.

The basic reason, however, is that God is in the camp. He is there to deliver His people and to protect them. "Therefore shall thy camp be holy: that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee" (v. 14).

The presence of God with His people is no merely figurative image: it states a very real fact. God is always closer to us than we are to ourselves. We cannot treat this fact casually. We are always totally in His providential care and government. Especially when men go to war to defend God's covenant and people from ungodly nations we are to recognize His vivid presence.

This is an alien concept to modern man, who finds it difficult to take seriously God's presence in church or anywhere else. But we are told here that any godly military action requires holiness on the part of the troops. God is in the camp, and it is dangerous to forget this. We can never separate ourselves from God nor shut Him out of our lives. Psalm 139 gives us a vivid statement of this. Holiness in every area of life and thought is necessary because God is in every camp and every place.

Chapter Seventy-Three

Access to God

(Deuteronomy 23:15-18)

15. Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee:

16. He shall dwell with thee, even among you, in that place which he shall choose in one of thy gates, where it liketh him best: thou shalt not oppress him.

17. There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel.

18. Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the LORD thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the LORD thy God.

(Deuteronomy 23:15-18)

These few verses open up the meaning of godly society in a clear and simple way. Verse 15 has reference to slaves. There were two kinds of slaves in Hebrew society. The major form, *first*, was of persons sentenced to servitude for the purpose of making restitution. The courts could sentence a man to make restitution to someone, and he would then be the servant of the person robbed or in any way the victim of the sentenced man's crime. The man winning such a case could sell the man's services to someone else, in order to gain an immediate restitution. This law does not refer to such a sentenced man: he had a debt to pay.

Other slaves were prisoners of war whose restitution as slaves was to all the society because of the harm done by their attack and invasion. They were to be treated justly, and as members of the family in a lesser degree. If they were mistreated, they could walk into any neighboring farm, ranch, or city and claim asylum. They could then choose which city in the nation they wanted to live in. In many cases, no return to their country was possible. Over the centuries, in many cultures, soldiers who allow themselves to be captured are unwanted by their own country and thus have no hope of life there. Adoption into the victorious country becomes their only future.

The original context of the Golden Rule has reference to foreigners of any kind, including these prisoners of war. We read, in Leviticus 19:33-34,

33. And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him.

34. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Israel is reminded of its own enslavement in Egypt; they are therefore to be protective of all foreigners, free or enslaved. This is a remarkable law, and it is surprising that more attention has not been given to it.

This law could also refer to foreign slaves who fled across the border into Israel. Israel's God-decreed policy would be common knowledge in surrounding states. Abused slaves then had only to cross the border into Israel to gain freedom. By contrast, the Code of Hammurabi decreed that anyone harboring a runaway slave be put to death.

Some commentators insist on seeing this law as applicable *only* to foreign slaves. There is nothing in the law to warrant such a limitation.

We have a case of a runaway slave in the New Testament, in Paul's letter to *Philemon*. The runaway slave was Onesimus, whose owner was his brother, Philemon (Philemon 16, "a brother...in the flesh"). Onesimus had apparently ended in prison with Paul, who knew him and his family, and who now converted this black sheep of a good family. Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon with his letter, asking for Onesimus to be forgiven, and offering to repay what Onesimus had stolen. The premise of Paul's thinking is this text, Deuteronomy 23:15-16. Philemon had apparently purchased his brother earlier to spare the family's honor.

The second law in this text, v. 17, prohibits any covenant girl from becoming a prostitute, or any male a sodomite. The Hebrew text makes it clear that both were sacred or religious prostitutes of the Ishtar-Astarte and other related cults. Prostitution in antiquity was in the main connected with fertility cults.

Later on, prostitutes did exist in Jerusalem, usually connected with the colonies of foreign merchants. Proverbs 2:16, 5:3, 20, and 23:27 refer to them as "strange women," *strange* here meaning, as in *stranger, foreign*. Ritual prostitution was often a means of leading the covenant people into another faith, as the incident with the Moabite women in Numbers 25 makes clear.

Those rabbis who saw the slaves of v. 15 as foreign slaves insisted on seeing the runaway slave as a potential convert to the covenant and the patrons of male and female prostitutes as potential converts to paganism.

Verse 18 forbids any money or gift received by a male or female prostitute from ever being received in the Temple, or, the house of the Lord. Such an idea seems foreign to us, but, to these hierodules of old, any sanctuary seemed a valid place to give the gods their percentage. This certainly helped introduce the practice into various cultures because the financial receipts were considerable. Both the practice of religious prostitution and the receipt of any funds from its practitioners are strictly forbidden.

Verse 18 uses a word for homosexuals, *dog*. This same term is applied to them in the New Testament, in Revelation 22:15. Romans 1:27 speaks of homosexuality as the burning out of man (in the Greek text). When man wages war against God, as Romans 1:24-32 makes clear, he destroys himself.

Modern efforts to pervert the biblical texts on homosexuality into something condoning the practice, or simply scholarly attempts to propagate flagrant lying, are too common. The biblical term *dog* makes it obvious that Scripture regards such persons with radical contempt, and it regards them as the enemies of God.

W. Gunther Plaut made an interesting comment on the use of the term “dog.” Curiously, this term has been found on a Phoenician inscription also, so it was apparently not uncommon. However much civil and cultic practices allowed such persons some status, people apparently still despised the male prostitutes. Moreover, Plaut pointed out, “Dogs were not domesticated in biblical times and were considered wild beasts.”¹ Dogs did coexist with people and were the scavengers in town and country, and their presence was welcomed because they devoured the human excrement as soon as it was dumped out of the house. This was a use continued into modern times in areas of the West, and is still common elsewhere. This helps us to understand the biblical usage.

Of vv. 16-17, Luther held, “All gains by sin are unacceptable to God.” This premise has long marked the church’s practice, and the

¹ W. Gunther Plaut, Bernard J. Bamberger, and William H. Hallo, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York, NY: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), 1497.

acceptance of “dirty money” has been sharply condemned by many churchmen.

Revelation 22:15 associates homosexuals with sorcerers, whore-mongers, murderers, idolaters, “and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.” This association makes it clear that these people are incapable of making an acceptable gift or offering to God.

We have forgotten that *gifts to a king are a privilege*. At one time, no man could make a gift to the king unless his person were acceptable. A gift is a form of access, and access to God is restricted to His established terms and conditions. To assume the possibility of a promiscuous access is radically wrong. Our access is by means of atonement, the sacrifices in the Old Testament era, and Christ’s sacrifice of Himself in the New. Then the law of God, the way of holiness, gives us His conditions. Our gifts to God are an aspect of His law. Thus, for a prostitute or a sodomite to bring a gift to God is to claim that access to the throne of grace is on his or her terms, not God’s. Such a person substitutes his own will for God’s law. Thus, this law has a very important premise. In the law of the runaway slave, we are told that persons seeking justice should have an access to us, but, in the law of gifts, the unrepentant moral degenerates can have no access to God.

Chapter Seventy-Four

Usury and Charity (Deuteronomy 23:19-20)

19. Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury:

20. Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it. (Deuteronomy 23:19-20)

This is a summary of what was stated in some detail in Deuteronomy 15:1-11. In brief, we are told in these two texts that loans to fellow believers in need must be without interest of any kind, either in money, food, or anything else. A loan to an alien, a nonbeliever, can be upon interest.

We need to consider this repetition. Men are not inclined to be charitable with their money. This means that they isolate themselves, and they think only of their own interests. God strikes at this isolation by telling His covenant people to be generous with non-interest bearing loans to their needy fellow covenant members.

The premise of such a law is *covenantal*. It presupposes a community of faith and life wherein men are indeed “members one of another” (Eph. 4:25). In the pre-World War II era, there were many problems, conflicts, and tensions in rural America, but there was also some sense of community. Farm equipment was loaned back and forth, since the poorer farmers could not afford to buy all the needed horse-drawn equipment. For emergency situations, neighbors would help. Such neighborliness still persists in some areas, but in others it is gone.

It is interesting that James Hastings’s (editor) *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* has no entry for *community*, although there is a long one on *communism*, and one on the *community of goods*. The same is true in various biblical encyclopedias. The *Encyclopaedia Judaica* has an excellent historical survey of the subject, but no biblical commentary or analysis.

There is a reason for this. Community is a *religious* fact, and not a coerced condition. Community requires a *common* and *governing* faith. Too often we see men having a common faith which is,

however, not a governing and determining factor in their lives. In the United States of the 1990s, well over 90 percent believe in God, and most of these regard themselves as in some sense Christian, but only a small minority of these are rigorously governed by their faith. It is one thing to believe that God is real, even as the moon and the stars are real, but quite another to be totally governed by God and His law-word. The first is a belief, and the second a governing faith.

Covenantal thinking sees us as members one to another. Non-covenantal thinking restricts our religion to some kind of relationship to God, whereas covenantal thinking sees our relationship to God as one with a membership in a covenant community. (This cannot be limited to or confused with church membership.) Communities have laws, and God's law governs the faith or covenant community. One aspect of this law concerns usury.

Usury in the modern sense is excessive interest. In the biblical sense, it means any interest, whether disguised or open. The prohibition has as its purpose to prevent covenantal, community assistance from becoming commercial and a source of profit. It must be *charity* to a needy brother, not a business loan. It is interesting that the Jewish toleration for usury began during the Babylonian Captivity.¹ Since then, a vast network of evasion has been developed, such as lending money to a Gentile to be reloaned to a Jew, in order to collect interest.² Partnerships were formed whose purpose was to lend money on interest under the pretext that the borrower managed the business and shared the profits.

In AD 1179, the medieval church forbade the taking of interest from a fellow believer. This rule meant that Jews became thereby the money-lenders to Christians. This made the loans "legal" for both Christians and Jews.

The Reformation inherited the medieval view; but it also studied texts such as Deuteronomy 15:7-8; 23:19-20; Leviticus 25:35-37; Psalm 15:5; Ezekiel 18:8; and Luke 6:35 without an Aristotelian perspective. Calvin wrote, with respect to usury,

Here an objection is made that today also usury shall not be permitted us for the same reason it was forbidden the Jews—

¹ Haim Hermann Cohn, "Usury," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 16 (Jerusalem, Israel: Keter Publishing House, 1971), 30.

² *Ibid.*, 31

because there is a fraternal union among us. To that I reply: there is some difference in the political union, for the situation in which God placed the Jews and many other circumstances made it possible for them to trade conveniently among themselves without usury. Our union is not at all the same. Therefore, I do not concede that it is forbidden us simply, as long as it is not contrary to equity or to charity.³

The society we live in is not identical with the covenant community of believers, where charity must prevail. If the commercial loans are “not contrary to equity or to charity,” they are permitted. Heinrich Bullinger in 1530 had already set forth new views on the subject. With reference to Luke 6:34-35, Bullinger saw this as referring to help to a neighbor and not a commercial loan. The requirement of love for one’s neighbor still governed such things.

With this in mind, we can understand the meaning of this law. *First*, the society of the believers is a covenant community. In that community, our relations must be godly and neighborly. This means dealing with one another honestly and lawfully. Some, but by no means all, such relationships must of necessity be charitable. In such dealings, we must be just and law-abiding, but the need for charity is not universal. The covenant community will be exploited if its only law, or governing law, is charity. During the centuries-long history of the Jews, the beggar has been a constant exploiting person in the Jewish community.

Second, this law militates against isolation, against an anarchistic individualism. Sadly, one of the appeals in this century of the city has been its facelessness. I have heard many people over the years express their delight in the anonymity of urban life. I recall, in a bay community, retired people building homes designed to make it impossible for their children or grandchildren to visit them overnight because there were no guest rooms. The era of individualism is hostile to family and to community responsibilities, and this law forbids such a way of life.

Third, loans to aliens, rich or poor, are legal. Their lack of faith in the God of Scripture leaves them without community as a willful choice. The pagan community can be severely restrictive, and it is not a loving but a coercive life.

³. From a letter to Claude de Sachin, “De Usuris,” *Joannis Calvinii Opera quae supersunt omnia*, 50.1: 247-48, cited in J. Wayne Baker, “Heinrich Bullinger and the Idea of Usury,” *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 5, no. 1 (April 1974): 57.

Being isolated from the living God, they are isolated one from another. True charity is a two-way street. The giver recognizes the need and his brother, and his help is an act of covenant grace. The recipient knows that God governs the giver and the gift, in this case, the interest-free loan, and his response is marked by gratitude and grace.

Various Christian groups and churches now have loan funds to help the needy in their circles with an interest-free loan. Such funds represent a true application of this law, whose purpose is not to create exploiters but a covenant community.

We must take note, finally, of a modern form of usury which is also a hidden tax, namely, *inflation*. Inflation robs every man of a percentage of his monetary wealth. It is a form of hidden interest on every dollar he possesses. The modern states may have usury laws barring interest they regard as exorbitant to private businesses and persons, but their hidden tax, inflation, can reach vast figures without any sense of guilt on the state's part.

Chapter Seventy-Five

Vows

(Deuteronomy 23:21-23)

21. When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee.

22. But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee.

23. That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; even a freewill offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the LORD thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth. (Deuteronomy 23:21-23)

Vows no longer have the place in people's lives that they once did. The reason for this is that people no longer take prayer as seriously as once was the case. To understand what this means, let us analyze what a vow is.

First, a vow is a promise to God for something received. A man receives an unexpected and unasked blessing or deliverance. His response is to tell God that, in gratitude for an unasked blessing, he will do certain things as his thanksgiving to God. It is a spontaneous response to God's providential care and mercies, but it is also a firm promise to do something by way of response.

Second, a vow is at times a pledge to abstain from something otherwise permitted in order to fix one's entire attention on doing something for God. It is an expression to oneself and to God of seriousness of intent. The vow began to fade when it became a poetic device, as in William Blake's poem from "Milton":

I will not cease from mental fight
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.

The romantic movement did much to undermine the high seriousness of vows when it used them for dramatic purposes and emphasis. From a pledge of one's total integrity to an operative device is what the vow became in the hands of the romantics.

Third, a vow is a binding promise to God that, if a thing prayed for is given, one will do certain things in gratitude. In Genesis 28:20-22, we have the first recorded vow in the Bible. Jacob promises that, if God cares for him, he will serve the Lord and will tithe faithfully to

Him. It was not the best of vows, but, when God blessed Jacob (Gen. 31:13), God had respect for even that faulty vow. Whatever the faults of Jacob's vow, Jacob took God very seriously and literally.

Fourth, a vow can be positive or negative. A man can vow to do something, or he can vow never to do certain things. Both kinds involve some kind of sacrifice to himself. The man making the vow is not asking for something other than God's blessing in the form of strength as he tries to do certain things. The vow concerns some major concern, and, to indicate the high seriousness of the cause, a vow is made to God. The man, by his vow, allows himself no retreat from his dedication to a particular effort. The vow prevents him from turning back on his word. If circumstances should make a fulfillment of the vow impossible, the man can only be discharged from his vow by a religious authority.

Fifth, a man making a vow to God, and pledging to give something if God hears his prayers, cannot give to God what he has no right to give (Lev. 27:26). He cannot give a human life in sacrifice, as did Jephthah (Judg. 11:30-40). Neither can he give what belongs, for example, to his wife. A vow does not dissolve the property ownership of those around him (Num. 30:3-16). For this reason, a wife or a child could not make a vow without the father's permission. The vow is entirely voluntary, but it is subject to legitimate authority.

Vows are closely related to prayer, and this is the reason why vows today are not a part of everyday life. Prayer has lost much of its meaning, and therefore vows are no longer common in our time.

Prayer is talking to God. It means acknowledging God as absolute Lord and the source of all things. When we pray to God, we are talking to One who is the Creator of all things. God is a Person, a very real person, to whom we can make earnest petitions in the assurance that He can respond to them. Where God has become remote, the vow becomes almost meaningless because the vow is a very intense and earnest pledge to the Lord of all creation.

Then, *sixth*, a vow is often the dedication of something we have, or ourselves, to God's service or use. I have known of men who promised God a given time of service in return for something. A doctor I knew, in return for his recovery from a very serious illness, served a given number of years in the 1930s as a medical missionary in Africa.

At no point in the Bible does God *require* a vow of us; it is an act of personal dedication, whatever form the vow takes. It is a person to Person exchange. I recall as a child a man whose daughter was near death, and no hope was held possible. He prayed for his daughter's life and vowed a vow. It was for him an intensely personal promise and response. It is important to stress this, because it is basic to vows; the present neglect of vows is due to the impersonalism many implicitly ascribe to God. Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 makes this clear.

4. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou has vowed.

5. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

God is a Person, and to offend Him is the worst kind of folly; any man who does so is a *fool*. He incurs the wrath of God. Since a vow is voluntary, it aggravates a man's sin that he voluntarily breaks his word to God.

Seventh, nothing illegitimate nor ungodly can be used to pay a vow. According to Deuteronomy 23:18, "Thou shall not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog [a sodomite], into the house of the LORD thy God for any vow." Only that which is good can be given to God.

Thomas Aquinas gave a short definition of a vow, "A promise made to God." It is a promise by a person to the Person of God. A New Testament example is St. Paul, in Acts 18:18. Augustine, in his commentary on Psalm 76:11, gives us examples of the use of vows in his day.¹

In v. 18, there is, as we have seen, a prohibition against bringing to God any hire of a prostitute or a sodomite as payment of a vow. Such persons have no right of access to God. Access to God is a privilege given by His grace to those whom He chooses. Promiscuous access to men is not countenanced: how much less so to God?

This means that the person making a vow has already the privilege of access to God. In terms of this privilege, the man asks God's blessing and promises to give thanks to God in a particular way. Both the vow and the gift are forms of privileged access.

¹ Saint Augustine, "Expositions on the Book of Psalms," in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd ser., vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956 ed.), 358-59.

Then, *eighth*, a vow cannot be used to disrupt the God-given order of things. A subordinate, such as a wife or a daughter, cannot make a vow without the father's consent, according to Numbers 30, and the implication of this is very clear. None, male nor female, can use a vow to undermine or dissolve an existing God-ordained relationship. Our Lord condemned the Pharisees for using vows to God to dissolve their duty to support their parents (Mark 7:6-13). No duty nor relationship which is God-ordained can be undermined, set aside, or terminated by a vow. The purpose of a vow must be to further God's Kingdom, not to undermine it.

Life having lost its high seriousness in the post-Darwinian world, so too vows now have a diminished meaning.

We see this very clearly in marriage vows. Certain things are very definitely and specifically *promised* and *avowed* in the marriage vows. How many churches or theologians have ever seen these broken vows as grounds for divorce? In failing to do so, these churches affirm that the vow means nothing; they demean both the vow and the church.

Chapter Seventy-Six

The Law of Kindness (Deuteronomy 23:24-25)

24. When thou comest into thy neighbour's vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel.

25. When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour's standing corn.

(Deuteronomy 23:24-25)

There are many who would maintain that this is an obsolete law. It has reference to a time in history when the distances between towns or cities was considerable, and there were no way-stations or places in between where a man could eat. A traveler, going some distance, might be hungry well before reaching his destination. This law gave him, legally, the freedom to pluck some grapes, fruit, or grain from a nearby field and thereby lessen his hunger. The law did *not* allow him to carry away anything from the field.

We have a reference to this text in Matthew 12:1 (cf. Mark 2:23; Luke 6:1). The Pharisees did not object to the disciples eating from a field as they passed but only to their doing so on the Sabbath. They deliberately misinterpreted what the disciples did by calling it *reaping* instead of *plucking* because they wanted to criticize the disciples and their Lord. The use of this kind of law prevailed in Palestine and Syria *at least* into this century, and elsewhere as well. The occasion for such use of another man's food had to be genuine hunger.

We have had now a series of laws calling for a love of one's neighbor. In Deuteronomy 22:1-4, the law concerns lost properties. In 23:19-20, interest-free loans to covenant brothers in need are required. In 22:8, the law requires a protective railing around the flat rooftops where people gathered and ate, even slept, in hot weather. Refugee slaves, according to 23:15-16, were to be given sanctuary, and so on and on. In Deuteronomy 24, we shall see more such laws.

This law gives no man a *right* to take from his neighbor's field. Only hungry travelers passing through could use a limited amount of a man's produce. Nothing could be carried away. The owner of the field could not be robbed. I recall also, as a child, in horse and buggy days, that the memory of this law and its use still lingered. A passerby

who took fruit violated the privilege if he pulled down and broke a peach tree in the process of getting a peach. Peach tree boughs break readily; respect for the farmers trees and vines was mandatory. There had to be a concern for the neighbor's property. To eat something was legitimate; to carry anything away was stealing.

To eat from another man's field was a *privilege*; it could not be treated as a right. In Armenia, whenever possible, permission was asked lest it be assumed that a thieving hand was in the orchard. The harvest was a gift from God, and it was therefore to be used according to His law-word.

This and other laws of Exodus through Deuteronomy have been called *laws of kindness*, and rightfully so. Those who insist on seeing God's law as harsh and unbending are simply ignorant of it. From start to finish, the law of God includes many commandments requiring that various persons, covenant members and foreigners, be treated with grace and helpfulness. It is simply false and ignorant to see God's law as harsh and brutal. Such views tell us more about the viewer than they do about God's law.

This law makes it clear that God's bounty must be shared. At the same time, there is no penalty *by man* for the violation of this law. God gives no man the right to enforce many of the biblical laws; that prerogative He reserves unto Himself. One of the serious evils in both church and state over the centuries has been the attempt to carry law beyond its God-ordained limits. To do so, for however an ostensibly noble cause, is to play god, and this is the ultimate sin (Gen. 3:5).

A rabbinic Targum to Deuteronomy translates, in vv. 24-25, "when thou comest" as "if you become a hired laborer," thereby limiting the permission to use the field's produce only to those who are hired workmen under the landowners authority. There is no biblical warrant for this limitation.¹ J. H. Hertz noted, "The Rabbis limit this privilege to the labourer who is engaged in gathering in the grapes."² The Geneva Bible marginal note retained this rabbinical view, which not all rabbis held.

This law makes it clear that we have no unlimited right to our possessions, or, we must add, to our lives. We are the Lord's property,

¹ Bernard Grossfield, *The Targum Ongullas to Deuteronomy* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier Inc., 1988), 70.

² J. H. Hertz, ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London, England: Soncino Press, [1936] 1960), 850.

and what He gives us must be used according to His law-word. This is the meaning of the law here given. We are stewards of all that we have under God. No man has a right to our property, but neither do we. We have received of the Lord that which we have; it is to be used, *first*, to prosper our covenant family in Christ. *Second*, it must be used to further His Kingdom. *Third*, we must help in Christ's name those who are in need.

This text has been used to promote a rather monastic view of property. Nothing could be more alien to the text. No other culture has done more to tie property to the family than biblical faith. The monastic perspective views property lightly because it sees the eternal order as more important. Without implying that monasticism was not often a great power for good, we still must insist that the biblical faith gives priority to the family in a very firm and material manner. Because property is so important we must use it to help those in need. Many ways have been sought towards this goal: glean- ing (as with Goodwill Industries), emergency aid (as with the Salvation Army, rescue missions, and the like), and many other means of helping the immediate needs of people have been developed.

The material side of life is regarded as God's blessing upon us in many texts. In Proverbs 10:22, we are told, "The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it." The word *rich* translates a Hebrew word meaning material accumulation, so it cannot be spiritualized away. Precisely because material wealth is a blessing from God where it is godly gain and prosperity, its use is important. Charity is expected of us: it reveals a love of God and of our neighbor. Material things are a part of the good life, and we therefore are summoned by God to bless those who are in need with our gifts.

With respect to this law, it means simply that a simple need is met. By being a part of a system of covenantal help one to another, whatever it may be, we manifest our love of God and our love of our neighbor.

We are told, in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, a command repeated often in the Bible,

4. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:

5. And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart,
and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

God does not give His law as something alien to His love, but as a part of it. By obeying God's law, we abide in a covenant of grace,

law, and love with Him, and with one another in Him. It is anti-God and anti-Christian to pit law, love, and grace one against another. Instead of “rightfully dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15), it is wrongfully dividing it. It is an attempt to put one aspect of God’s revelation against another. God’s law is this law of kindness to us.

A final note: Otto Scott has pointed out that statism destroys both charity and property. Taxation works to replace charity with welfareism, and to undermine the ownership of property.

Chapter Seventy-Seven

Divorce and the Family (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

1. When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorce-ment, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.
2. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife.
3. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorce-ment, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife;
4. Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.
(Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

Like so much in Deuteronomy, this is a controversial text. The modern mind misunderstands it and declares it to be antifeminist because it would appear that *only* the man can secure a divorce. That this is not true appears from Mark 10:12, where our Lord speaks of a woman divorcing her husband. Had His statement been contrary to the Law, the Pharisees and scribes would have immediately called attention to this, to discredit Him. In the intertestamental period, it is true that many rabbis gave ridiculous reasons for divorcing a wife, e.g., cooking and serving food too hot, or too salty, and so on and on. These trifling grounds reflect rabbinic pontifications to please people, not reality.

Churchmen, on the other hand, insist on contrasting Matthew 19:3-9 with Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and discrediting the Deuteronomic law. Again, if our Lord were stricter or looser in His teachings on divorce than the Law, He would have been at once the target of an all-out attack and condemnation.

In order to understand this law, we must recognize the strong familistic culture of the Bible. *First*, the dowry system was perhaps the major restraint upon divorce. No man could casually divorce a woman wrongfully and not thereby forfeit the considerable wealth of the dowry. It was somewhat easier for a woman to walk away from a marriage. *Second*, if the man wronged his wife, he not only

lost the dowry he had provided, but he faced also the anger of his wife's family: the male members would be resentful of his faithlessness. In a familistic culture, it is very unwise to offend another family. *Third*, the divorce was not obtainable on his say-so. A council of tribal or clan elders would pass on the validity of his attempt to divorce his wife. This hearing would determine whether he or the wife retained the dowry. The elders at the gates of the city or town were the men who rendered the decisions in all such matters.

The grounds for divorce were "some uncleanness in her" (v. 1), a term which covers more than sexual misconduct to include a generally evil character and an evil way of life. The phrase "to find no favour" thus cannot be read in terms of arbitrary personal tastes. It refers to substantial problems.

If the elders grant the divorce, whether favoring the man or the woman, "a bill of divorcement" had to be given by the husband to the wife. Again, this is important, because it means that she has title to the dowry, or, possibly, does not, because the guilt is hers. This bill of divorcement clarifies the marital *and* property status of the woman. It also establishes whether or not the woman also has the children because the guilty party could lose control of them.

Having gained a divorce, whether winning or losing, the woman could then remarry. Her guilt or innocence had been established. Her guilt did not prevent her from remarrying; her second husband might well believe that she has mended her ways.

Verse 3 then gives us certain possibilities for the woman. *First*, her second husband might hate her also, finding her a perverse and evil woman. *Second*, her second husband might die, and leave her a widow. What then are her options?

Verse 4 tells us that her first husband cannot remarry her. He might want to do so because, assuming her guilt, she is now a wealthy woman, and he wants to gain her assets, assuming that the dead husband had no heirs. On the other hand, she could be now a repentant and godly woman. Whatever the reason, remarriage is forbidden. The reason given is that "she is defiled." The Hebrew word translated *defiled* means foul, or contaminated. The bill of divorcement would specify the grounds for divorce. The man and woman were no longer a community of life. Marriage is a covenant and a contract. As such, it cannot be lightly entered into or lightly broken. There is a ban on attempts to renew it. *Defilement* and *uncleanness*

are related concepts. The defilement is of two kinds, and these two are inseparable. *First*, one can be defiled in relationship to God. It is His law we transgress. Whether or not we understand what God means, when He says we are defiled, we are defiled. We have crossed a boundary forbidden to us. *Second*, because we are defiled in God's sight, we should therefore see ourselves as defiled in the sight of men. Our obedience must rest, not on understanding but on faithfulness. God ordains the marriage covenant, and He sets the conditions thereof. We cannot go against His word without being defiled, self-defiled. A remarriage contrary to God's law (v. 4) "is abomination before the LORD," and it causes "the land to sin." Because marriage is the most personal and closest of ties, marital and sexual sins are especially deadly for a land and a culture.

The grounds for divorce in this law did not include adultery, nor homosexuality, because both the husband and the wife gained a divorce by death from the guilty party. Treason against the family was the worst crime, and, in any society, it is deadly. Modern life is not family oriented, and so it is alien to the biblical doctrine of treason.

In v. 1, the phrase, "some uncleanness in her," can be rendered "something shameful in her." It is, however, literally, "the nakedness of a thing." In Proverbs 29:18, we are told, "Where there is no vision, the people *perish* [or, *is made naked*]: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." The Hebrew words for naked or nakedness in Deuteronomy 24:1 and Proverbs 29:18 are not identical, but the meaning is similar. A people or persons who despise God's laws concerning marriage and the family are in a state approaching collapse. They are running wild or naked; they are evil and unashamed of it.

Thus, what is here said to be the grounds for the dissolution of a marriage is a general lawlessness, not in the sense of criminal conduct but in regard to God's requirements of men and women in marriage.

In the kind of offense cited in v. 1 as *nakedness*, we have those things whereby a person shows his evil and ungodly nature. The very forms of godly living are set aside. A pattern of contempt for God and man appears. In such a case, the man seeks from the elders at the gate a dissolution of the marriage, and the wife of such an ungodly man, through her family, seeks an end to her bondage.

This is not simply a *divorce* law. Modern anarchism will call it so, but it is more than that: it is *family law*. The major concern in a divorce is thus not merely the husband and the wife but the husband,

wife, children, and the kinfolk. We cannot superimpose our modern anarchistic individualism on biblical law. In our time, priority rests with the state, and then the person. In a truly godly society, priority belongs to God and His law, and, under Him, the family. It is a tragic absurdity that modern discussions of divorce center on the individual, and it tells us much about the modern age.

In a divorce, those affected can include children, if there are any. It is commonly, and in other eras, always inclusive of families on both sides. We cannot limit the meaning of the word family to the husband, wife, and children, the basic unit. It includes a network of lives and relationships. To limit our concern to *divorce* law thus falsifies the problem. Each man and woman has normally a family network which is either hurt or benefited by the divorce. Divorces occur, but the family remains. A divorce can deliver a family from evil; godly divorce *is* a deliverance from evil, for the suffering person, the children, and the relatives.

Chapter Seventy-Eight

Marriage and the Family (Deuteronomy 24:5)

When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, neither shall he be charged with any business: but he shall be free at home one year, and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken. (Deuteronomy 24:5)

Few texts are more revelatory of the difference between a godly social order and a humanistic social order than this one. Not the state, nor the church, but the family is central to life. Because of this, the establishing and knitting together of the marital bond requires a year's sabbatical from all kinds of responsibilities. The modern honeymoon is unrelated to this because it is a departure from the family whereas our text refers to a rest for settling into the family's life. A cognate verse is Proverbs 5:18: "Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth."

In Genesis 2:18 and 24, we are told,

18. And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

24. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

Many verses in Proverbs tell us of the blessedness of a covenantal union, and the problem of a bad marriage, e.g.,

Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD. (Prov. 18:22)

House and riches are the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife is from the LORD. (Prov. 19:14)

A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones. (Prov. 12:4)

There is much in Proverbs and elsewhere about marriage and the family because the family is the foundation of the community and of life.

Genesis 2:24 requires a man to leave his parents and cleave to his wife. This does not require a break with the parents, but it does mandate that he is now the head of a new family and must cleave to his wife, assuming that she is a godly woman. Deuteronomy 24:5 makes

it clear that marriage is a break for the wife. She is now under her husband's authority; life has a different pattern, one that depends on her husband and his calling.

During the first year of marriage, the husband cannot be recruited for civil or military service. While the text does not specifically bar him from working to maintain a farm, for example, it seems to require a minimal amount of work because his duty is "to cheer up his wife." The meaning in the Hebrew is to "brighten up" or "make joyful." The text does *not* mean that the bride is unhappy with her marriage but that the husband strives to make sure that for his wife the new relationship is a privilege and a blessing. For both the personal and the national well-being, it is important for the bride to be happy and trusting. To be otherwise is to blight the marriage.

The bridegroom *cannot* be involved in military or civil duties. This is a requirement of very great importance because it clearly indicates the priority of the family to the nation. Religious institutions are not mentioned, because crises in such spheres are a rarity, whereas crises in national life are commonplace. No national crisis can take precedence over the new marriage. Because the family is most important in God's sight, it must always be protected. The Vulgate gives an interesting reading: the groom shall "rejoice (or, take pleasure) with the wife of his youth."¹ He is free, literally, "for his own household." He has a duty under God to establish a family as a physical and spiritual entity. J. A. Thompson wrote, "Such a law is out of place in a modern state," but he recognized that the law gives priority to the family over the state.²

James Moffatt's rendering of Deuteronomy 24:5 is interesting:

When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go on active service with the army, nor shall he be called upon for any enterprise; he shall be free at home for one year, to be happy with the wife he has taken.

God's purpose in His law is not restrictive but expansive; its purpose is to give us happiness and freedom in Him. James calls God's law "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25; 2:12). The law of God is for our protection, happiness, and liberty.

¹ H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 270.

² J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, [1974] 1978).

This freedom under God's law is not anarchic: as Keil and Delitzsch pointed out, "Free shall he be for his house for a year."³ The focus, *for his house*, means for the new community his marriage establishes.

In Numbers 4:23, 30, the service of the Levites is described, in English, as "to perform the service," or, literally, as the marginal reading has it, "to war the warfare." To do God's work is holy warfare. The various kinds of service cited in our text are aspects of our holy warfare. It tells us much about the importance of marriage and the family that exemption from such service is mandated by God during the first year of marriage. The term "holy matrimony" is a relic of such a view.

In Deuteronomy 20:5ff. exemption from military duty is given to betrothed men; here it is given to newly married men, and it is from more than military service.

We come now to two important aspects of this law. It reads, "when a man taketh a *new* wife," meaning that this applies to more than a first marriage. It can apply to remarriage, as to a widow. It is valid for a remarriage in which the children of both the man and the woman can be young, or they can be of age and themselves married. The law applies to any and every marriage.

Second, John Gill, citing Maimonides, stated that the exemption from public duty meant an exemption from all taxation for a year. In fact, we are told that this was a law Aristotle learned from the Jews and taught to Alexander the Great. Alexander, after the battle of Granicus, sent his newly married soldiers home to winter with their wives and then return in the spring.⁴ This fact of exemption from all public service *and* exemption from taxation tells us how serious this law is. We have an echo of this law in the tax deduction a man gains on marrying, and then for each child. It is a means of stressing the value of the family. In the biblical form, this stress makes clear the priority of the family in civilization. It is the primary bearer of faith and culture. When church and state seek to separate faith and culture from the family, both suffer.

The law declares that the man shall be "free at home one year." He is to enjoy himself and develop his calling and his marriage. He is

³ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 3, *The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949 reprint), 419.

⁴ John Gill, *Gill's Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, [1852-54] 1980), 780.

free from extraneous duties; he is not to travel. He is to be *at home* for the year.

It is clear from this law how important the family is in God's sight. This law is to us unusual in its stress on the family and very different from what we find in other cultures.

Chapter Seventy-Nine

The Protection of the Helpless (Deuteronomy 24:6)

No man shall take the nether or the upper millstone to pledge: for he taketh a man's life to pledge. (Deuteronomy 24:6)

This is a very important law. It is in a sense related to Deuteronomy 20:19-20, which forbids destroying an enemy's fruit trees because whatever is a "man's life," whatever is basic to his continuing existence, must be spared; beyond a certain limit, we cannot wage war against an enemy.

In this text, the reference is to millstones, used by people to prepare their flour for the family's daily bread. These millstones were two, the bottom one stationary, and the top one moving over the lower one to grind the grain. The bread made was whole-grained, highly nutritious, and a basic part of man's diet. The Lord's Prayer speaks of "our daily bread" and refers to this whole-grained food.

To take away the millstones as pledges on a loan was comparable to taking away a man's life. His mainstay in surviving would be gone. Loans made to the poor could not require that the essentials of eating and working be taken from them.

This law is an absolute prohibition on loans that would require pledges or pawns that would prevent a man from eating or working. The terms of a loan must not degrade a man nor cripple him. If character is an insufficient security, then nothing else is morally valid.

To degrade the needy is strictly forbidden. If it is a charitable loan, then no interest can be charged. In Exodus 22:25-27, the law reads:

25. If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.

26. If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down:

27. For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious.

This law in Exodus speaks of the Hebrew poor, the covenant people. The law in Deuteronomy makes no such restriction. It can be a loan to a foreigner, but, all the same, there can be no demand for a pledge or pawn that endangers his life, health, or security. Very commonly,

over the centuries, the money-lender has not only specified what he will hold as pawn but has entered the poor man's house to pick and choose what he will take. God outlaws this practice.

In Nehemiah 5:3, 5 we read that some Jews who became money-lenders seized not only their clients' lands, houses, and children but also exhibited thereby that they had learned the Babylonian money-lending practices very ably.

The whole grain was ground daily and bread was made and eaten immediately. Very commonly, the bread, besides being the mainstay of the diet, was used to wrap the cheese, olives, and other ingredients of the meal. It was in effect the plate and the food.

This is a law against oppression. The legitimacy of money-lending is not denied, but the necessity of morality in so doing is stressed. Poverty is a form of weakness, and no man has a right to exploit or to abuse the weak. Here again we have a law of kindness. God's law rejects the concept of a hard, legal indifference to compassion and mercy. This law is at the same time an aspect of family law. The millstones in a house were used by women, usually two, as they prepared the grain for use. The millstones were a basic part of the family's equipment and life.

There are references to violations of this law in various texts. In Job 22:6, Eliphaz accuses Job of violating this law, apparently without any grounds for doing so. Amos 2:6-8 describes the evil Israelites and their contemptuous violation of this law. There are references to this law also in Proverbs 20:16, 22:27, and 27:13, but they deal basically with the foolish lender.

The demand for a collateral that is unjust is a violation of justice, and God's laws require that justice and mercy prevail in every sphere of life, including the economic realm. We have enjoyed some of the consequences of such laws in the past, and now we are losing them. It is noteworthy that the Greeks and the Romans had similar laws during one stage of their histories.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:10, it is very bluntly stated that, if a man will not work, neither should he be fed. Biblical law militates both against a parasitic attempt to exploit charity, and any heartless attempt to exploit the poor. The borrower's feelings and needs must both be respected.

"A man's life" is at stake, we are told. The literal reading is "a man's soul." Power should not be used to humiliate and degrade others, and

wealth is a form of power. It is interesting that Jeremiah 25:10 sees the sound of the millstone as comparable to joy, comparable to “the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle.” This was indeed a law for the protection of the poor, but also for the protection of the quality and dignity of life. Jeremiah’s reference makes it clear that the sound of the millstones was one of the familiar and loved sounds of family life. It meant not only survival but also the richness of a family’s life. The literal reading, “a man’s soul,” is clearly indicative of this fact. Statist welfarism may be generous to a family, but it is destructive to its soul. This is the meaning of this text: we cannot strip a family of its dignity and freedom.

The prohibition is total: “no man,” and, by implication, no human agency, shall take away the necessities of a man’s livelihood. We have a faint trace of this law in modern bankruptcy laws which allow a man to retain his home when he enters bankruptcy. The origin is clearly in biblical law at two points: 1) the limitation on debt to six years and no more, and 2) this prohibition on the use of the necessities of life as collateral. This means that they cannot be taken from him. If the millstones cannot be taken, then by implication neither can the house. In some of the older Christian cultures, land and homes can only be cash purchases. This prevents the buyer from risking the loss of the family’s house.

The Scottish version of the millstones, called *guern*, were in use at least into the late 1800s, and like instruments could be found in northern Europe in rural areas.

To remove the millstones prevented a man from living, and it also made it impossible to repay his debt. Thus, to loan money and require a collateral that made life difficult was a way of eliminating the poor man.

We cannot appreciate the significance of this law unless we recognize that, again and again, people in power have wanted the elimination from society of the poor and needy. Various rationales have been used to suggest that the country would be better off without the poor, the homeless, and the drifters. Instead of conversion, the solution is seen as elimination. Rich and poor, capitalists and workers, blacks, whites, and others, have been the target of such policies. Our century alone gives us many revolting instances of such “solutions.”

This text is against all such beliefs. We cannot treat the poor as nothing. They are made in the image of God, and, like us, they need salvation, and they need our covenantal mercies and help. We cannot treat a man's life and welfare as nothing.

Chapter Eighty

“The Stealer of Life” (*Deuteronomy 24:7*)

If a man be found stealing any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and maketh merchandise of him, or selleth him; then that thief shall die; and thou shalt put evil away from among you. (*Deuteronomy 24:7*)

This law is a restatement of Exodus 21:16, but with a difference. The Exodus law bans the slave trade and requires a mandatory death sentence for anyone engaged in the practice. In *Deuteronomy*, the law specifies “the children of Israel,” i.e., no covenant member could be enslaved. Both texts refer to forcible enslavement, and thus both foreign and native enslavement are banned.

There is an exception to this law, in that anyone unable to pay a debt was required, if he could not repay it, to work it off as a bond-servant. The length of such a servitude was brief. Since debts were limited to six years, any unpayable debt would be a fraction of the six years.

In the Ten Commandments we are told very bluntly, “Neither shalt thou steal” (*Deut. 5:19*). If the theft of property is very strictly forbidden by many texts in the law, how much more is the theft of people banned? This applies to young and old, male and female. This is a very strong statement of the ban.

The main purpose of kidnapping in antiquity was enslavement. In our time, the purpose is to gain ransom, and, in many cases, it is a political reprisal and at the same time a demand at times for money, or for the release of criminal prisoners.

In the Hebrew, the kidnapper is called “the stealer of life.” This term explains why the death penalty is required.¹ To steal a family member is to destroy the life of the person stolen and also to shatter his family. The kidnapper, the enslaver, is “the stealer of life.”

The Code of Hammurabi had a similar law: “If a man has stolen the son of a freeman, he shalt be put to death,” or, in the translation of Theophile J. Meek, “If a seignior has stolen the young son of

¹ Anthony Phillips, *Deuteronomy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 161.

a(nother) seignior, he shall be put to death.”² The difference is a very substantial one. The Code of Hammurabi made such kidnapping and enslavement illegal only where a freeman or seignior, or a nobleman, was involved. In Hittite law, for example, freemen had exemptions from various penalties because of their status:

194. If a free man cohabits with (several) slave girls, sisters and their mother, there shall be no punishment. If blood-relations sleep with (the same) free woman, there shall be no punishment. If father and son sleep with (the same) slave girls or harlot, there shall be no punishment.

200 (A): If a man does evil with a horse or a mule, there shall be no punishment. He must not appeal to the king nor shall he become a case for the priest. — If anyone sleeps with a foreign (woman) and (also) with her mother or (her) sister, there will be no punishment.³

In such cultures, criminal law restrained the lower classes and gave license to the upper classes. As against this, biblical law protects everyone. The freedom of Christendom cannot be explained apart from God’s law. From the alien law codes of antiquity we see that the life of most people was unrelieved exploitation. When scholars talk about the similarity here of God’s law and Hammurabi’s Code, they falsify history. Kidnapping for enslavement was a common part of non-Christian cultures even until recently and is far from gone now.

A man’s freedom means security from theft and from enslavement. Modern enslavement is often indirect. It can be by taxation, by the destruction of sound money, and by various other means. P. C. Craigie called attention to an important facet of this law:

Stealing the life — the crime is social murder, for though the victim does not literally die, by being sold into slavery he is effectively cut off from the covenant family of God. Hence the penalty for the crime is severe — death! To cut a man off from the covenant community was to cut him off from sharing in the blessing of God for his people in the promised land.⁴

² Code no.14, in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, trans. Theophile J. Meek (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, [1950] 1955), 166.

³ *Ibid.*, 196-97. Trans., Albrecht Goetze.

⁴ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 307.

The two versions of this law make it clear that "stealing the life" of any man, covenant or non-covenant, is an offense against God. In Deuteronomy, there are three laws, essentially two, that do not equally protect the foreigner and the Israelite. The *first*, in Deuteronomy 14:21, has to do with diet. The non-covenant man is free to eat as he chooses. The *second* and *third* laws, Deuteronomy 15:3 and 23:20, deal with loans. Long-term loans to nonbelievers can be made. They have no Sabbath premise, no belief in resting in God, and therefore long-term debt is a way of life for them.

This law declares that the kidnapper must die. Whether or not the victim was restored to his or her family, the act of stealing and enslaving a person cut him or her off from the family. Therefore, "the life of the kidnapper must also be cut off."⁵

Normally, the targets of kidnappers would be the poor. To steal someone from an important family would mean the possibility of immediate pursuit and capture. This law therefore protects the poor; it protects families who had neither the means to pursue the slaver nor the importance to arouse the authorities to quick action. By making enslavement a capital offense, it made pursuit and capture more important to the civil authorities. It is a curious fact that the rabbis limited the meaning of this law. They held, "The victim must have been seen by witnesses in the hands of the kidnapper *and* also have been sold, before the crime was punishable by death."⁶ This is a curious fact; it does not include the victim's testimony.

A man could sell himself into a voluntary servitude, but no other man could sell him. Men can and do enslave themselves, but this does not entitle other men to coerce them into slavery.

This text was used by the English clergy in fighting against and ending the English slave trade. As one great Christian leader of that era, Thomas Scott, wrote,

Christianity has annihilated that distinction of nations, which, for typical and political reasons, was during a time established; and in this respect every man is now our brother, whatever be his nation, complexion, or creed. How then can the merchandise of men and women be carried on, without transgressing this commandment, or abetting those who do? An inhabitant

⁵ Louis Goldberg, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Lamplighter Books, 1986), 127.

⁶ J. H. Hertz, ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London, England: Soncino Press, [1936] 1962), 308.

of England, if he stay at home, and steal a horse, or a sheep, is condemned to death, but if he take a voyage to Africa, he may steal, or purchase of those who do steal, hundreds of men and women, and not only escape with impunity, but grow great like a prince. According to the law of God, whoever stole cattle restored four or five fold; whoever stole one human being, though an infant or an idiot, must die. May we not call upon British legislators to rectify this flagrant abuse? — Since this was written, the author, with tens of thousands more, has to bless God, that this expectation has been answered, in the abolition of the slave-trade, by an act of the legislature; but further powerfully coercive measures are still needful, fully to accomplish the benevolent design.⁷

For many offenses, God requires no punishment by human agencies but reserves that power to Himself. In this instance, the state must exact the death penalty. According to Calvin, “For we know how God appointeth punishments accordingly as he esteemeth of the greatness of the sin which is committed.”⁸

The death penalty is required, and, we are told, “and thou shalt put evil away from among you.” God does not see it as sufficient for us to live morally by separating ourselves from the evils of our time. We must be a force for good; we must work to eliminate the evils of our time. Multiculturalism in our day rejects the legitimacy of Christianizing the world; this is seen as cultural aggression. Our enemies reserve, however, the right to wage war against God and us. The Bible requires us to “put evil away from among” us. We are told that there are capital offenses, and, if we do not triumph over the evil ones, they will triumph over us.

The biblical phrase, “the stealer of life,” tells us that many analogous ways of stealing life exist. These do not entail the death penalty, but they are still very important for us to forestall.

In his study, *Enslaved*, Gordon Thomas has shown that slavery is more prevalent now than ever before, for labor, sexual use, and to use body parts in surgery. There has been no public outcry over his findings. We have in our time a false agenda, inherited from the French Revolution and its demand for *liberty, fraternity, and equality*.

⁷ Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible, ...with Explanatory Notes, etc.*, vol. 1 (Boston, MA: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1830 ed.), 578-79.

⁸ John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth Trust, [1583] 1987), 84-85.

There can be no liberty nor fraternity if equalitarian goals are pursued, as they have been, aggressively. Equality denies men the freedom to excel; all are reduced to the lowest common denominator. This makes fraternity dangerous, because fraternity is naturally partial and exclusive. Scholars enjoy most the fellowship of other scholars; artists feel closer to other artists, and so on. Equality denies men this privilege. As a result, equality becomes a very divisive force in society.

Chapter Eighty-One

Quarantine and Community (Deuteronomy 24:8-9)

8. Take heed in the plague of leprosy, that thou observe diligently, and do according to all that the priests the Levites shall teach you: as I commanded them, so ye shall observe to do.

9. Remember what the LORD thy God did unto Miriam by the way, after that ye were come forth out of Egypt.
(Deuteronomy 24:8-9)

This text concerns “leprosy”; the word as used in the Bible includes a variety of infections, one of which is the leprosy we know today. This leprosy, called Hanson’s disease, was near the disappearing point before World War II. Now, especially with the influx of aliens from Southeast Asia, it is on the rise. However, even as we as a nation have rejected the biblical requirement of quarantine for AIDS, so too we have abandoned it for leprosy.

One commentator has observed of our text, “Primitive societies typically see disease as a religious matter.” The question is one of ultimacy. Today we are approaching a state of mind where *virtually everything* is a *political* matter. Can we honestly regard as “primitive” or backward those who view all things as essentially religious? Is it not being backward and primitive to see all things politically? It is an aspect of the stupidity of the modern mind that it sees nothing as wise except itself. This is provincialism of an amazing kind.

This law, as do others, makes a quarantine mandatory. There always has been a tendency to relax the law where the wealthy and the powerful are concerned. God allows no such exemptions, and we are reminded that not even Miriam, sister to Aaron and Moses, was spared.

Morecraft has pointed out,

God identifies Himself as the God who separates His people from other peoples. Therefore, separation (including Christian intolerance of other religions and gods) is a basic principle of Biblical law, with respect to religion and morality.¹

Morecraft is very much to the point. When God separates us to Himself, more separation must follow. We then separate ourselves

¹ Joseph C. Morecraft III, *A Christian Manual of Law: An Application of Deuteronomy* (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Christian Training Center, n.d.), 75.

from evil, both moral and physical evil. Quarantine thus is a logical consequence in the medical sphere. Being a Christian does not make us immune to being killed by a fire, or from drowning. We avoid dangers instead of courting them, and, where God requires a separation, we make it.

Another commentator has said that this law has as its purpose increasing the priestly power. We are told, in v. 8, "do according to all that the priests the Levites shall teach you." All this does is to say that the priests had authority as public health officers, nothing more. The search for supposedly primitive motives and goals leads scholars to curious absurdities. The basic meaning is very different. As Keil and Delitzsch so ably commented:

The thought here, therefore, is, "Be on thy guard because of the plague of leprosy," *i.e.*, that thou dost not get it, have to bear it, as the reward for thy rebellion against what the priests teach according to the commandment of the Lord. "Watch diligently, that thou do not incur the plague of leprosy" (*Vulgate*); or, "that thou do not sin, so as to be punished with leprosy" (*J. H. Michaelis*).²

Leviticus 13 and 14 give us the laws on leprosy. This text is a reminder of those laws, and a summons to *take heed* unto them. It is a warning not to be overconfident that one will not acquire the contagion. Infections have more than a simple physical cause. They *can* have a moral cause. Miriam was stricken because of her rebellion. To assume that a naturalistic causality marks all things is false. If God is what He says He is, the Maker of heaven and earth and all things therein, He is the ultimate cause of all things and can be an immediate cause.

The fact that God ordains this law means that God is telling us that our health is important. We cannot morally be justified if we abuse our bodies and play havoc with our health.

From our Lord's words in Luke 17:14, we see that this law was still enforced in our Lord's day (as indeed it was in medieval Europe). The priests had to pronounce a healed leper clean or there could be no return to normal life. It is absurd to state, as some do, that priests then functioned as doctors. There were physicians in both Old and New Testament eras. It was a *religious* requirement that quarantine be instituted and also ended by the priests. Civil authorities then and now

² C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 3 *The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949 reprint), 420.

are governed by political considerations, and, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, we have seen rules of quarantine set aside for political reasons. In the Bible, however, we see Miriam and, centuries later, King Uzziah segregated from others because of their leprosy. This religious character of quarantine provided an additional, although not infallible, check against the political abuse of the law.

There is another aspect to the biblical law of quarantine, namely, membership in the community is not a right: it is a privilege. If membership is a "human right," then quarantine, and any form of exclusion, is morally wrong. Then, too, excommunication becomes a violation of a "right." There can be given the premise that membership in the community is a "human right," not exclusively male or female, Protestant or Catholic, white, or any other kind of exclusive organization. Given the humanistic premise of "human rights," we are seeing the rise of legal bars against exclusionary rules. John Dewey saw, in *A Common Faith*, an antidemocratic and illegitimate character in biblical Christianity because of the division of peoples into the saved and the lost, the good and the evil.

It should not surprise us that quarantine laws have been dropped all over the world. If homosexuality and AIDS are not grounds for barring people from society, or from a job, or from serving food in a public eating place, then how can any form of separation and segregation in terms of faith, common loyalties, or common interests be maintained?

In the history of Christendom, the emphasis on community has at times extended to the dead. An excommunicated man, or a suicide, for example, could not be buried in a churchyard, in hallowed ground. This seems cruel and arbitrary to the modern mind, but it simply meant that the holy community was a very serious fact to its members.

This fact of community has faded for us. At one time, it had momentous meaning. Monasticism was in medieval Europe held for centuries in very high esteem because the monks prayed as representatives of the whole Christian community. Men outside the monastery knew that the monks were praying as their representatives. In the Book of Common Prayer, there is, in both morning and evening prayer, "A Prayer for all Conditions of Men," a petition for the entire community.

Because the community has been so important a fact over the centuries, excommunication, or any form of ban, was seen as a form of death. The community means life as against death.

It is especially important that even the lepers of old upheld the community that barred them from membership. These lepers cried out to all who approached them, "Unclean, unclean" (Lev. 13:45). They thereby *protected* the community from themselves. It was God's community, and the life of their loved ones who were healthy, that they safeguarded. Thus, even the outcast lepers protected the community, whose center was the sanctuary and the God thereof. If God be removed from this community, there remains only a collection of random persons, unconnected and without an overriding faith and loyalty. The lepers of old who cried unclean had a greater sense of community than the godless men of our time.

It should be apparent now how much modern culture has stripped man of community and of meaning. Confronted by a simple rule that indicates the implications of community and of separation or segregation, men see this as an obsolete rule of quarantine and no more. We are morally and intellectually self-impooverished.

A final note: We have had a form of quarantine in the imprisonment of guilty men. The evidence indicates that this too is breaking down under the influence of humanistic equalitarianism. John Dewey's demand for the destruction of all divisiveness in society is in process of following its inner logic. If there be no good nor evil, if we are to live in a world stripped of moral discrimination, why have courts, and why have prisons?

Chapter Eighty-Two

“A Righteousness Unto Thee” (Deuteronomy 24:10-13)

10. When thou dost lend thy brother any thing, thou shalt not go into his house to fetch his pledge.
11. Thou shalt stand abroad, and the man to whom thou dost lend shall bring out the pledge abroad unto thee.
12. And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge:
13. In any case thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee: and it shall be righteousness unto thee before the LORD thy God. (Deuteronomy 24:10-13)

This law is related to Deuteronomy 24:6, the prohibition against taking as security or collateral on a loan anything that is essential to life. In this instance, on loans to the poor, whether business loans or charity loans, certain rules are established. *First*, the lender cannot determine the specific pledge or collateral to be given. He cannot go into the house to pick and choose what he wants as his collateral. This would humiliate the borrower. As long as an adequate security be given, the lender must be satisfied. This stipulation applies to any kind of loan, a charitable non-interest loan or a business loan at interest. Being a lender gives no man privileges over another. In those days, a man who loaned money often went to the borrower's house to pick and choose his collateral. This is still done in many places.

Second, a common pledge was a man's outer tunic. This protected him against the cold or heat, and, with the very poor, it was commonly used as a sleeping blanket or cover. To demand this garment as a pledge against debt was to limit his ability to live. The best surety in debt is a man's character.

This outer garment provided protection against both cold and rain. Moneylenders not only took this garment in pledge but they also used them in contempt of the owners. Amos tells us that such moneylenders, fathers and sons together, would go to a pagan fertility cult altar and use the garments taken in pledge as a pad to lie on while using a prostitute (Amos 2:6-8).

This law sets down a premise which has had a major impact in Christendom. When, in colonial America, Judge James Otis decreed that “a man's house is his castle,” he had reference to this law. Intrusion into a man's house is a violation of his freedom. God's

law protects a man from the malice and interference of powerful men. To protect men's houses and properties is to uphold God's order, because God has established the legitimate boundaries of the family's jurisdiction and freedom.

A little thinking tells us what this law prevents when obeyed. When a money-lender can enter a house to choose his collateral, he can, with a practiced eye, inventory the contents of the house. It is then possible for him to urge the borrower to ask for more than he can repay. By this means, he can in time seize various valuable assets.

For its own purposes, in various countries now, inventories of a man's house are required by the tax collector, or by the census bureau. By this means, the state knows more than it has a legitimate right to know, and it can plan to use that knowledge lawlessly.

To use Peter C. Craigie's excellent term, this law "means that a man can borrow with honor."¹ If a man is deserving of a loan, he is a man to be respected, not humiliated. Anthony Phillips commented, "The Israelites' attitude to their neighbours was a direct result of their understanding of the character of their God."² Having received the grace of God, we must manifest grace towards other men.

A letter written ca. 625 BC makes it clear how common the practice of seizure at will of collateral by money-lenders was in antiquity:

May my lord, the commander, hear the word of his servant. As for your servant, your servant was harvesting in Hasir Asam; and your servant harvested, took measure, and arranged its storage according to custom before the sabbath. When your servant had measured the harvest and stored it up according to custom, Hawshyahi, son of Shobay, came and took the garment of your servant. When I had harvested this harvest of mine according to custom, he took the garment of your servant. And all of my brothers can testify for me, those who were with me in the heat of the sun. My brothers can testify for me! Truly, I am innocent of guilt. Return, please, the garment of mine. And if it is not for the commander to return the garment of your servant, show mercy to your servant and do not drive him away.³

¹ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 308.

² Anthony Phillips, *Deuteronomy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 163.

³ Richard Clifford, S. J., *Deuteronomy, with an Excursus on Covenant and Law* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier Inc., 1982, 1989), 130-31.

This letter vividly illustrates the helplessness of men under lawless rulers. This law was against the oppression of the poor. Where such oppression occurs, in time the circle of the oppressed grows to include the non-poor. If the immunity of any group in society from tyranny be breached, in time the tyranny will reach all.

When the poor are oppressed, Exodus 22:27 says of them, that God says, "when he crieth unto me, ...I will hear; for I am gracious." God repeatedly declares Himself to be the God of widows, orphans, and the helpless.

Calvin held that gifts to God of funds received in violation of this law were not acceptable:

For if we think to pay God by offering him this or that which we have spoiled from our neighbours, he will detest and abhor both us and our offerings also. For why? God will not change his nature according unto our lust: and there is nothing more properly belonging unto him than kindness and goodness. For he indeed is the very fountain and root of it. And therefore seeing it is so, must he not either transfigure himself, or detest us, when he shall see us cruel as wild beasts, so as every of us endeavoureth nought else but to devour the substance and goods of his brother?⁴

It is important to remember that in word and in deed, Calvin was very mindful of the poor in society.

Over the centuries, money-lending has been a major form of oppression. There is no culture where the money-lender is not resented and hated. God's law, however, requires that mercy and charity be exercised in this sphere. Very plainly, the law does not expect either the borrower or the lender to be victimized. The purpose of the law is mercy and justice.

Robert Jamieson said, of the outer garment cited in this text, "The ordinary size of them is six yards long and five or six feet broad, bearing a close resemblance to the plaid of the highlander."⁵ At one time, both kilt and tunic served a common purpose.

Verse 13 tells us two things in the latter half. *First*, if the lender is godly and honest, the borrower will *bless* him. This is a somewhat

⁴. John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth Trust, [1583] 1987), 852.

⁵. Robert Jamieson, "Deuteronomy," in Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary ...on the Old and New Testaments*, vol.1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982 reprint), 679.

startling statement for us. What the law requires is that a money-lender, whether making a charitable loan to a fellow believer, or a business loan to an unbelieving foreigner, be a godly and honest man. God does not expect the money-lender to lose money but to be honest and just. The result will be a furthering of God's holy order, and the borrower will bless the helpful and honest money-lender. God does not want a conflict society but a harmonious one.

Then, *second*, to obey God in this respect, as in others, "shall be righteousness unto thee before the LORD thy God" (v. 13). In Deuteronomy 6:25, we are told,

And it shall be our righteousness if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us.

According to Sir George Adam Smith this means

... that righteousness here does not mean goodness, uprightness, but rather justification, vindication, the right to live, and by consequence their life itself.⁶

In other words, life is a privilege, and we can live it only on God's terms, His law. The rabbis of old held that *righteousness* meant *alms*.⁷ This meaning also prevailed in medieval Europe and in the Reformation. The privilege of life is validated by our faithfulness to justice, mercy, and community.

⁶ Sir George Adam Smith, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, [1918] 1950), 104.

⁷ J. R. Dummelow, ed., *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York, NY: Macmillan, [1908] 1942), 133.

Chapter Eighty-Three

Justice versus Process (Deuteronomy 24:14-15)

14. Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates:

15. At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee. (Deuteronomy 24:14-15)

When I was a boy, this law was still commonly applied to farm labor. Where short-term jobs were involved, such as pruning, picking fruit, turning raisin trays, and the like, farm workers were paid daily. School children from neighbouring farms were paid when the work was done because their parents wanted the wages in a lump sum to be saved.

This was ended when federal laws required taxes to be withheld, forms to be filed, and work permits (for children and teenagers) to be secured. Payment then was by checks. In some areas, “minority” peoples would refuse a job if the pay were not in cash. A centuries-old practice was ended when for taxing purposes statist intervention governed the employer and worker. We can assume that abuses existed under the old system. All the same, the worker was usually free to leave one farmer for another, and he often did so.

This law appears also in Leviticus 19:13. The hired man’s capital was his ability to work. His major asset is abused whenever an employer can postpone payment, because postponement means that the settlement of the account occurs when it is too late to act against it.

The phrase in v. 15, “at” or “in his day” means the day of his labor. A deferred payment means the depersonalization of a man and his work. Under the present system, neither the employer nor the worker control both the character of the work and its pay, and both are harmed thereby.

When the Roman Empire took over Judea and Galilee, its centralized authority made it easier to overlook this law. As a result, the wealthy, both Jews and aliens, were able to use the fact that Roman law now took priority over God’s law to exploit workers. The

brother of our Lord, James, gives us a clear statement of the evil that resulted:

1. Go to now, ye rich men, and weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.
2. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.
3. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.
4. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.
5. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.
6. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you. (James 5:1-6)

James prophesies judgment on these peoples, and it came in the Jewish-Roman War, AD 66-70. He sees their costly garments, their gold, and their silver as worthless against their day of condemnation, and their assets will eat their flesh like fire. They would be the especial target of the vengeful and conquering Romans. Their sin was postponing payment until protests by the workers would have no effect.

God hears the cry of these poor because He is a compassionate God. Laws manifest a theology; wherever we find law, we find there also a doctrine of community and of ultimacy. What and who is ultimate is always revealed by a body of laws. Biblical law manifests the God of justice and grace, of mercy and wrath. As we read in the Ten Commandments,

5. ...for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;
6. And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. (Ex. 20:5-6)

God's judgment and grace are tied together as aspects of His justice and care. The poor are told to look to God rather than to man for justice.

Many commentators, because of their modernism and their evolutionary perspectives, are convinced that this law, Deuteronomy as a whole, and most of the Pentateuch were actually written centuries after the time of the exodus and of Moses. Their premise for this is evolutionary: they cannot believe that as far back as Moses's day such

“advanced” thinking was possible. Because of their Darwinian belief, men back then were for them still semi-brutish, and wisdom was born only as man reached some proximity to the Greeks and Romans!

But morality is not a product of evolution but of a true and regenerate religious faith. If we begin on Darwinian premises, but fail to recognize the possibility of devolution as a companion of evolution, we will then be forced to believe that history goes onward and upward. Man is moving to Teilhard de Chardin’s omega point; it is advancing because evolution by definition means an advance.

In terms of evolutionary theory as applied to the Bible, neither its supernaturalism, nor the morality of the law, is possible; it is held that a slow, developing humanity, by expediency, trial and error, or tyrannical imposition, acquired its moral and legal framework, that no supernatural revelation is possible because power evolves from below, not from above.

Another aspect of this law is cited by Matthew Poole, namely, “justice must not be denied or delayed.”¹

Any delay in justice, whether in the courts or in daily life, is morally wrong. The nature of the political process in our time is alien to a quick justice, or to justice at all.

It should be apparent by now that all law has a source and a context. Its source can be the state, or it can be God. Its context can be a state bureaucracy or a godly community and the Kingdom of God. Law rests on certain presuppositions. At its extremes, this can be the natural goodness of man, or it can be the total depravity of man. If man is naturally good, then his institutions, the state and its bureaucracy, are also good and can be trusted with power. If man is fallen and sinful, then neither he nor his institutions can be trusted, because sin permeates all things. God’s law alone can be valid, and a decentralization is necessary in society to preserve it from tyranny. The rise of modern tyranny has accompanied the belief in man’s goodness, as it did with Renaissance humanism.

This does *not* mean that decentralization eliminates tyranny; far from it. Evil seeks power on all levels. A decentralized society at least limits the scope of evil. Apart from regeneration, it is always there, and triumphant. With regeneration, its scope is progressively limited, and it is placed under control.

¹ Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, vol. 1 (McLean, VA: Macdonald Publishing Co., reprint n.d.), 384.

There is also the time factor to be considered. Delayed justice undermines law and justice alike. Justice is then delayed with an endless process. Men condemned to be executed for their crimes are still sitting in jail cells ten and fifteen years later pursuing continuing and repetitive appeals when there is no reasonable doubt as to their guilt. The appeals are usually based on the technical details of their conviction. The requirement that there be justice is subordinated to the demand that the process be observed rigidly. We have, clearly, an inordinate faith in the legal process rather than in justice. It is not unreasonable to insist that this too is an aspect of the Darwinian worldview. Evolution replaces the creative act of God with an endless process, and, since Darwin, the world has enthroned process over justice. It would appear that faith in justice has given way to faith in process.

Chapter Eighty-Four

Justice and Responsibility (Deuteronomy 24:16)

The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin. (Deuteronomy 24:16)

As far as I know, this is one of the many texts basic to Christendom that is still without an adequate history. It was once commonplace to kill an entire family for a father's crime, or to punish a clan or tribe for the offense of one man. This was the premise of clan warfare and of feuding.

We meet with this law in 2 Kings 14:5-6, where we are told of King Amaziah of Judah,

5. And it came to pass, as soon as the kingdom was confirmed in his hand, that he slew his servants which had slain the king his father.

6. But the children of the murderers he slew not; according unto that which is written in the book of the law of Moses, wherein the LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

This same incident is cited in 2 Chronicles 25:4, and the law is referred to in Jeremiah 31:29-30. Ezekiel 18:19-20 is a strong statement of the same law:

19. Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live.

20. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

The law is also stressed by Jeremiah 31:29-30, and Ezekiel 18:2 and 4. This is a basic premise of biblical justice: personal responsibility. There can be no justice without it.

Over the centuries, it has been common to punish and execute an entire family, or a village, for the sin of one member. Such an incident preceded World War II. It was routine with many a European

monarch to push men to confessing their crimes, real or fancied, to avoid having their family's properties confiscated. There was no certainty this would follow, but, if they confessed, the king *might* allow the property to remain with the family. Henry VIII used this strategy, for example, and it made him feel morally "right" that his victims pleaded guilty as charged.¹ Some prisoners often praised the king fulsomely to gain his favor for their family.

We see now, in the later years of the twentieth century, the rigorous use of this evil practice. Various U.S. agencies use it routinely. For example, when parents reported that their son, still living at home, used drugs, the federal agents seized and confiscated his parents' home.

It is this kind of practice that this law legislates against. Two kinds of problems are involved. *First*, the state can seize the property because they are confiscating private wealth. This is very common. *Second*, the state can seize properties in order to undermine and destroy its critics.

Critics commonly oppose to this text Deuteronomy 5:9:

Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them [graven images], nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation to them that hate me.

The difference between the two texts, however, is an important one. *First*, Deuteronomy 24:16 forbids man, the state, or any human agency to punish innocent persons for some family member's sins. *Second*, Deuteronomy 5:9 tells us that the *social consequences* of sin can endure for generations. There is no contradiction between the two laws. Sin is a personal act; God's judgments can affect all of us, or generations of men.

In Hammurabi's Law, we see the kind of evil which God's law corrects:

229. If a builder constructed a house for a seignior, but did not make his work strong, with the result that the house which he built collapsed and so has caused the death of the owner of the house, that builder shall be put to death.

¹ Joseph Allen Matter, *Rule by King or Rule by Law* (New York, NY: Vintage Press, 1979), 50.

230. If it has caused the death of a son of the owner of the house, they shall put the son of that builder to death.²

The rationale behind the executions of entire families was that it would eliminate a group who would seek vengeance. The hanging of Haman's sons in Esther 9:13-14 may have been an example of this. It is possible, however, that they were active with their father in his offenses. We do not know.

There is another important aspect to this law which ancient Hebraic scholars set forth. This law insists on *personal* as against corporate responsibility. No relative of a guilty man can be punished for his sins. On the other hand, the family cannot be used to testify against the person on trial. However, there is an ostensible exception to this law in Deuteronomy 21:18-21, which requires parents to join in on the trial of an incorrigible son; in this case, however, the crime is known and demonstrable; the family's role is to side with justice rather than blood.

Our contemporary laws which bar testimony by a family member, as a wife against her husband, come from Deuteronomy 24:16.³ Families may and do have internal dissension and divisions, but the state can never legitimately compel the members thereof to testify one against another.

I have heard of ironic consequences of this law against testimony by a family member. At times, marriages have remained outwardly intact because the man cannot afford to have his wife divorced and free to testify against him. She is in effect bribed to remain in the marriage.

The comment of P. C. Craigie on this verse is a telling one:

This short piece of legislation makes clear a principle underlying all the law in Deuteronomy, namely, that the presence of law, and the requirement that it be obeyed, placed upon every man a responsibility for his actions, both within the covenant community and before God.⁴

² James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, trans. Theophile J. Meek (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, [1950] 1955), 176.

³ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 5, *Deuteronomy*, trans. Isaac Levy, 2nd ed. rev. (London, England: Judaica Press, [1966] 1982), 489.

⁴ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 310.

Responsibility is a moral and a religious fact. *Wherever Christianity is undermined, so too is responsibility; the return to paganism is a return to injustice.* There is another aspect to this law. The family is not only a biological entity but a moral and religious one as well. Even in our time, with all the assaults on the family, it remains very much a unity. In spite of this fact, God requires that we see responsibility as personal; if more than one family member is involved in a crime, each must be tried in terms of his or her personal complicity.

This law imposes a limit on the power of the judges and the state. Guilt and virtue are personal facts, and the duty of the court is to ascertain personal guilt and no more. To hold family members guilty of the offense of one is to dilute and in effect deny the validity of responsibility.

Both in antiquity and in our time, people have preferred to believe in collective guilt. Thus, it is commonly assumed by many that war guilt can be ascribed to all Germans and Japanese; that the European major powers were evil colonial exploiters; that the white race, or the black, is evil and demonic, and so on. This law requires us to be *specific* about offenses, and *specific* about guilt. Precisely because criminal offenses are so serious, we cannot be other than specific in the charges. The concept of victimhood means that the family, society, the environment, heredity, or anything can be blamed. This dilutes responsibility and trivializes offenses, because the guilt is then so widespread that it is meaningless. Responsibility is replaced with victimhood and justice is undermined.

This law has been important to the development of freedom in Christendom. By making guilt personal, it frees us from paying a grim price for what we did not do. Our departure from this law means that people not involved in an offense can be blamed for it. It means racism and class warfare, because it transfers sins from persons to peoples and classes unconnected with the crimes. We are far gone in our departure from this law. The churches must proclaim it so that we can be a free people. A basic component of freedom is that you pay for your own offenses, not another man's.

Chapter Eighty-Five

Justice and World Law (*Deuteronomy 24:17-18*)

17. Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge:

18. But thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee thence: therefore I command thee to do this thing. (*Deuteronomy 24:17-18*)

These two verses are concerned with a very common emphasis in the law, the prophets, and the gospels. In *Deuteronomy 10:17-19*, God identifies Himself as one who loves the fatherless, the widows, and the aliens; He pays no attention to wealth or status; His judgment is in terms of His law-word. In *Exodus 22:21-24*, God promises judgment against persons and nations who exploit such peoples (see also *Ex. 23:6*). *Proverbs 22:22* states the same, as do other *Proverbs*. *Isaiah 1:23*, *Jeremiah 5:28*, and other texts stress this also.

This law is not addressed to the judges, rulers, kings, or civil powers but to the people. Neither charity nor justice can exist in any country if they do not exist in the hearts and lives of the people. Although the civil authorities must administer justice, its beginnings are in the lives of the people. The law of God thus governs the private and public life of the people so that justice may begin with each and every man. Only then can it exist in the civil authorities. The state has no part in charity, which means that, unless the people are charitable, the society will be a cold and heartless one. Nothing in this indicates that statist welfarism is to be adopted. Statist welfarism is impersonal; it insists on the "right" to be cared for, and it propagates dependency and social disintegration.

It should be apparent by now that to all but the most prejudiced *Deuteronomy* is a remarkable book. It summarizes the law of *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, and *Numbers*, and, in the process, highlights the remarkable unity of law and love, of justice and mercy. It militates against evolutionary beliefs in the primitivism of Old Testament faith and life. It centers the hopes for a society in the faith and life of its families, for the book is a series of addresses to the covenant families. *Deuteronomy* clearly offers a solution which fallen man rejects.

The goal of nations throughout history has usually been power, and power is seen as the ability to control and manipulate other

peoples. As against this dream of power, God offers the covenant life, grounded in the justice of His law. This is rejected because, openly or covertly, God is rejected.

Three classes of helpless people are cited: the orphan, the widow, and the alien. In a society whose goal is power, the helpless will at least be neglected if not exploited. If welfare is given, it is to silence guilt or protests, and welfarism divides peoples. Charity unites them because it is personal and religious.

In this context, the concern is justice. Justice requires that the weak and defenseless be protected from injustice. Justice is the duty of godly kings and rulers (Ps. 72:12-14) and of all society (Deut. 10:18; 27:19; Ex. 22:22; 23:6-9; Lev. 19:33; etc.). Israel should remember that they were once helpless and exploited in Egypt (v. 18), and their redemption was God's work. All the redeemed of God should remember that their standing and prosperity is of God's grace, and it can be withdrawn at any time.

Society cannot long exist nor flourish without justice. At the foundation of all social orders is a hope of realizing a just social order. Those social orders that neglect justice in due time undermine their own foundations. Fallen man's nature makes him very prone to injustice, and the society he creates shows the same disposition to evil. As a result, the fall of man is replicated in the societies he creates. The fall is thus a repeated act because men refuse to acknowledge what they are, and where their hope lies.

There is an interesting aspect to this law which goes back to the rabbis of old. The requirement that these helpless people be given justice was seen as meaning help to them in court. The premise led to what we now call the "public defender," although his modern purpose has strayed somewhat.

Especial attention is called to the widow's raiment: it cannot be taken as a pawn or security. No man's loan to a widow gave him any ground to humiliate or degrade her.

The marginal note in the Geneva Bible for this text reads, "Because the world did least esteem these sorts of people, therefore God hath most care over them."

Two words are used in contrast here: *pervert*, and *remember*. It is a curious juxtaposition and a interesting one. It is not the contrast that would come to our minds. As against the perversion of justice, we are to remember our own need for justice. Justice cannot exist in

the abstract. Having received it, we are to give it to others. If we have not received it (and Israel did not get justice from Egypt), all the more we should be dedicated to gaining justice for others.

The ultimate and only true source of justice is God the Lord. If we reject His laws of justice, we cannot expect God to be mindful of us.

This law is an aspect of God's laws of justice. In the main, three concepts of justice have governed men. *First*, for biblical faith, justice is God's nature and law. Justice is an expression of God's being and is therefore the inescapable standard over all things. God gives us His law as the rule to live by. Justice is thus in essence supernatural because a fallen, sinful world cannot be just. It expresses injustice in all its ways, and, whatever its pretenses, a hostility to justice.

Second, some see law and justice as the expression of Nature, and they speak of natural law. This view, even in its church-related formulations, has an inherent contradiction. How can a fallen world give us a law? We can agree that there is a law *over* the universe, and that this law is operative within the universe, but it is God's law, not Nature's. At a conference where a professor expounded on natural law as the world's and freedom's home, one man asked, "What does natural law say about adultery?" The professor dismissed the question as "irrelevant."

Natural law is usually invoked to evade God's law while having some transcendental reference. The *specifics* of natural law cannot be agreed upon. There is no given body of natural law.

Third, law can be purely the expedient, temporal, and changing law of nations. It has no eternal validity, and it is pragmatic in purpose. There is no absolute good nor evil, right nor wrong. If God's law is not the overruling government over all things, then some kind of super-state must provide it. As a result, a world of statist law-making bodies soon seeks to create a fiat world law, a world court, and a world state. If there be no God with a governing law over all things, then a man-made world order must replace Him.

Thus, the alternative to God and His law is inevitably a humanistic law and world order.

Chapter Eighty-Six

Community and Charity (Deuteronomy 24:19-22)

19. When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands.

20. When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

21. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

22. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing.
(Deuteronomy 24:19-22)

We have here another statement on the law of gleaning. Because “the earth is the LORD’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1), God legislates our use of the earth’s bounty. In Leviticus 19:9-10, gleaning is described. The land-owner is required to leave the corners of the field unharvested, so that the gleaners can have the grain; the vineyard must not be picked clean for the same reason. In our text, this law is expanded. A dropped sheaf of grain must be left for the gleaners. Fruit trees, such as the olive, cannot be picked clean. The same is true of things like grapes.

The landless poor must be allowed to come into the field and glean. Since the gleaning was of the remains after a harvest, it was harder work to glean than to harvest. At times, as the book of Ruth tells us, the gleaners worked behind the harvesters. Because of this, the owner could tell his crew to leave a little extra behind for the deserving person. According to Ruth 2:15-16,

15. And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not:

16. And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.

At least until World War I, this practice still existed in Palestine. Some commentators insist on seeing gleaning as related to pagan practices of leaving the last sheaf to the spirits who ruled the fields. This

is so remote from gleaning that the idea of relating the two practices seems to be an act of mental and moral dereliction; the reason for so doing is the determined Darwinian perspective. Everything is caused from below and is an act of primitivism, not a mandate from God.

In 1 Kings 21:1-16, we see how Naboth, in terms of God's law, saw his farm as an inalienable property, which he could not sell. It belonged to his forefathers, and to the generations yet to come. God's law governs the land and its use, so that the harvest is an aspect of godly charity and community.

The protection of the helpless is the duty of all, and gleaning is one aspect of this protection. Goodwill urban gleanings are a modern application of this law.

God makes it clear (vv. 21-22) that charity and justice to the helpless is very important to Him. In vv. 17-18 *justice* to the aliens, to orphans, and to widows is required; in vv. 19-22, the requirement is *charity*. God's law links the two together. A mistake made by many commentators is to assume that this law was addressed to "wealthy landowners." Nothing in the text limits this law to the prosperous farmer; it is addressed to all. Verses 20 and 21 say that the things specified "shall be for" or *belong to* the deserving poor. Because gleaning is very hard work, harder than harvesting because it is much work for limited returns, the undeserving poor over the centuries have preferred begging to gleaning. Gleaning enabled the gleaners to retain their self-respect: it was not a matter of shame to be a gleaner but a manifestation of character.

Two reasons are stated to motivate obedience to this law. *First* (v. 19), God will bless the faithful in all the work of their hands, in every area of their life and activity. *Second*, the fact that they were once in bondage should make them ready to help the helpless. In Clifford's words, they will be blessed "in remembering that the land is not theirs by right but by grace. Its yield is a gift and gifts are best shared."¹

D. Davies observed of this law,

If a man is not generous toward his poorer neighbours in time of harvest, he will never be generous. If the profuse generosity of God be lavished upon him in vain, his moral nature must be hard indeed.... As men "make hay while the sun shines," so should we yield to benevolent impulses while God surrounds us

¹ Richard Clifford, S. J., *Deuteronomy, with an Excursus on Covenant and Law* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier Inc., [1982] 1989), 132.

with sunshine of kindness. As we are undeserving recipients, we should share our unpurchased bounty with others.²

It is a moral obligation to help the weak and the helpless where we can. We are told, in Leviticus 25:23,

The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me.

This tells us, *first*, that the land belongs to God and cannot be disposed of at our will, because, *second*, the land belongs to God, and therefore we live on it at His pleasure and on His terms. *Third*, before God we are like the poor and the helpless, transient peoples here on earth. God is the landlord, and His terms for our tenure on earth are unchanging and nonnegotiable. The marginal note to this text in the Geneva Bible reads, "God judged them not mindful of his benefit, except they were beneficial to others."

The practice of gleaning became an aspect of Christian life. Although a much neglected subject, we have a vivid reminder of it in Millet's famous painting, "The Gleaners." To many people of our father's generation, this painting was a vivid reminder of a Christian practice in Europe, America, and elsewhere. Calvin, in a very moving sermon, declared that God declares, in this text, to men,

The land you have is mine, and I have granted it unto you with condition that I shall receive at leastwise the rents and services. God therefore in token of a kind of homage, reserveth unto himself, the gleaning and other things for the poor that come after to gather the grapes and the olives which are left behind. God sayeth that these are royalties which belong unto him, and that he giveth and bestoweth them on such as have need: and therefore, that the rich men ought not to be grieved therewith, as if they had lost any thing, or as if their own goods were taken from them: for God saith, all is mine. Yet see then in effect which is here contained. Now let us note well, that God meaneth not that the poor should be in such wise relieved, as that the rich should be spoiled of that which they possess. For what a confusion and disorder would that breed? We must therefore note, that God leaveth unto every man whatsoever he possesseth, either by way of inheritance, or by buying, or by any other just and lawful title. And hereby the poor are warned, not to ransack or make havoc of whatsoever cometh in their way, as many do, which think they may snatch away any thing

² D. Davies, in H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 391.

by good right, so they be not punished by law, nor have any to witness against them.³

A marked characteristic of the ancient city, and of cities up to the military use of gunpowder, was the city wall, to protect the city from enemies and marauders. Walls are protective devices. What we are now seeing is the walled individual. A lawless society is making self-protection necessary. Houses are in various ways safeguarded with guns, security systems, and dogs. We are instructed on how to drive an automobile in dangerous areas. The reason for this is both the rise of crime and the breakdown of community.

Biblical law requires godly instruction on all levels of society so that the peoples may be trained in the ways of justice. At the same time, it requires a concern for the helpless in society.

Douglas Murray has reminded me that the California Hollanders farming in the San Joaquin Valley have long been strong advocates of gleaning. They were reported for this, a few years back, and were consequently severely penalized by insurance companies. With mechanization, gleaning became easy and profitable. A mechanized cotton picker leaves more than half the cotton in the field; at the end of the tomato season, the mechanized harvesting is similarly inefficient. However, a large-scale farmer would see his insurance costs more than double if he permitted gleaning.

Because even trespassers who injure themselves while attempting to rob a farm collect large sums from the owner, insurance costs in this, the dark age of our history, are heavily penalized for their Christian charity.

In the modern world, and too often the church, charity is left to the state and to human impulse; God's law is forgotten. But man's impulses are sinful, not godly. To have a just society, we must be charitable as God requires it. There have been, throughout history, not too many eras of grace and peace. All the same, men have lived in and survived very trying and evil times when the grace of charity has been present. It is a witness to community. A community without charity is quickly dead.

³. John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth Trust, [1583] 1987), 865-66.

Chapter Eighty-Seven

The Stable Society (Deuteronomy 25:1-3)

1. If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked.
 2. And it shall be, if the wicked man be worthy to be beaten, that the judge shall cause him to lie down, and to be beaten before his face, according to his fault, by a certain number.
 3. Forty stripes he may give him, and not exceed: lest, if he should exceed, and beat him above these with many stripes, then thy brother should seem vile unto thee.
- (Deuteronomy 25:1-3)

Corporal punishment does not loom large in biblical law, but it is all the same an aspect of it. On the world scene, then and later, corporal punishment could be very brutal, in fact, even fatal. This was not the case with this penalty. In practice, *first*, the beating was soon limited to thirty-nine stripes, because it was possible that a mistake in counting might be made. *Second*, it was not permissible to degrade the man, lest “thy brother should seem vile unto thee” (v. 3). The punishment was for a minor wrongdoing. It established the fact of a transgression, but its purpose was correction and restoration, not humiliation and degradation. The words, lest “thy brother should seem vile unto thee,” have been rendered by some as “lest thy brother be dishonored publicly,” or “to thine eyes.” This beating *must* be in the presence of the judges to ensure its proper execution, without malice or undue violence. The offense was a minor one, and care was taken to prevent it from turning into a serious beating. God’s law not only names the crime but also the punishment, and man’s wrath cannot go beyond God’s limits. According to C. H. Waller,

The punishment was not considered to be any degradation, after it had been inflicted. It was inflicted in the synagogue, and the law was read meanwhile from Deuteronomy XXVIII.58, 59, with one or two other passages.¹

The text cited, Deuteronomy 28:58-59, reads:

¹ C. H. Waller, in “Deuteronomy,” in C. J. Ellicott, ed., *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, reprint, n. d.), 67.

58. If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD;

59. Then the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance.

Sickness, epidemics, and plagues have their immediate medical causes, but their ultimate cause is God. Thus, all, including the person punished, must see the execution of justice in cases great and small as a means of preventing God's judgment on the whole people. The punishment of individuals protects both them and all society from God's judgment.

In Deuteronomy 22:18 we see that a man who falsely impugned his wife's chastity was similarly to be beaten as well as fined heavily. In such cases, there was a double penalty, a heavy fine and also a public beating.

The purpose of the beating was both punishment and restoration. All wrong-doing is a violation of God's order, and the restoration of that order requires the punishment of the wrong-doer *and* the restoration of community. This aspect of the law survived in practice at least until World War II. If two men in a small community were in conflict, the community and the pastor required a public restoration. If two boys began to fight on a school ground, a teacher came over to insist that they shake hands when the fight was broken up. We often forget how the law of God has reached into everyday events in our past.

In v. 2, we are told that the judges shall sentence the guilty man "according to his fault, by a certain number." The punishment could thus be a very light one, only a stroke or two. Historically, if the convicted person were an alien, orphan, or widow, and, while guilty, acted under provocation, this mitigated the penalty.

As against this, some peoples have intensified the humiliation of punishment as much as possible. Thus, "The Turks, when cruelly lashed, are compelled to return to the judge that commanded it, to kiss his hand, to give him thanks, and to pay the officer that whipped them!"² When the Turks treated fellow Turks so harshly, we can begin to understand their depravity towards Christians. Severe beatings

² C. Clemance, in H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n. d.), 394.

often led to the loss of bodily functions and the public humiliation of the victim. This was and is often the goal of excessive punishment. God's purpose is the punishment of the wicked, not their degradation and public shame. The judge or judges had to witness the beating. If the person being beaten clearly showed an inability to take the punishment, the judge had the power to stop it at once. The presence of a judge was more than a formality: he was there as a judge. His presence meant that he was responsible.

According to John Battersby Harford, the punishment was inflicted on the soles of the feet, and this rule restricted its severity.³ The purpose was justice with mercy.

Unhappily, too many Western nations developed in time harsh alternatives to this. Thomas Scott tells us that English law saw "the excessive severity of inflicting several hundred lashes for one crime."⁴ Men seek for better results by trying to be wiser than God, with hellish results.

We find references to this law in Matthew 10:17 and Acts 26:11. In these instances, offenders against the faith were beaten in the synagogues. According to Dummelow, in addition to Deuteronomy 28:58 and 59, Psalm 78:38 was read at the beating.⁵

This text, stressing mercy, reads,

But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.

Verse 2 refers to the guilty party as one "worthy to be beaten." The Hebrew text reads, literally, "a son of beating." Some people require such punishment to keep them in line. We have referred to the savage beatings once a part of British law. Under Turkish and Chinese law of old, death was a common outcome of such punishment. The presence of the judge and the strict limitation on the number of strokes makes God's law a humane and merciful one. The beating was not administered with any lethal whip or similarly ugly weapon.

³ John Battersby Harford, "Deuteronomy," in Charles Gore, H. L. Goudge, and A. Guillaume, *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture* (New York, NY: Macmillan, [1928] 1929), 164.

⁴ Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible, ...with Explanatory Notes, etc.*, vol. 1 (Boston, MA: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1830 ed.), 580.

⁵ J. R. Dummelow, ed., *A Commentary on the Whole Bible* (New York, NY: Macmillan, [1908] 1942), 133.

God's law requires death for incorrigible criminals and for a number of very serious crimes. Restitution prevails in all other cases, except some, where only corporal punishment is required. In Deuteronomy 22:18, a heavy payment in restitution and a beating were required.

The purpose of God's law is to eliminate the incorrigible and to restore the other offenders to their rightful place in society. Together with restitution, this serves to keep society, when the law is kept, in the hands of the godly. Wherever God's law is set aside, the control of society shifts into the hands of the ungodly. God's law is thus basic to a stable and virtuous social order.

Chapter Eighty-Eight

The Unmuzzled Ox (Deuteronomy 25:4)

Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.
(Deuteronomy 25:4)

This is a verse with a long history of attention and neglect. If it were used as often as it is cited, the world would be very different.

This text is cited more than once in the New Testament. Although St. Paul supported himself, he insisted on the duty of Christians to support their leaders. In 1 Corinthians 9:7-11, he writes:

7. Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?

8. Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also?

9. For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?

10. Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.

11. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?

Paul declares that a soldier must be paid, a farmer or a rancher gain a living from his work. God's law requires that an ox threshing corn is entitled to have some corn. The point of this law is that, as creatures, we are dependent upon our work for our sustenance. As a result, those who work as ministers of the word of God are entitled to be paid for their work. If the law of Deuteronomy 25:4 validates the duty to feed the ox, how much more does it not vindicate the paying of God's servants? Paul again discusses this law in 1 Timothy 5:17-18:

17. Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

18. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.

Paul, in the final sentence, was quoting our Lord's application of this law in His charge to the disciples:

9. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses,
 10. Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.
 (Matt.10:9-10)

The word translated as “scrip” in v. 10 refers to a leather pouch for carrying food. In other words, our Lord requires those ministered to that they *fully* support the ministers. When Paul speaks of those who minister well that they receive “double honour,” the Greek word translated as honor means both *pay* and *honor*. Thus, double pay is required. Paul uses this law of Deuteronomy 25:4, as does our Lord.

It is very clearly a law about payment for work. The value of the work must determine the pay. All work must be rewarded, but, because there is a gradation of importance, there is a gradation of pay. Now God knows that what we truly *want* we will pay dearly for. His concern is that we recognize that in the things we *need*, the ministry of His word in particular, we recognize our moral obligation to pay well for. Paul does not mean, in 1 Corinthians 9:10, that God’s only focus is on us. Deuteronomy 22:6-7 make clear His protection of even birds. Rather, the point is that God’s law here requires us above all else to see our duty to our fellow men. We have an aspect of this law in Proverbs 12:10:

A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.

There is a clear-cut pattern here. We are told that the practice of gleaning is required by God, and that animals that help with the work must be permitted to eat freely. No “right” to glean is given to the poor; there is a *duty* to permit gleaning. Thus, both the needy persons and the working animals are required by God to be provided for. No man can live unto himself or only for himself in God’s law.

This law is basic to what we now call “labor relations.” Morecraft summed up the matter very ably, stating, “Animals are not to be ‘robbed’ of what is due them. How much more heinous is it to rob a man of the honor or wages due him.”¹

We have here an important premise with respect to the treatment of animals, and at the same time the treatment of all workers. We need to look again at 1 Corinthians 9:9-10, where Paul insists that this law is given “for our sakes.” The meaning is that, important as

¹Joseph C. Morecraft III, *A Christian Manual of Law: An Application of Deuteronomy* (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Christian Training Center, n.d.), 79.

the fair treatment of animals and people certainly is, obedience to God is more important. For the sake of our growth in the faith and our growth in obedience, God requires that we be mindful of the ox, and of all animals. His laws are “for our sakes” in order that we may live a happier and more blessed life.

A few people have used this text to say that the worker should share in the profits. Nothing of the sort is even implied. We are simply commanded to be just in the recompense of both animals and men.

Thomas Scott’s observation on this text is noteworthy:

Kindness is due, not only to men, but even to the beasts, and every living creature which contributes to our ease, pleasure, or advantage, should receive from us such reciprocal satisfactions as it is capable of, in proportion to the benefits conferred: much more then should servants and laborers be suitably recompensed; and, by parity of reason, ministers, who are instrumental to men’s salvation, should be maintained comfortably at their expense.²

What Scott is affirming is a harmony of interests under God of men, and of men and their domestic animals. This harmony is a *moral* harmony, whose premise is God’s total and providential government. The direction of humanistic thinking is to stress a radical conflict of interests. Darwinism has done much to promote this belief in conflict, because it is a presupposition of the idea of natural selection and the struggle for survival. The influence of the evolutionary ideology has been anticapitalistic because of this stress on conflict. We have, as a result, racial, economic, and political conflicts all over the world. Freedom has receded in the twentieth century because of these conflicts. In an evolutionary universe, there is only struggle and conflict; truth is tentative, and the development of man may render each day’s truth irrelevant in the days to come. We live in a world of conflict, not under God’s harmony, according to this perspective.

Our legal systems have echoes of this and other laws, but they are all steadily eroding. We are moving into a culture of the muzzled ox and the muzzled man. Freedom is associated by the modern mind with license, not morality, and the desire for freedom has come to mean the desire to sin.

². Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible, ...with Explanatory Notes, etc.*, vol. 1 (Boston, MA: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1830 ed.), 581.

We have thinkers who claim to be Christian who insist on seeing God and Christ as *process* in terms of Darwinian thinking.³ In such thinking, the Trinity of orthodox faith is gone, and so too is God's law. What we have instead is a cosmic process. Is it any wonder that the followers of such thinking have been the pioneers of our present lawlessness: no God, no law, no truth, no true morality? The wasteland surrounds us. The unmuzzled ox is a reminder of God's order and harmony.

³. Ewert H. Cousins, ed., *Process Theology: Basic Writings* (New York, NY: Newman Press, 1971).

Chapter Eighty-Nine

The Levirate (*Deuteronomy 25:5-10*)

5. If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her.

6. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel.

7. And if the man like not to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother.

8. Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him: and if he stand to it, and say, I like not to take her;

9. Then shall his brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother's house.

10. And his name shall be called in Israel, The house of him that hath his shoe loosed. (*Deuteronomy 25:5-10*)

This is certainly one of the more upsetting texts in biblical law for modern man. It goes against the grain for modern men and women. It must be granted that it is alien to almost everything in our culture, so that, to understand it, we must know the context.

In biblical law, the family is the basic governmental unit. The family is the law center in a biblically governed society, and it is the source of charity and education. The normal life is family life. Unattached men, women, and children are alien to such a culture. Church and state do not have the centrality belonging to the family.

For modern man, society cannot exist without the state. In terms of God's law, society cannot exist without the family. Biblical law does acknowledge the need for civil society, but the state's importance is not equal to that of the family.

In terms of this, the perpetuation of the family is very important because it is the foundation of society. The book of Ruth illustrates this. When Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem, we read "that all the city was moved about them" (Ruth 1:19). Elimelech, Naomi's

deceased husband, had a parcel of land needing redemption. The kinsman of Elimelech who bought the land had the duty of marrying Ruth and rearing a successor and heir for Elimelech.

That successor born of a levirate marriage could be male or female. Lacking a qualifying male heir, girls could inherit, as Numbers 36 makes clear. The levirate marriage served a double purpose. *First*, it kept the family intact by providing an heir, and, *second*, it kept the land within the family.

The Bible's rigorous concern for the family name and the land clearly stress the material nature of biblical faith. Spiritual religion comes from Greek Neoplatonism, not the Bible. The godly family leaves an imprint on the physical creation because biblical faith is land oriented, work oriented, and family based.

Levirate is a word derived from the Latin *liver*, meaning "brother-in-law."

In some circles, notably Orthodox Jews and the Hutterites, the levirate marriage is still practiced. In the New Testament, there are references to it in Matthew 22:23-28 and Luke 20:27-33. There was no compulsion to fulfill one's levirate duty, as vv. 8-10 make clear, but there was shame in the failure. The reason for refusal we see in Ruth 4:1-8. In that instance, the next of kin to Elimelech hoped to gain Elimelech's land, but not at the price of marrying Ruth. He had apparently hoped that Ruth as a foreigner would not qualify, and he would then gain the land. The elders obviously thought otherwise.

Clifford's comment calls attention to the place of the shoe, vv. 9-10, in this law:

Legal deeds were often accompanied by gestures which showed dramatically the reality of the legal exchange. When one sold a piece of property, for instance, one handed one's shoe to the buyer, showing that the right to walk on the property as its owner has been given up to the buyer. Here the surviving brother lets the land slip out of family control; this is equivalent to transfer of ownership. Hence the stripping off of the sandal. The law in Deuteronomic fashion is concerned with the land which the Lord gives, emphasizing how disgraceful it is not to pass the land on to the legitimate descendants.¹

¹ Richard Clifford, S. J., *Deuteronomy, with an Excursus on Covenant and Law* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier Inc., [1982] 1989), 132.

Until recently, i.e., this century, in many areas of the world land had been in the family for centuries, and the protection of the family's land was essential. Land meant freedom, and for a man to be unwilling to perform his levirate duty meant a disavowal of his duty. He was called a shoeless man, or the unsandalled one. He had placed freedom and family low in his estimation. He therefore deserved to have the widow spit in his face. For him, individual goals were more important than family responsibility. To assume that this law tells us that the ancient Hebrews were less individualistic is a sorry assumption because its premise is that this law comes from folk customs rather than from God. The use of the shoe to transfer property was an ancient one, used in northern Europe and elsewhere.

A levirate marriage was regarded as a continuation of the previous one. The firstborn son was then legally the son of the dead man, or, lacking a son, the daughter. When Ruth gave birth to a son by Boaz, it was *legally* Naomi's son, and Naomi named the boy Obed (Ruth 4:16-17).

We can understand the continuing importance of this law to Orthodox Jews when we see that Samson Raphael Hirsch, in his commentary on *The Pentateuch* ([1966] 1982) took from pp. 505 to 517 to discuss it.

In v. 5, "child" is properly son, but, if no son is born of the levirate union, the daughter succeeds. Numbers 27:4 and 36:8 indicate a daughter could claim the inheritance. In the book of Ruth, there is an additional factor: not only is there no child, but the land has been alienated and must be redeemed.

There is a very important aspect to this law which again eludes the modern man. The need for a son, or, lacking that, a strong husband for a daughter, points to an important aspect of marriage, protection and care. A wife or mother requires protection, because the world, being fallen, is exploitive of the weak and the helpless. The woman is protected, and the land is maintained.

We must remember that in the Bible there is no property tax because "the earth is the LORD'S" (Ps. 24:1). This means that to protect the family and to retain the land is to maintain freedom. The family property is in God's sight comparable to an independent realm or kingdom. In the days of power for monarchies, an unbroken succession meant safety for a realm. So too for the family kingdom: its freedom and succession as a realm had to be maintained. In

this context, the family is the freedom center, and its maintenance and perpetuation critically important. Today, this law is a curiosity, but in a free, family-based society, it would again have its place. Strong family-based societies like the Scots practiced the levirate into the medieval era.

We have a reference in Genesis 38:8-10 to this levirate practice early in history. Contrary to the contemporary view that this is a callous treatment of women, it was protective of women in that it assured the permanency of their protection where and when this practice was maintained.

Finally, there is another aspect of the loosening of the shoe to be considered. The man who refused to assume his levirate responsibility was guilty of irresponsibility because his thinking was personal and self-centered. There were many such men and too few like Boaz. The many references in the Bible to the needs of widows tell us that irresponsibility was commonplace. Especially if property were involved, it was sometimes simpler to let the widow die and then redeem the property, or inherit it. Then every man can operate in terms of self-interest, and social cohesion collapses.

The premise of this law is that the family under God is a key law center and radically essential to society's life and welfare. Apart from this fact, this law is not understandable. Men are God's appointed guardians of His law, and to remove by death the head of a household was a threat to society in that an agent of the law was missing, and a law center, the family, broken.

In antiquity, we find a variety of law centers, from the family and father as in early Rome, to the state, as in Babylon. In all instances outside the biblical revelation, the power is absolute; freedom, as a result, did not exist. In biblical faith, the law center is *the family under God*. The preservation of the family thus was the preservation of the law order at the most basic level. It is because for modern man the law center is the state, and man and the family are made increasingly powerless that the levirate seems so remote to us. The modern condition is one of a radical separation of power from man and the family by means of statist laws and by taxation into impotence and irrelevance.

When colonial Judge James Otis said that every man's house is his castle, he echoed biblical law, wherein a man's house and land are nontaxable, and patriarchal man is a law center. We have echoes of

such a law order in the still existing power of the citizen's arrest, something unique to a Christian culture. As against this, we now have a land and property tax, women's "rights," and children's "rights." All this leads to the emasculation of man. The biblical position is not one of *rights* but of *duties*, duties towards God and man.

The modern mind's focus with respect to this law is on the sexual aspect, whereas God's law places the family and mutual responsibility at the center. The difference between the two approaches is very great.

Chapter Ninety

The Limits on Pity (Deuteronomy 25:11-12)

11. When men strive together one with another, and the wife of the one draweth near for to deliver her husband out of the hand of him that smiteth him, and putteth forth her hand, and taketh him by the secrets:

12. Then thou shalt cut off her hand, thine eye shall not pity her. (Deuteronomy 25:11-12)

This is a startling law because it is the only instance in biblical law where mutilation is mandatory. [See *publisher's note on p. 426.*] Although common in pagan law, it is normally banned in God's law, which means that this exception requires careful attention.

First of all, we need to recognize the nature of the offense. Two men are fighting; no limitation is made about the cause. One man could be a thief, or an enemy ravaging the countryside behind the lines of battle. The assailant could also be a friend or neighbor, and the men are in a drunken brawl, or disagreement has led to the fight. The law applies whatever the cause may be.

Second, where such incidents as this wifely intervention have taken place in various cultures, the woman's purpose is usually to end the fight by castrating or maiming her husband's opponent. Such things are not normally written about or publicized, but they occur and are vicious to the extreme. The woman's motive in taking part is not a friendly one. Such intervention has taken various forms: the use of hands, the use of blows with a stick, and even a burning torch or a heavy burning stick pulled out of a fire. All forms of attack are covered by the text.

Third, in Exodus 21:18ff. we have laws governing cases of assault. In all these cases, damages are paid to the injured party. Besides being the only case where mutilation is required, the offense is seen as a very serious criminal case. The man's ability to have children can be affected by the woman's behavior. Even if this does not occur, her offense still requires this heavy penalty.

Fourth, some scholars have seen this act as "the violation of a very sacred taboo."¹ What the taboo was, and where it existed, such men

¹ Sir George Adam Smith, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, [1918] 1950), 289.

cannot say. It is simply their belief that such statements are somehow good scholarship and science. Others see this as “a typical case of feminine *immodesty*.”² It is hardly typical, nor is such a statement good scholarship.

But this is not a case of immodesty, and, if we view it as such, we miss the point. It is rather a case of lawlessness. We live in God’s creation and in His world of law. We have no right to set His law aside when our interests are threatened. It is easy to see how, in such a battle, in some cases the man’s life might be threatened, and the woman’s intense fear and anger aroused. This gives her no right to do what under no circumstances is valid, i.e., to strike at a man’s manhood. Extreme conditions gave her no right to break the law of God. In Morecraft’s words, “Faith requires staying within the Law of God.”³

Fifth, this law is best understood in relation to Exodus 21:22-23:

22. If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman’s husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine.

23. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life.

The law with respect to the woman in our text deals with a *deliberate* offense. In Exodus 21:22-23, we have an *accidental* abortion. Two men are fighting, and, in the process, a pregnant woman is so injured that a miscarriage follows. The man whose fall or action causes the miscarriage is liable even if there is a safe delivery of a live child. Death to either the mother or the child means a murder charge: “life for life.” These two laws, Exodus 21:22-23, and Deuteronomy 25:11-12, tell us how seriously offenses against life are regarded by God. Sadly, the rabbis reduced the penalty for the woman to a monetary fine.⁴

Sixth, the most common statement by commentators, older and recent, is that we have here an offense against “decency” or “delicacy,” and an example of female “immodesty.” All such comments are irrelevant because there is no higher law of decency; what we have here is God’s law. To violate God’s law is as high or low as one can

² H. Wheeler Robinson, *Deuteronomy and Joshua* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. C. & E. C. Jack, n. d.), 183.

³ Joseph C. Morecraft III, *A Christian Manual of Law: An Application of Deuteronomy* (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Christian Training Center, n. d.), 80.

⁴ Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz, trans., ed., *Sforno: Commentary on the Torah*, vol. 2 (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1989), 833.

reach. It is an offense against God who created life and who sets all the boundaries of human action. The fact that God forbids such action is enough; it is absurd to bring in ideas of modesty, delicacy, and decency. Such feelings cannot maintain a culture nor foster reformation. What is alone efficacious is obedient faith.

Seventh, this law concludes with the statement, "Then thou shalt cut off her hand, thine eye shall not pity her." Pity can become at times a deadly sentiment *if* we pity evil and are unwilling to see justice done. In early 1994, *some* people were upset over the sentence of flogging meted out by the Singapore court to an American youth. Although 91 percent of Americans approved the sentence in one poll, a vocal 9 percent held that it was too harsh. The more important question was this: was it *justified*? It was a known penalty for certain offenses.

In Deuteronomy 7:16, God orders the conquest of Canaan to be, unlike other campaigns, one of a radical nature, declaring,

And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee.

The words *pity* and *compassion* are used interchangeably in the Bible; they translate the same Hebrew and Greek words in most cases. Because God is the Lord and alone man's Savior, His pity or compassion alone defines grace and salvation. No contrary saving power can accompany man's pity or compassion, and it is dangerous to think so. This means that man must only exercise pity or compassion under God. Not to do so is presumptuous and evil. We are, for example, to be compassionate towards widows and orphans (Ps. 146:9; James 1:27). The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) instructs us in the meaning of godly compassion. God's compassion is governed by His sovereign wisdom and grace; our compassion must be governed by His word and law. In Zechariah 7:9-10 we are told,

9. Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother:

10. And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.

Our text makes it clear that we cannot show pity or compassion where God's law requires judgment. God ordains the limits on pity, not man. This seemingly minor text is a very important one and requires more attention.

Publisher's note:

Dr. Rushdoony commented that the words *translator* and *traitor* have a common root, and that a translation of the Hebrew or Greek can fail to do justice to a text's original meaning. He was not averse to adjusting his work in terms of the best conservative scholarship available. Three years after his death, a strong case for correcting the translation of Deuteronomy 25:12a was finally put forward. It is possible that Dr. Rushdoony would have embraced the newer translation and adjusted his comments accordingly. While we do not have the benefit of his having done so, given the time frame involved, the nature of the translation change is important enough to warrant mention here.

The words "cut" and "hand" in the translation "cut off her hand" are somewhat unusual ("hand" in particular). The word normally used for "hand" is the Hebrew *yad*, used in verse 11 immediately before this verse, but in verse 12 we find the more rare word *kaph*. *Kaph*, derived from *kaphaph* ("curve"), denotes the bowl of a dish, or the leaves of a palm tree, or even the socket of the thigh (used twice in this sense in Genesis 32), as well as the palm of a hand. Recent scholarship points out that this word is a circumlocution for the groin. The word "cut" (*kawtsats*, from *kawtsar*) is used in Jeremiah 9 and 25 for cutting off the beard, being based on an Arabic root for cutting the nails or hair, in addition to other ranges of meaning (including the reaping of a field). In sum, a defensible translation for Deut. 25:12a, in lieu of "cut off her hand," would be "shave [the hair of] her groin." As Semitic scholar Jerome T. Walsh phrased it, "She has humiliated a man publicly by an assault on his genitalia (presumably without serious injury to them); her punishment is public genital humiliation, similarly without permanent injury." This translation, as Walsh points out, reduces "the severity of the punishment from the permanency of amputation to the temporary humiliation of depilation." Consequently, the punishment addresses both the principle of the *lex talionis* (proportionality of punishment) and "the shameful nature of the woman's deed." Had actual injury ensued, the assault would have been covered by the well-known biblical laws concerning compensation for injury rather than this passage.

If Walsh's thesis is borne out, there would remain no scriptural support for the idea that the Bible teaches mutilation as punishment anywhere. If Walsh's view (despite very strong support on lexical and philological grounds) is ultimately rejected by conservative scholarship, the position Dr. Rushdoony advanced in the relevant two chapters of this commentary would stand as is. In either case, Dr. Rushdoony's thesis that pity must always be subordinate to God's law remains perpetually true: false pity always promotes lawlessness.⁵

⁵ For further research on the translation of this phrase, see the *Journal of Semitic Studies* 2004 49(1): 47-58, copyright 2004 by the University of Manchester: the article entitled "You Shall Cut Off Her... Palm? A Reexamination of Deuteronomy 25:11-12" by Jerome T. Walsh.

Chapter Ninety-One

Life and Pity (Deuteronomy 25:11-12)

11. When men strive together one with another, and the wife of the one draweth near for to deliver her husband out of the hand of him that smiteth him, and putteth forth her hand, and taketh him by the secrets:

12. Then thou shalt cut off her hand, thine eye shall not pity her. (Deuteronomy 25:11-12)

This is not a favorite text of feminists. It does not help matters to call attention, as Roy Lee Honeycutt Jr. does, to the fact that “immodest assault on another person was prohibited, but probably more for the religious overtones of sexuality than for immodesty.”¹ We shall return to those “religious overtones” later. Biblical law is almost routinely against mutilation, which, historically, has been one of the most common forms of punishment, yet, in this case, it is *required*. [See *publisher’s not* on p. 426.] We do have laws regarding fighting between men in Exodus 21:12-15, 18-26, but the penalty of this law is unique. Certainly the fact that a woman in such a case could destroy a man’s ability to have children is important, but more is involved. The law in Exodus stipulates compensation in fights between men, but here the situation is different.

The Code of Hammurabi required mutilation for various crimes. In this century in the United States some offenses have been punished by forms of castration.

Morecraft’s comment is very good:

This law refutes pragmatism: The end does not justify the means, however good and proper to the end.

A wife is under God to be a help-meet to her husband, but always and only under God’s law. *Faith requires staying within the law of God*, and a person may never help his spouse lawlessly.

The principle applies throughout human activity. A lawless love, anywhere, is forbidden; for law is the eye of love, and without law, love is blind, reckless and cruel.²

¹ Roy Lee Honeycutt Jr., *The Layman’s Bible Book Commentary*, vol. 3, *Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1979), 146.

² Joseph C. Morecraft III, *A Christian Manual of Law: An Application of Deuteronomy* (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Christian Training Center, n. d.), 80.

Morecraft is right: the premise here is valid in all human activity: "Faith requires staying within the law of God." No man nor woman can justify lawless actions in terms of good goals. We are required always to honor and obey God's law. Unbelief and lawlessness reduce the options to man's act and thereby disregard God's law and government.

Rabbi Hertz tells us that the rabbis of old commuted this penalty to a monetary fine.³ This was a step taken in mercy, but man's mercy cannot be wiser than the justice of God.

In Deuteronomy 23:1, we are told that no eunuch, no man genitally maimed or injured, could be a member of the covenant community. He could be a devout believer, but he could not function as a covenant member, as a man able to exercise authority. For a woman to strip a man of his manhood under God, and of his privilege of exercising authority, was a very serious offense with a grim penalty. God created man to exercise authority and dominion, and to separate a man from this privilege was an offense against God. The fact that a man might fail to exert such a responsibility did not absolve any woman from the guilt such an act incurred. Similarly, no man had a right to strip another man of his manhood. In many non-Christian cultures, such an act is commonplace. It is interesting that, as a matter of sportsmanship, hitting below the belt has been regarded as a foul. Men may fight with one another; they may hate each other, but they cannot strip another of his manhood. This law thus applies both to men and to women. It is a case law. The law protects both men and women.

Notice that in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, the relative who fails to perform his levirate duty towards a widow can be *shamed* legally, but no male can be *unmanned*. The law protects men in their maleness even as it protects women and children. It should be clear by now that this law is concerned with much more than immodesty! If it be said that perhaps her husband's life was at stake, it can be answered that many things could have been done besides emasculation to aid her husband. Such a step was less easy and more malevolent. To reduce this law to one dealing with "immodest acts," as some commentators do, is absurd, and the punishment is then disproportionate for immodesty.

³. J. H. Hertz, ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London, England: Soncino Press, [1936] 1960), 856.

The law of the levirate (Deut. 25:5-10) protects the family by requiring that, on the death of a childless man, the widow becomes the responsibility of the next of kin male, to raise up progeny to continue the family's name and existence. This law immediately follows and safeguards the procreative ability of a man.

The religious context is thus one of covenantal family life. In any context, the woman must not transgress by trying to emasculate a man; in any context, it is wrong and lawless. In the case of a covenant man, this is especially intolerable.

It is perhaps necessary to comment on the fact of two grown men fighting. This was more common than it is now not too many years ago.

The religious meaning of this law is that it is a very serious offense to wage war against human fertility. Perhaps one reason for the failure of many, since the Enlightenment, as before, to understand this has been the failure to respect reproductive ability. Abortion is clearly an example of this. Waging war against civilians is another example. Some Marxist regimes have used torture to emasculate men. Such policies are clearly illegal in terms of God's law.

The phrase in v. 12, "thine eye shall not pity her," is very important. False pity, misapplied pity, is very prevalent in our time. It is thus important to understand what *pity* means. The word comes from the Latin *pietas*, meaning dutiful conduct, sense of duty, religiousness, devotion, piety, family loyalty, or patriotism. In English, its basic meanings are mercy, clemency, sympathy, and regret. We extend pity in terms of a loyalty to certain standards. Modern pity is too often given to criminals and transgressors, so that it is essentially lawless. Pity for the murderer facing the death penalty may call itself humanitarian, but it has allied itself with the killer rather than the victim's family. Pity is not in and of itself a virtue if it lines us up with evil.

This law thus not only forbids a certain type of sin but it also forbids false pity. It designates thereby that misguided pity is an evil. The statement is imperative and mandatory: "thine eye shall not pity her." Too much of what is today called sensitivity and virtue is in reality an evil pity. This law protects life; false pity is antilife because its sympathies are with the enemies of life.

The expression, "thine eye shall not pity," appears elsewhere in Deuteronomy, in 7:16, for example, where God forbids pity towards

the Canaanites. In Deuteronomy 13:8, pity is forbidden towards all who, being *within* the covenant, work secretly to subvert it. In Deuteronomy 19:11-13, pity towards a murderer is forbidden. We thus have attempts to emasculate a man placed on a level with murder, treason, and pity for an evil people at war with God, and given to ritual prostitution, homosexuality, and bestiality.

This gives us a perspective on how important this law is. We are also warned in these texts of the evil of false pity. God in His pity can reach out to the most depraved because He is capable of regenerating them. We are not gods; we cannot be redeemers, only servants of the Redeemer. False pity assumes that man can play god and, by his pity and mercy, change the evil-doer. There is thus a great arrogance about misplaced pity.

Chapter Ninety-Two

Family and Trade

(Deuteronomy 25:13-16)

13. Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small.

14. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small.

15. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

16. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the LORD thy God.

(Deuteronomy 25:13-16)

This law is related to Leviticus 19:35-37:

35. Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure.

36. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.

37. Therefore shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: I am the LORD.

Honest measurements in every sphere, in goods, liquids, money, and everything else, are a matter of justice and a religious concern. All who disregard honesty in measurement are an “abomination unto the LORD.”

These are, as Hoppe pointed out, *trade laws*. Trust is essential to community life, and a failure in this sphere is deadly to a community.¹ We forget that a fixed price is an achievement of Christian civilization. In other cultures, notably the Islamic, a simple transaction involves endless haggling because there is a lack of a fixed price. A fixed price requests an adjustment of the cost of production and the cost of marketing, with a profit on both ends. Where haggling or dickering occurs, there is a disbelief in the integrity of fixed prices. The loss of fixed prices is destructive to an economy.

The validity of pricing is undermined in other ways by false weights. One such false “weight” or measurement is paper and debased currencies. It is false because it loses value. Those who argue

¹ Leslie J. Hoppe, O.F.M, *Deuteronomy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1985), 78.

that the items purchased can also lose value fail to reckon that loss through use is a legitimate economic fact whereas loss by inflation is larceny.

God's indictment of such practices appears in many verses: in Isaiah 1:21-22, the debasing of silver is termed by God the whoredom of the once faithful city; Amos 8:5 and Micah 6:11 speak of fraudulent measurements as wicked.

In the twentieth century, the modern state has legislated against false weights and measurements by business while itself embarking on some of the most radical injustices in this sphere in the name of sound money, clear air, and a variety of other pretexts.

The question is one of *protection*. How can society be best protected, by God's law or by man's fiats? We have a long history of the sorry results of man's unwillingness to trust God. Certainly trust in man has had evil results.

Using "diverse weights" has reference to an ancient practice of using greater weights and smaller, depending on the circumstances. Weighing some food when purchased, i.e., a calf or a hen, with a lighter weight would mean getting more than one paid for. Weighing with a heavier weight when selling would bring in more money. Rather incidentally, we learn that David as king introduced a standard weight to limit fraud and deception (2 Sam. 14:26).

All who use false measurements "do unrighteously" (v. 16), or, "do injustice."

The earlier instance of this law, Leviticus 19:35-37, is at the conclusion of a passage (Lev. 19) on sanctification. Basic to the life of holiness is measuring up to God's standard in the everyday world of business and household affairs. The false doctrine of holiness or sanctification locates it in spiritual exercises, whereas the law of God places it in the context of everyday life. It should not surprise us, therefore, that some of the great Christian revivals and advances have had courageous businessmen deeply involved.

Lawlessness in this sphere is called "an abomination unto the LORD" (v. 16). Samson Raphael Hirsch's analysis of the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 25:16 and Leviticus 18:27 led him to conclude, "The responsibility for sins against honest weights and measures is still greater than that for sexual immorality."² Let us assume that the two offenses, sexual sins and false measures, are alike seen as very evil, an abomination, without following Hirsch in rating one above

or below the other. Sexual sins can pollute the family by making paternity uncertain or altered. Sins in the sphere of measurements have a like deadly effect: they pollute economic activity to produce a bastardized result. The two kinds of offenses are deliberately compared by the use of a common phrase to call attention to their common evil nature.

The parallel does not end there. The commandment to honor one's father and mother carries the promise of long life (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16), and so too does this law requiring just weights and just measures. We must obey that our "days may be long upon the land which the LORD [our] God giveth" us (Ex. 20:12). The functioning of life requires godly families and godly economic activity. Integrity in marriage and in trade is required. Lawlessness in these spheres warps the whole life.

Proverbs 11:1 tells us, "A false balance [or, a balance of deceit] is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight." In every sphere of life, the standards must be from God and His law, and every departure is a step towards the destruction of the society.

False weights and false measures warp a society. They make the poor poorer, and they create a dishonest ruling class. The middle class is usually wiped out where dishonest measurements prevail, especially with respect to money. To fight such injustices is usually beyond the means and ability of the victims. Justice in trade is thus a matter of concern to all. Money is the life-blood of trade.

Only occasionally do most people in their lifetime have contact with a court of law. All have daily involvement with trade; shopping brings women into the world of trade regularly. Anything which warps that realm, whether it be fraudulent money, intrusive regulations, or any other falsifying factor, has an effect on the whole of society. We live in families, and we are a part of a trading world. The two realms can strengthen the social order, or they can destroy it.

When God calls anything an abomination, we had better listen and obey.

² Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 5, *Deuteronomy*, trans. Isaac Levy, 2nd ed. rev. (London, England, Judaica Press, [1966], 1982), 521.

Chapter Ninety-Three

“Remember” (Deuteronomy 25:17-19)

17. Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt;
18. How he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God.
19. Therefore it shall be, when the LORD thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it. (Deuteronomy 25:17-19)

The word *remember* appears repeatedly in the Old Testament, and over twenty times in Exodus, Leviticus, and especially Deuteronomy. The Hebrew word means to mark and to recognize, and it has a positive, masculine note. It means to remember and thereby command and exercise dominion. We are to *remember* so that we might *act*.

What we are to remember is Amalek, an historical example of evil and a type of pleasure in depravity. Amalek's hatred of God was manifested in their hatred of the covenant people. It was not simply that they warred against Israel but that they began by attacking the stragglers in the wilderness march. These were the weak and the feeble, the faint and the weary.

This encounter had been at Rephidim near Sinai (Ex. 17:8-16). The attack by Amalek had been an unprovoked one. If, as Velikovsky held, Amalek used the occasion of God's devastation of Egypt as an opportunity to conquer Egypt, Amalek should have been grateful to Israel rather than hostile. The attack was thus an act of contempt for God and Israel. The nations had reacted to God's judgment on Egypt with terror. Some forty years later, Rahab spoke of the continuing "terror" because of God's acts and fear for His covenant people (Josh. 2:9-11) and the great triumphs over Egypt known to all. The animosity of Israel to Amalek was a religious one, as 1 Samuel 15:2-3 makes clear. It was a *duty* to oppose Amalek. This text is not comprehensible apart from that fact. There are religious boundaries on pity and friendship, and we are not allowed to transgress in these spheres.

This is an aspect of Scripture too seldom noted. In the New Testament we see limits placed on our fellowship:

17. Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

18. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. (Rom. 16:17-18)

10. A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;

11. Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself. (Titus 3:10-11)

9. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

10. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:

11. For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds. (2 John 9-11)

Some will argue that there is a difference between these New Testament texts and the law concerning Amalek, in that one commands simply a separation while the other orders death. This is not an honest interpretation, because no unprovoked attack on Amalek is ordered. Attention is called to the unremitting hostility of Amalek; the law then requires no mercy in time of war. There is no instance of lawless violence against Amalek. However, when Amalek had gained a portion of Canaan, Samuel ordered war against them, and their destruction. Saul's sin was that he sought a treaty with them after defeating them (1 Sam. 15:1-25). *What is forbidden, thus, is any compromise between causes which cannot be reconciled.*

Those who believe in the reconciliation of all differences either want the surrender of one side, or else they believe that nothing exists which cannot be compromised. False doctrines of reconciliation are basic to many of the most bitter conflicts of the twentieth century. Because some men believe that truth and justice can be compromised does not make it so. Since God is the author of all truth and justice, we can have neither except on His terms.

In v. 19, we see that God ties Israel's inheritance of the covenant land to the destruction of Amalek. *When* God gives Canaan to Israel, "thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek." *Remembrance* in

Hebrew is a word, *Zeker*, related to *remember*, *zakar*. The Bible sees history as in part a memory war. Jeremiah sees his enemies as men seeking to obliterate the very memory of him (Jer. 11:19) because their cause in history is anti-God. As against this, God seeks another goal, which Isaiah 2:4 describes thus:

And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

This peace comes not by compromise but by conversion and victory, by a rejection of every attempt to reject the antithesis between good and evil, right and wrong. When the moral fact of all human action is ignored, then change between one force and another is a matter of compromise. Issues then not being moral, they are thus amenable to rearrangements designed to obscure differences. For the *moral* antithesis in history, Hegelians have substituted a dialectical one, so that thesis and antithesis lead to synthesis, i.e., "right" and "wrong" come together in a new formulation. This becomes a perpetual conflict, a continual antithesis to every new synthesis, because nothing is nor can by definition be called true. This has been described as "perpetual war for perpetual peace."

This text concludes with the words, "thou shalt not forget it." With some things, there can be no peace. "Thou shalt not forget it" again invokes, as does the first word, "Remember," *memory*. Without memory, we are miserable creatures; we do not know ourselves because we then have no past. True amnesia is rare, and disastrous. Our text warns us against religious and historical amnesia. We have today, as a result of our humanistic faith, a prevalence of abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, and other evils. We are oblivious to a variety of evil forces around us because of our moral and historical amnesia. We are as a result moving blindly into disasters. In Isaiah 59:7-10, we have a vivid description of such moral blindness:

7. Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths.

8. The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace.

9. Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness.

10. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men.

Moral blindness means historical death. The biblical emphasis on memory is an important aspect of its moral demands. *Memory* is not normally seen as a theological concern, nor is *history*, but any intelligent reading of the Bible makes it clear how important both are.

An old American proverb says, "Memory is the guardian of the mind." We can add that it is also important to our future.

Existentialism in the twentieth century has done much to destroy historical knowledge and memory because it is very specifically governed by the present, not the past nor the future. As a result, it has lost command of even the present.

Chapter Ninety-Four

History and Liturgy (Deuteronomy 26:1-11)

1. And it shall be, when thou art come in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and possessest it, and dwellest therein;
 2. That thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name there.
 3. And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the LORD thy God, that I am come unto the country which the LORD swore unto our fathers for to give us.
 4. And the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand, and set it down before the altar of the LORD thy God.
 5. And thou shalt speak and say before the LORD thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous:
 6. And the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage:
 7. And when we cried unto the LORD God of our fathers, the LORD heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labour, and our oppression:
 8. And the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terrible-ness, and with signs, and with wonders:
 9. And he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey.
 10. And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O LORD, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the LORD thy God, and worship before the LORD thy God:
 11. And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the LORD thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you.
- (Deuteronomy 26:1-11)

We again have a text which stresses history and memory, in this case to prompt the covenant people to thanksgiving. They are to remember with gifts of their firstfruits God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Pride in their past, however, is not encouraged. It is not

their supposedly glorious past that they are to recall but God's mercy and salvation.

On bringing their firstfruits, a statement must be made, not calling attention to any greatness in Israel, but to their humble origin. They must say, A Syrian, or a wandering Aramean, was my father. He went into Egypt, was enslaved there, and yet, by God's grace, became a great people. The reference is to Jacob, renamed Israel by God. "Israel" means a prince of God. Jacob becomes a royal man in God's Kingdom by God's grace. The contrast is an emphatic one: a wandering nomad becomes a prince, and his family, a nation.

Jacob's mother, Rebecca, was from Aram-Naharaim (Gen. 24:10). Jacob was a wandering Aramean "ready to perish." H. Wheeler Robinson noted, "the Hebrew word for 'perish' is applied to animals 'straying' or 'lost' (I Sam. ix. 3, 20; Jer. l.6)."¹ Jacob was a straying or lost man, but God by His grace gave Jacob a future. The emphasis of the text is that thanksgiving, when wholly experienced, is an expression of our realization that we are what God's mercy makes of us. The clearest expression of this comes from Paul, in 1 Corinthians 4:7:

For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why doest thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

At the heart of biblically mandated thanksgiving is this humility. This presentation was perhaps at the Feast of Weeks (Deut. 16:9-12). David F. Payne's comment is very good: the worshipper is summoned to be "*intelligently grateful*."² It is absurd to pass over this fact. The ritual requires understanding: it summons us to be "*intelligently grateful*."

This means an awareness of what we are, and who God is. The worshipper must confess himself to be a straying or lost person. Anthony Phillips called attention to an important aspect of this designation: "'wandering' indicates the lost position of a man who has abandoned citizenship in his own country, but has not acquired a new one."³

¹ H. Wheeler Robinson, *Deuteronomy and Joshua* (New York, NY: Henry Frowde, n. d.), 186.

² David F. Payne, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985), 142.

³ Anthony Phillips, *Deuteronomy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 173.

The confession is *historical*, not “spiritual.” It does not say, I thank Thee, Lord, for saving my soul. Its focus is on God’s covenant, the gift of the land, and the necessity of a *practical gratitude*. Words of thanks are required, but they must be accompanied by the firstfruits. The firstfruits signify the priority of God’s claims to our work over our claims.

This text describes a liturgy. The stress in this liturgy is on gratitude, but the liturgy also emphasizes the fact that God’s gift of the land gives freedom. Freedom is land-based in part, but it is essentially covenantal and faith-governed. Freedom also requires a memory of God’s covenantal grace and His deliverance of His people. Worship requires a sense of history. Antinomianism is also antihistorical; by denying God’s law, it denies the relevance of God’s grace to the historical process.

Verse 11 commands rejoicing: “And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the LORD thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house.” *Enjoy*, this is the required response. God commands His people to enjoy the bounty of the Promised Land. *Pleasure in things material is a duty*. Biblical faith is anti-ascetic.

This rejoicing is to include “the Levite, and the stranger that is among you.” The first Thanksgiving in America was marked by the inclusion of the Indians in terms of this law.

In 1 Corinthians 15:20, we are told, “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.” The firstfruits thus typify the harvest of the new creation which begins with Christ’s resurrection. We are all thus among the continuing firstfruits of the Kingdom of God. We are summoned to increase that great harvest by our service to the King.

Moreover, this liturgy of thanksgiving is one in which the believer says that the gifts in his hand which he brings have been placed there by God in His providence. At the same time, we should recall our past with gratitude to God for His providence.

The comment of Keil and Delitzsch is telling: “The fruit was the tangible proof that they were in possession of the land, and the presentation of the first of this fruit the practical confession that they were indebted to the Lord for the land.”⁴ It is illegitimate to spiritualize this

⁴ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 3, *The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949 reprint), 426.

liturgy. We were not created as angels, but as men, out of the earth (Gen. 2:7). Spiritualized religion is not biblical.

Moreover, spiritualized religion is not interested in history: its focus is essentially personal. Whereas biblical faith stresses history and memory, spiritual religion abandons these things. The law of God stresses the importance of history, as do the history books, the prophets, the Gospels, Acts, and the epistles. Certainly Revelation is a long declaration of history's meaning.

Pagan liturgies have routinely been nonhistorical, whereas the brief portions of liturgy in the Bible are inseparable from history. History can never be governed by men who abandon it. Humanism today is nearing collapse. Because it sees the end of history, history giving way to the beehive and the anthill, it is losing control of its future and its history. Spiritual religionists have abandoned history, and the world is now in the hands of mindless zombies.

Chapter Ninety-Five
Memory and Tithing
(Deuteronomy 26:12-15)

12. When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase the third year, which is the year of tithing, and hast given it unto the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within thy gates, and be filled;

13. Then thou shalt say before the LORD thy God, I have brought away the hallowed things out of mine house, and also have given them unto the Levite, and unto the stranger, to the fatherless, and to the widow, according to all thy commandments which thou hast commanded me: I have not transgressed thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them:

14. I have not eaten thereof in my mourning, neither have I taken away ought thereof for any unclean use, nor given ought thereof for the dead: but I have hearkened to the voice of the LORD my God, and have done according to all that thou hast commanded me.

15. Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people Israel, and the land which thou hast given us, as thou swarest unto our fathers, a land that floweth with milk and honey. (Deuteronomy 26:12-15)

The emphasis on memory continues in this text, but memory is now tied not only to gratitude but also to the third tithe, the poor tithe. We are to remember what God has done for us and to show the same grace and charity to others. In our Lord's words, "freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8).

This poor tithe is *first a form of worship*. The covenant man manifests His worship of God by tithing. The tithe, v. 13 tells us, is "the hallowed thing." The confession here required is a statement by the covenant man that he has not stolen from God by bringing anything less than is God's due. The tithes are not man's property; although the money, produce, or goods are in our hands, they are God's property and are therefore *hallowed* or sacred. To touch that part of our income is sacrilegious and a theft.

Second, the tithe is a symbolic sacrifice (v. 13). We sacrifice a portion of our income to God because His royal government requires it.

Third, the worshipper's profession of faith and obedience in vv. 13-15 invokes God's blessing for faithfulness, and, implicitly, His curse for disobedience.

Fourth, by recalling God's covenant gift of the Promised Land, the stress is again on memory and gratitude. Where memory and gratitude disappear, God's curse takes over.

The poor tithe is a law closely tied to the two great commandments. In Matthew 22:34-40, we are told:

34. But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.

35. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, saying,

36. Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

37. Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38. This is the first and great commandment.

39. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

The three tithes are linked to this. The first tithe is for the Lord and His work. A second tithe is that we might rejoice before the Lord. A third is for charity. Our love of God and of our neighbor is thus demonstrated without forgetting us and our needs.

Since this tithe is a form of worship before the Lord, and a solemn confession before Him, to declare falsely or to stand before Him without tithing to Him invites retribution.

The tithe is "the hallowed thing"; it is holy because it belongs to God, not to us. The confession disclaims three kinds of pollution from misuses of the tithe (v. 14). *First*, the tithe cannot be consumed by a mourner who is ceremonially unclean because of his association with death. The tithe is to the Lord God, the Author of all life, and its purpose is to further life, not death. Charity is a way of furthering life and protecting it, so that no funeral "service," however religious, can be connected with life and the tithe. *Second*, unclean uses of the tithe, or any connecting of the tithe with death, are forbidden because the tithe celebrates God's work, which is life-giving; it blesses our rejoicing before the Lord; and, in charity, it guards the lives of the poor, the weak, and the helpless. *Third*, in no way can the tithe be used for *anything* connected with death. The tithe must further, rescue, and protect life in the Lord, the Author of life.

This tithe is thus for the relief of the poor (Deut. 14:28-29). They are to rejoice with us and to eat to their fill. In v. 15, we have a petition for God's blessing if we are faithful to His requirement here.

This confession includes in v. 13 a vow that one has been faithful and obedient to *all* of God's commandments. This does not mean perfect obedience but a thorough faithfulness wherein we seek, with all our heart, mind, and being, to obey the Lord. In v. 14, the confession is therefore negative: I have not eaten the sacred portions as a part of my mourning, nor while unclean, nor have I offered any of this as a memorial to the dead. The positive affirmation, in v. 13, is that I am giving to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. This is the only legitimate use of this tithe. There is a reference to the illegitimate use of this tithe in Hosea 9:4.

This statement in v. 13, "I have brought away the hallowed things out of mine house," is "I have cleaned out the holy from my house." The tithe is God's property, not ours; once we gain our income, God's portion cannot remain with us. It becomes stolen property if it remains with us. Hence, we must clean it out of our house.

The ancient rabbis, as well as the church fathers, have called this text a *confession*. This term is usually applied to confessions of sin but not necessarily so. It refers here to a confession of gratitude for God's past and present mercies and of our obligations to Him. Tithing is a confession of debt and of gratitude. We pay God's tax gratefully. We are not "tipping" God: we are proclaiming Him to be our Redeemer King when we tithe.

To confess that "I have cleaned out the holy from my house," or removed or put away the tithe to the poor, was a statement on the third year that all arrears in the tithe were settled. The third year was known as "the year of removal," a term still used in Jewish Orthodoxy. This prayer was thus made *after* all the tithe was given to the poor. The expression, "Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven," appears in 2 Chronicles 6:12-42 repeatedly, so that Solomon was mindful of this obligation.

This confession was known in Hebrew as the "confession of tithing," a basic confession of faith.

This tithe tells us that the basic agent in charity is the family. Its tithe is called the holy or hallowed thing, so that each family holds a sacred fund which belongs to God and is *basic* and *fundamental* to the work of the Kingdom, whether it be worship, schooling, charity, or

like activities. These are activities essential to government, and they rest in the family and in the tithe. They tell us, Tithe and be blessed, Tithe and prosper. Where these essential services are transferred to the state, both the services, the family, and the society suffer. Railing against socialism and the high cost of government is futile if we do not seek God's remedy.

Memory is here linked to gratitude *and* to government. When we are grateful to God, we do His will and bidding, and we reorder our lives and income to His service. We therefore reorder ourselves and history.

Failure to tithe is to lose a concern for social order. It creates welfareism and a sense of entitlement. The poor believe that they are entitled to welfare, and those who are able to support themselves believe that they are entitled to keep all their income. Both attitudes are socially destructive because they separate men from God and from one another.

Chapter Ninety-Six

The Conditional Covenant (Deuteronomy 26:16-19)

16. This day the LORD thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments: thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.

17. Thou hast avouched the LORD this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice:

18. And the LORD hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments;

19. And to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the LORD thy God, as he hath spoken. (Deuteronomy 26:16-19)

Some commentators have little to say about these verses, seen as simply a conclusion to the statement of the law. But Phillips is perceptive in calling attention to a central fact: “the blessing remains conditional on Israel’s obedience.”¹ Israel’s sin was to assume that the blessings were unconditional and an inheritance and property, a transgression commonplace in various churches as well. More than a few nations and families, highly blessed, have also assumed that God’s blessing is a permanent property.

These verses presuppose the covenant. God in His grace and mercy gives to Israel His covenant and law. The law is a gift of grace. The happy side of the law is that obedience leads to blessings, whereas disobedience leads to curses. The sin of men and nations has been to treat God’s providential blessings as natural prerogatives. To do so is to invite judgment.

There is a repeated emphasis on the obligation “to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice...thou shouldest keep all his commandments” (vv. 17-18). This must be done “with all thine heart, and with all thy soul” (v. 16). We do not have here a demand for total *obedience* on pain of judgment, but rather that our total *direction* be one of faithfulness to our covenant God. God does not give His covenant law to

¹ Anthony Phillips, *Deuteronomy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 176.

the people as a device for punishing them, but as the way of life and of blessing. This is made very clear in Deuteronomy 28. This is why we are called upon to *revere* the covenant law, to use David F. Payne's term.² We do not revere the laws of the state; at best, we obey them. The one is God's law, expressing His nature, whereas the other is often no more than the arbitrary will of the state.

The promise to covenant obedience is that the people will be exalted by God. In v. 19, we are told that God promises to the covenantally faithful people "to make thee high above all nations which he hath made." This is a remarkable promise, and a key to history. These words form the conclusion to the covenant or treaty. This is ancient legal language. God is the suzerain, and Israel is the vassal. The generation that left Egypt was faithless to the covenant law and perished in the wilderness; the younger generation now had the privilege of covenantal life. Leslie J. Hoppe says of v. 19, "A national life lived in accord with the divine law cannot help but reflect divine glory."³ Covenantal obligations are opportunities for the fullness of life and blessing. To view the law negatively as antinomians do is to view life unfavorably or with hostility, for law is to life what our bones are to our ability to function. Deuteronomy 28 makes it clear that the choice is between life and death. Many other texts, such as Psalm 1, restate this same fact.

The covenant makes it very clear that grace and law are inseparable. Any faith which seeks either one or the other to the exclusion of either is not biblical but in fact anti-biblical. This text stresses also that the covenantal faith must be kept "with all thine heart, and with all thy soul" (v. 16). The covenant law is not a way of salvation; rather it sets forth the way of life of the redeemed.

To be in covenant with God means to be under His law. If we are not under His law, we are not under His covenant nor in His grace. The fact of God's covenant requires both grace and law.

Antinomianism has insisted on the radical discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. Charles Simeon, for example, wrote:

The Jewish covenant had respect in a great measure to temporal blessings, the bestowment of which was suspended entirely on

² David. F. Payne, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985), 145.

³ Leslie J. Hoppe, O.F.M., *Deuteronomy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1985), 80.

their performance of certain conditions: whereas ours relates altogether to spiritual blessings; and though it has conditions as well as theirs, it provides strength for the performance of them, and thereby secures from failure all those who cordially embrace it.⁴

It is hard to believe that champions of this view really believe it. Simeon said, and many echo him, that, in the New Covenant, ours are “altogether... spiritual blessings.” Why then do these antinomians pray constantly for all kinds of material blessings?

The covenant and its law require *reciprocity*. God tells Israel what He, in His grace, has done for them, and what they must do for Him, i.e., obey His covenant law. This reciprocity is tied to gratitude: we are to *remember* God’s mercies and be all the more faithful. We must in humility as a covenant people see ourselves as simply the subjects of God’s grace, not the possessors of a special merit. History is not a triumph of the self-willed but of the God-ordained, and God can and does raise up His Assyrians in judgment on faithless peoples.

The conditional character of the covenant and of God’s blessings must be stressed. The modern perspective insists on a mindless cosmos in which man’s mind and will are the only intelligent force. The determination of history then becomes a human decision. The universe, or multiverse, being mindless, there is no moral force or direction to history, only a brutal struggle for power. To deny God and His covenant is to strip life and history of purpose and meaning.

As against this ugly and blind struggle for power, God’s covenantal dealings with men tell us that history is a treaty, a contract made by God with men, an act of amazing grace. God’s contract means that all of history has meaning, as does every life. As against meaningless chance, we have total meaning. Our Lord tells us, “the very hairs of your head are all numbered” (Matt. 10:30). Such a total meaning is beyond our ability to comprehend, but it is essential to covenantalism because it insists on God’s radical involvement in history. For antinomianism to surrender this for its pious emotions is a deadly loss.

We began by calling attention to the fact that blessings are conditional upon obedience. Israel’s sin was to believe that God’s covenant is unconditional. This is the church’s sin also. God’s grace

⁴ Charles Simeon, *Expository Outlines on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2, *Numbers through Joshua* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1956 reprint), 410.

gives us salvation and blessings. If we assume that this means an unconditional love from Him, we misconstrue His word. We cannot, as some hold, commit every sin in the book and still have God's unconditional love. We are plainly told in 1 Peter 4:17 that "judgment must begin at the house of God." Again, in Matthew 13:12, we are told by our Lord, "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." This statement is repeated in Matthew 25:29, Mark 4:25, Luke 8:18, and Luke 19:26. Moreover, our Lord declares in Luke 12:48, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." Israel had made a property and a possession out of God's grace and love, and now the church is doing the same. This is an invitation to judgment.

Chapter Ninety-Seven

Altar and Law (Deuteronomy 27:1-13)

1. And Moses with the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, Keep all the commandments which I command you this day.
 2. And it shall be on the day when ye shall pass over Jordan unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, that thou shalt set thee up great stones, and plaister them with plaister:
 3. And thou shalt write upon them all the words of this law, when thou art passed over, that thou mayest go in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, a land that floweth with milk and honey; as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee.
 4. Therefore it shall be when ye be gone over Jordan, that ye shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in mount Ebal, and thou shalt plaister them with plaister.
 5. And there shalt thou build an altar unto the LORD thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them.
 6. Thou shalt build the altar of the LORD thy God of whole stones: and thou shalt offer burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD thy God:
 7. And thou shalt offer peace offerings, and shalt eat there, and rejoice before the LORD thy God.
 8. And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law very plainly.
 9. And Moses and the priests the Levites spake unto all Israel, saying, Take heed, and hearken, O Israel; this day thou art become the people of the LORD thy God.
 10. Thou shalt therefore obey the voice of the LORD thy God, and do his commandments and his statutes, which I command thee this day.
 11. And Moses charged the people the same day, saying,
 12. These shall stand upon mount Gerizim to bless the people, when ye are come over Jordan; Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin:
 13. And these shall stand upon mount Ebal to curse; Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.
- (Deuteronomy 27:1-13)

Our translation loses some of its bluntness because the English of the Authorized Version is old fashioned and therefore sounds more polite than it is. In v. 9, "Take heed, and hearken," can perhaps be rendered, "Shut up, and listen." The restatement of the law is now

finished, and the time for its ratification has come. The covenant law is the gift of God's grace, and they must hear and obey. No option to pick and choose is given.

There are three sections to our text. *First*, the law is to be written on stones, plastered to make it possible to do so. This was a common practice in antiquity. However, the dry climate in, for example, Babylon and Egypt, made it possible for such writings of the law to survive indefinitely. In Palestine, then a wooded land with year-round streams, the dampness would, before long, cause the plaster to disintegrate. This means that the renewal of these public inscriptions was necessary from time to time, and a practical test of the concern of the people for the law. With a moral indifference, this public posting of the law would disappear. Another factor is noteworthy. Such public postings of the law in various nations mean that literacy then was higher than we are ready to admit. Well into the nineteenth century, scholars were unwilling to admit any literacy in Mosaic Israel. Now we know better but are no wiser.

Second, an altar of uncut stones was to be erected also (Ex. 20:24-25). Wherever atonement or salvation was set forth, man was not allowed to contribute anything. Man's part is to receive what God in His sovereign grace gives to Him. This altar was, like the stones inscribed with the law, a kind of boundary mark to the land. The land, being the covenant people's realm under God, was marked by God's altar, signifying atonement and salvation, and by God's law, the way of holiness or sanctification. The land was the altar land and therefore the law land.

Third, the twin mountains, Ebal and Gerizim, were to be used to set forth this fact. Curses would be pronounced from Ebal, and blessings from Gerizim, for disobedience and for obedience. Because "the earth is the LORD's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1), the whole earth is an altar land, and a law land. The whole earth is therefore subject to God's blessings and curses, now no less than in Noah's day.

Because God is the Creator, and because He commands our use of the earth, all the world is therefore His altar land and law land, and the Great Commission requires that it be restored to His dominion by means of the altar or atonement.

We have here a ritual in which all the clans or tribes are involved. In our time, public rituals have little place. Ritual is a form of manners,

of courtesy and respect. Ritual means much more than religious ceremonies in the church. To illustrate, it is well documented that marital unions that begin with a religious ceremony, rather than living together, have a markedly higher survival rate. The rite implies a respect. When I was in my twenties, I encountered a family, both husband and wife coming from a superior ancestry, with ways which seemed very strange to me. Common courtesies were lacking, no "good morning" nor "good-bye," only a very casual association. Such things are more common today. If a simple matter of courtesy, a minor ritual of family life, "good morning," "good-bye," "please," and "thank you" are lacking, there is then a fundamental lack of respect.

Ritual belongs in all of life, and its observance tells us that the forms are respected, and their meaning understood and valued. In v. 1, we are told that the elders of Israel were united with Moses in issuing these requirements.

Some nations inscribed their laws on stone by engraving. All regarded it as important that the law be known. The Code of Hammurabi, discovered in 1902, has 3,614 lines that have been recovered. Modern civil law is neither as simple nor as well known. It is impossible for modern man to know the law because it fills thousands of volumes, with many more regulations added to it by bureaucracies.

In chapter 28, we have a catalog of covenant blessings and curses. What we have in Deuteronomy 27:14-26 are curses on specific actions, twelve in number.

The law has *beneficial* effects when it is remembered and obeyed. Hence blessings and curses are basic to Scripture and to God's dealings with us. We are to remember our past under God but see the past in the light of His law as a step towards our future in Him. Some scholars have wondered whether or not the whole of Deuteronomy's law was here written on stone, or simply the Ten Commandments. The text indicates all of the law. To see every item of the law would remind people of their obligation to God. The public postings of law in antiquity had in mind a people who knew all the law.

In v. 9 there is a reference to "the priests the Levites," i.e., all the tribe of Levi was associated with Moses and the seventy elders in proclaiming this requirement. The teaching function of the Levites, the clerisy of Israel, made it very important for them to be connected with the law. The Levites were scattered later throughout the land and were therefore very important in their influence.

Verse 9 is important also because, it declares that all the people have “become the people of the LORD thy God.” According to Samson Raphael Hirsch, all had “been appointed the representatives and keepers of the Torah, made responsible for it,” and been made also guardians of the inscribed stones of the law.¹ The covenant people are simultaneously the law people and the grace people.

Biblical language seems strange today to many because it speaks of *blessings* and *curses* and assumes that these are our alternatives in life. Modern man insists on seeing more and more of life as morally *neutral*. As a result, we have a world which is increasingly devoid of meaning and character. Because *God is*, no area of life or thought is morally neutral. We are always moving in realms of potential blessings or potential curses, and none can escape into a morally neutral realm. One of the deadliest illusions common to our time is the belief that one can escape judgment, or can evade consequences. Life is a matter of time and eternity, and there is no evading of God’s judgments. There is no realm of neutrality in the universe, nor any hiding place from God.

¹ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 5, *Deuteronomy*, trans. Isaac Levy, 2nd ed. rev. (London, England: Judaica Press, [1966] 1982), 550.

Chapter Ninety-Eight
The Locale of Power and Grace
(Deuteronomy 27:14-26)

14. And the Levites shall speak, and say unto all the men of Israel with a loud voice,
 15. Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination unto the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place. And all the people shall answer and say, Amen.
 16. Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen.
 17. Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen.
 18. Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen.
 19. Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen.
 20. Cursed be he that lieth with his father's wife; because he uncovereth his father's skirt. And all the people shall say, Amen.
 21. Cursed be he that lieth with any manner of beast. And all the people shall say, Amen.
 22. Cursed be he that lieth with his sister, the daughter of his father, or the daughter of his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen.
 23. Cursed be he that lieth with his mother-in-law. And all the people shall say, Amen.
 24. Cursed be he that smiteth his neighbour secretly. And all the people shall say, Amen.
 25. Cursed be he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person. And all the people shall say, Amen.
 26. Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen.
- (Deuteronomy 27:14-26)

As we have seen, the modern worldview strips life of all moral and theological meaning. In one area of life after another, the correct intellectual stance has been to avoid any analysis which reflects any biblical element. The Enlightenment regarded it as a triumph of intelligence to view all things in purely naturalistic terms. The Marquis de Sade, and, after him, Kinsey, insisted on denying that any moral or theological standard has any reality. Thought, ideas, determine life. We now have an increasing number of people to whom any moral or religious considerations or standards are irrelevant. As a result, the world around grows more evil and anarchic.

We have here twelve curses. The twelve tribes or clans are all required to take part in the ceremony. The Levites proclaim the twelve curses in unison in a loud voice. All the tribes shall respond by saying, Amen.

The first curse is on all idolatry. Four curses are on perverse sexuality: one involves bestiality, the other three, incest in some form. One curse is on all who dishonor their fathers and mothers. Another curse is on all who pervert justice in order to exploit widows, orphans, and aliens. Another is on all who mock the blind by misdirecting them. Two are concerned with violence against others, in the one case secret violence against a neighbor, in the other, hiring someone to kill an innocent person. Another curse is on all who remove or misplace landmarks to increase their own land's limits. The final curse is on all who will not "confirm" the whole law, that is, make it their way of life.

There is an important strand in these curses: they deal in most cases with perversity. Not too long after World War II, I learned that police were encountering in growing numbers cases of incest. The appeal of such an offense to the perpetrators was its perversity. A desire to push back restraints and move boundaries marks such persons. I learned of acts of bestiality performed on a dare as a way of manifesting some kind of eminence. To excel in evil has become a part of our popular culture.

Misdirecting a blind man no longer has a popular appeal, but the premise is still with us, i.e., making a mockery of those around us who cannot strike back. Again, the element of perversity is very strong. The godly and moral man is helpful to those in need. The evil man relishes opportunities for perversity. The world of rock and roll music is full of evils of major character.

In the Hebrew, *cursed* is passive; it means that those who perform these acts enter into the curse. They *are* accursed. *Amen* means firm, assured, it is or will be so.

Now an important aspect of naturalism, whether in a modern form, as in Sade and Kinsey, or in the ancient paganisms, Hittite, Canaanite, and others, was its belief in acts of chaos as revitalizing. In some ancient religions, it was held "that sexual intercourse with a sacral animal could lead to physical union with the deity."¹ The Roman Saturnalia suspended all laws and work (except for bakers) and

¹ Anthony Phillips, *Deuteronomy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 182.

crowned as king a condemned criminal for the duration; he then possessed the queen and had free rein for the entire time of the Saturnalia, as did all. Anti-morality was the law of the carnival, and its purpose was to revitalize society by lawlessness. We have a survival in the Mardi Gras. In biblical faith, power and grace come from above, from God. In ancient and modern paganism, power and grace come from below. The greater the moral anarchy, the greater the revitalization. Rulers thus were above the moral law, as in the cases of Nero, Caligula, and others. In the modern world, this evil doctrine persists in such beliefs as "the royal privilege," the artist's freedom to be above the law, and so on.

The whole form of reference in curses and blessings is to power and grace from above, from the triune God. This is why the language of curses and blessings is so alien to modern man. It refers to a *personal* world, a personal God and persons on earth, whereas the modern view is impersonal or else depersonalizes.

It was an important aspect of the church's teaching over the centuries to stress that the opposite of the true faith is the anathema. To act as one who could pick and choose where the faith is concerned was to be a heretic and accursed. In fact, in its original form, the Nicene Creed ended with these words:

And whosoever shall say that there was a time when the Son of God was not, or that before he was begotten he was not, or that he was made of things that were not, or that he is of a different substance or essence (from the Father) or that he is a creature, or subject to change or conversion—they that so say, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them.²

The twelfth curse is general: it demands full obedience to the whole of God's law: "A curse on the man who will not give effect to the words of the law" (Moffatt's version). The law is the way of life and blessing, whereas disobedience is the way of cursing and death (Ps. 1). Men can look for good from God, or from this world. Their standards can reflect God's law, or their own wishes. There is nothing impersonal nor mechanical about it. The modern appetite is for success with no strings attached, no obligations to anyone. To be a success means owing nothing to any man, to succeed entirely on one's own. But the Bible tells us that no man can live only

² Henry R. Percival, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*, vol. 14 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd ser. eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956 ed.), 3.

unto himself without paying a deadly price, and the Bible declares that character governs more than human life. As Andrew Harper wrote almost a century ago,

A truly modern mind scorns the idea that the fertility of the soil can be affected by immorality. Yet there is the whole of Mesopotamia to show that misgovernment can make a garden into a desert.... In Palestine the same thing may be seen. Under Turkish domination the character of the soil has been entirely changed. In many places where in ancient days the hills were terraced to the top the sweeping rains have had their way, and the very soil has been carried off, leaving only rocks to blister in the pitiless sun. Even in the less likely sphere of animal fecundity modern science shows that peace and good government and righteous order are causes of extraordinary powers. And the movements which are going on around us at this day in the elevation and depression of nations and races have a visible connection with fidelity or lack of fidelity to known principles of order and justice.³

Ideas have consequences in every sphere, and faith requires results; it leads to blessings, not curses.

A final note: The removal of blessings and curses, of moral considerations from life, leads to a radical depersonalization. The eighteenth-century classic of anti-Christianity, LaMettrie's *Man or Machine*, has colored intellectualism ever since. Scholarly works have stripped their analyses of theology and morality, and yet scholars, when they note the growing moral collapse, refuse to see their part in the spread of ethical suicide. Because man is not a machine, he is as God's creature inescapably in a world of blessings and curses. The scholar or intellectual who does not make that fact basic to his perspective may be prominent, but he is also irrelevant.

³. Andrew Harper, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: George H. Doran Co., n. d.), 444.

Chapter Ninety-Nine

Blessings (Deuteronomy 28:1-14)

1. And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth:
2. And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God.
3. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field.
4. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep.
5. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store.
6. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out.
7. The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways.
8. The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.
9. The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways.
10. And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee.
11. And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee.
12. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow.
13. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them:
14. And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I

command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them. (Deuteronomy 28:1-14)

Perhaps twenty-five years ago, I spoke at a college conference and said, in passing, that our God, being Creator of all things, has made all things good and with a total rationality that makes knowledge possible. A distinguished graduate-school professor from a major university, also a speaker, objected vigorously. For him, the fundamental intellectual premise was the insistence that only “a thin edge of rationality” existed, and that in the mind of man. To insist on total rationality from God was to threaten the premise of modernity and the university.

This is still the basic issue. An impersonal universe, one without God, can neither bless nor curse. It is then a world without intelligent nor moral consequences.

This chapter was once basic to the oath of office. The office bearer invoked God’s blessings for faithfulness, and His curses for disobedience. Moral neutrality is an impossibility in such a universe because every act is before God’s eyes, and there is no life nor thought outside of nor apart from God.

Years ago, E. G. Browne, in *A Year Among the Persians*, wrote of one sect, the Persian Balis, a modern sect,

They seemed to have no conception of absolute good, or absolute truth; to them good was merely what God chose to ordain, and truth what He chose to reveal, so that they could not understand how any one could attempt to test the truth of a religion by an ethical and moral standard.¹

This view posited an irrational God or fate. The modern view assumes an irrational world.

Because the universe is totally God’s creation, and, however fallen, is still totally governed by Him, the curses and blessings are irresistible. In v. 2, they are shown to be not only inescapable but also irresistible: they pursue and overtake us. They follow inevitably because God so ordains it. The words “blessed” and “blessing” occur ten times in this text. As Bernard N. Schneider pointed out, these blessings are, *first*, national. *Second*, the promised blessings are material and earthly.

¹ Cited by Andrew Harper, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: George H. Doran. Co., n. d.), 451.

Third, the promised blessings are conditional: they require faithfulness.²

As David F. Payne pointed out, vv. 3-6 tell us how extensive and comprehensive these blessings are. They cover the city and the countryside, all human activities in war and peace, and they promise universal fertility. In v. 7, victory against enemies is declared; there will be battle, but victory is assured. The nations will be afraid of the godly nation (v. 10) if they keep God's commandments (v. 9). All their activities will be blessed (v. 8). Again, in vv. 11-12, fertility in every area is promised to the nation. The weather shall be favorable, not destructive, and their wealth shall be such that they will be a lending, not a borrowing, nation. They shall be a commanding nation (v. 13). All these blessings will overtake them if they faithfully adhere to God's sanctifying law (v. 14). Not to do so is to serve other gods, we are told.

These verses are part of a legal treaty, a covenant. God promises to be their covenant Lord and protector if they will keep His covenant law. The blessings of God cover and enhance all of life. The choice before the people, and us, is between life and death, between the sovereignty of God or the pretended sovereignty of men and nations.

The doctrine of the covenant tells us that there is no life outside of God. He created all things and governs all things absolutely. The covenant is neglected by the modern church because it believes, however faithful it often claims to be, that man's choice is final. This makes God a personal option: man supposedly chooses God, not God, man. The Bible is a covenantal book. It does not present itself as an option for us but as a mandate. Because God cannot be someone for us to judge and accept on our terms, we are required by the covenant to submit to God's terms or be cursed.

The blessings are radically related to national life and the land. Elsewhere, the Bible speaks of personal blessings and curses; here they are primarily national. Our life here is important because eternity and heaven are important, and the one is the preparation for the other. The blessings and the curses cover every area of our life because no area is outside of God and His government.

² Bernard N. Schneider, *Deuteronomy* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1970), 129-31.

God's blessings are a declaration of our future in Him, because they are a promise of life, whereas His curses assure us of death and destruction. We know the future under God precisely in these terms, as blessings and curses. The modern impulse is to view the future naturalistically, which is why the experts were taken by surprise when the Soviet Union collapsed. They had equated total power with total success.

Political prognostications of the future are fallacious because they assume the ultimacy of the political order. Verse 12 tells us that God ordains the weather, and He can bless or destroy men and nations thereby.

Since God makes it clear that He so powerfully rewards covenant nations, it is obvious that the lawless nations are marked by a strong perversity in their rebellion against God (Ps. 2:1ff.). Man's original and basic sin is his will to be his own god (Gen. 3:5), and he therefore wants no blessing if it comes from the hand of God. About fifty years ago, a man made it very emphatically clear to me that, if there were anything like a "blessing" in his life, it would be of his own making. He wanted nothing from the hand of God. This is basic to life under God's curse, whereas a blessed life is one lived entirely under God and His law-word.

This morning I had a long telephone conversation with my brother, Haig, with respect to problems in the Balkans, where he is at work through his organization, Macedonian Outreach. The whole area is foundering because of conditions going back to 1940 and World War II. The great illusion promoted by the United States and others is that freedom, by which they mean voting, will bring wealth and prosperity, but it does not. What is required is character, moral standards put to work, a governing faith that creates its own environment. Lacking that, the people will curse freedom and democracy as much as they did Marxism and dictatorship. Freedom is a *relative* good: freedom can have an evil use as well as a good one. The faith and morality of a people determine their use of freedom.

Chapter One Hundred

Curses

(Deuteronomy 28:15-68)

15. But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee:

16. Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field.

17. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store.

18. Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep.

19. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out.

20. The LORD shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me.

21. The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it.

22. The LORD shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish.

23. And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron.

24. The LORD shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed.

25. The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.

26. And thy carcase shall be meat unto all fowls of the air, and unto the beasts of the earth, and no man shall fray them away.

27. The LORD will smite thee with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed.

28. The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart:

29. And thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee.

30. Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her: thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof.

31. Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes, and thou shalt not eat thereof: thine ass shall be violently taken away from before thy face, and shall not be restored to thee: thy sheep shall be given unto thine enemies, and thou shalt have none to rescue them.

32. Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail with longing for them all the day long: and there shall be no might in thine hand.

33. The fruit of thy land, and all thy labours, shall a nation which thou knowest not eat up; and thou shalt be only oppressed and crushed alway:

34. So that thou shalt be mad for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see.

35. The LORD shall smite thee in the knees, and in the legs, with a sore botch that cannot be healed, from the sole of thy foot unto the top of thy head.

36. The LORD shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known; and there shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone.

37. And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the LORD shall lead thee.

38. Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field, and shalt gather but little in; for the locust shall consume it.

39. Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine, nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat them.

40. Thou shalt have olive trees throughout all thy coasts, but thou shalt not anoint thyself with the oil; for thine olive shall cast his fruit.

41. Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity.

42. All thy trees and fruit of thy land shall the locust consume.

43. The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low.

44. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail.

45. Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee:

46. And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever.

47. Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things;
48. Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee.

49. The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand;

50. A nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young:

51. And he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed: which also shall not leave thee either corn, wine, or oil, or the increase of thy kine, or flocks of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee.

52. And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land: and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates throughout all thy land, which the LORD thy God hath given thee.

53. And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the LORD thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee:

54. So that the man that is tender among you, and very delicate, his eye shall be evil toward his brother, and toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the remnant of his children which he shall leave:

55. So that he will not give to any of them of the flesh of his children whom he shall eat: because he hath nothing left him in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee in all thy gates.

56. The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter,

57. And toward her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward her children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates.

58. If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD;

59. Then the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance.

60. Moreover he will bring upon thee all the diseases of Egypt, which thou wast afraid of; and they shall cleave unto thee.

61. Also every sickness, and every plague, which is not written in the book of this law, them will the LORD bring upon thee, until thou be destroyed.

62. And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the LORD thy God.

63. And it shall come to pass, that as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it.

64. And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone.

65. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind:

66. And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life:

67. In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see.

68. And the LORD shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again: and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you.

(Deuteronomy 28:15-68)

These curses are the antithesis of all the blessings of Deuteronomy 28:1-14. The rejection of God's covenant law means that the covenant becomes an overwhelming flood of judgment. All men, all races, tribes, tongues, and peoples, are under the curse of Adam's fall (Gen. 3:17-19). Those who are the peoples of the covenant, i.e., Jews *and* Christians, are doubly under the curse for rejecting the covenant as renewed in Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ.

The number seven is a type of fullness, of totality. In v. 22, seven judgments pursue Israel, both from men and pestilences, for faithlessness. There is no probability here, only certainty. Irresistible curses pursue the faithless people. Overcivilized men who feel too wise to need God are reduced by these curses to the level of the animal he believes man to be (vv. 53-54, i.e., resorting to cannibalism). So Otto

Scott has said, "God is no buttercup." In v. 63, we are told, "as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and bring you to nought." Men see only a progression of population, whereas history tells us of times of depopulation as a result of God's judgments.

The preference of men and nations is to confuse the line between good and evil. Men resent a clear distinction between good and evil, white and black: they prefer a universal grey, with a few villains classified as possibly black. A common type of question asked by such persons aims at a fuzzing of moral boundaries. What God does here is to draw the lines sharply and clearly: good and evil cannot be confused without sin.

In v. 21, the word *pestilence* can also be rendered *death*. Death cleaves to the godless to eliminate them from the land. This is why the law itself is eschatological and postmillennial. God's law works to eliminate evil. If men and nations do not apply it, God applies it against them in judgments.

In v. 23-24, we are told that God uses the weather to judge men and nations. Drought will destroy their fields and reduce men to hunger and death.

Diseases and madness will overtake God's enemies (vv. 27-29), so that men shall "grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness." This means that the most obvious things will become incomprehensible to those who reject God the King. Enemies will overcome them (v. 25).

Moreover, their wives, children, and possessions will fall into enemy hands (vv. 30-36). A people once free and powerful will amaze the world by the extent of their collapse and fall (v. 37). At every turn, perverse circumstances will overwhelm a perverse people (vv. 37ff.). The curse will continue and intensify against a perverse and apostate people (vv. 38-68). They will in effect be returned to Egypt, that is, to captivity and bondage.

Just as Deuteronomy 28:1-14 promises earthly blessings, so too vv. 15-68 promise earthly curses. In vv. 15-24, the promised curses are against the people and their land. In vv. 25-48, God's curse drives them from the land. Then, in vv. 49-68, God smashes them for failing to learn from all His judgments that He requires repentance and obedience. The promise is of the death of Israel for covenant faithlessness. This meant that in time Israel was replaced by the church (Gal.

6:16) as the true Israel of God. The church now and the Christian nations are no less subject to rejection for faithlessness.

What begins as drought and sickness becomes epidemics, disease, disgrace, and death. Every aspect of life is cursed: mind and body, economy and foreign relations, and everything else. Both blessings and curses are total. Man wants a blurred and indistinct line between good and evil, whereas God's judgments in history move to clarify the lines men seek to erase.

The curses, like the blessings, are on the people *and* the land. In Genesis 3:17, Adam is told by God, "cursed is the ground for thy sake." In Deuteronomy 28:1-14 the ground and man are blessed by man's obedience; in vv. 15-68, they are cursed by his disobedience. Blessings mean freedom and prosperity; curses mean captivity and disasters.

As Honeycutt noted, these verses tell us that, *first*, causality governs us. There is a causal relationship between disobedience and curses (v. 15). *Second*, every aspect of life comes under the curse (vv. 16, 18-19). *Third*, because God is Lord over all things, He uses men and nations, the weather, and diseases to judge a people (vv. 20-68).

The curses are progressive. The people are given time to come to their senses and return to God and His covenant law. Apart from God, the covenant breakers will find no ease, no peace (v. 65); instead, they shall have "a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind." The failing of eyes means that, because sin blinds them, they will not recognize the most obvious facts. They will be self-blinded.

Nothing will help men who will not seek help from God. Having denied their Creator and covenant God, they have denied life and affirmed death. In Proverbs 8:35-36, we are told,

35. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD.

36. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.

For a law-abiding man, the law, if it be God's law, is life and protection. For the lawless, it means condemnation and death. One of the most tragic developments in history has been antinomianism in the church. The rejection of the law by the church is an affirmation of death, because grace is the concomitant of law. We are surrounded by the culture of death. We see it in great things and small. Years ago,

I first learned that it would be wise to separate myself from a brilliant thinker when I discovered that, despite his serious health problems, he had a studied contempt for the rules of health. He saw them as unworthy of serious concern. Since then, his course has been suicidal. This example can be repeated countless times. Man's suicidal drive is apparent in a variety of areas.

Deuteronomy 28 tells us that we live in a world of laws, and that curses and blessings inescapably and irresistibly pursue us. The rules are made by God, not by man. The blessings and curses are God-ordained, and they are the conditions of life. Those who try to create their own conditions invite God's judgment.

Chapter One Hundred One

“That Ye Might Know” (*Deuteronomy 29:1-9*)

1. These are the words of the covenant, which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb.
2. And Moses called unto all Israel, and said unto them, Ye have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land;
3. The great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles:
4. Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.
5. And I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot.
6. Ye have not eaten bread, neither have ye drunk wine or strong drink: that ye might know that I am the LORD your God.
7. And when ye came unto this place, Sihon the king of Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, came out against us unto battle, and we smote them:
8. And we took their land, and gave it for an inheritance unto the Reubenites, and to the Gadites, and to the half tribe of Manasseh.
9. Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do. (*Deuteronomy 29:1-9*)

The covenant made at Mount Sinai is renewed by Moses at the borders of Canaan. The law of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers was given at Sinai. This same law, with further details, is summarized in Deuteronomy as God’s unchanging covenant law. God’s law expresses God’s nature in justice and charity.

The people are reminded of God’s judgments against Egypt, and of His miracles. Men tend either to discount the past or to naturalize its providential and miraculous character. The persistent habit of man is to reduce history to human action rather than God’s supernatural acts. Man seeks to occupy the place of God in the determination of all things.

Verse 3 speaks of “the great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles.” “Temptations” means trials, testings, provings. God puts us to the test because this is His way of preparing us for His service, or, for His judgment. These testings

were applied to Egypt, and Egypt failed. God's miracles only intensified Egypt's hostility and opposition. Having seen these things, Israel still continued self-blinded.

Cornelius Van Til spoke of history as a process of *epistemological self-consciousness*. This term means self-knowledge of what we are and what we believe. Sin is a moral rebellion against God, and a desire to be one's own god. Man then tries to know everything apart from God. As a result, he forfeits knowledge because things have no meaning apart from God. Man then knows himself as his own god and law (Gen. 3:5), and all else is unknowable and brute factuality. Man then has a universe restricted to his own consciousness. Refusing to know God, man can know neither the world nor himself.

Egypt refused to recognize God in spite of His plagues on Egypt. In vv. 4-8, Moses reminds Israel of their similar blindness. No man becomes good by saying that evil is bad, nor could Israel become just by condemning Egypt. There had been many miracles which Israel had not seen as miracles. *First*, during forty years in the wilderness, neither their clothes nor their shoes had worn out. Deuteronomy 8:4 also refers to this fact. It is not a popular bit of data. People do not want to be grateful to God for small, everyday favors, only for major gifts of their own choosing. Too particular a providential care makes them uncomfortable. Their self-pride is threatened.

Second, manna replaced bread. Their wilderness life made the manufacture of wine and strong drink impossible. God kept the people cold sober so "that ye might know that I am the LORD your God" (v. 6). Facing life cold sober requires faith, because sobriety means self-awareness. People who run away from God are also running away from self-knowledge. Logically, they should have died in the wilderness. Sobriety kept them aware of their radical dependence on God, something they fought against. Moses says, "that ye might know" the Lord God and what He is doing. This knowledge Israel in its best days generally avoided.

Third, in vv. 7-9, Israel is told that God had given them a great victory over two kings, Sihon and Og, and their lands became the possession of the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half-tribe of Manassah. Their favored status had been openly confirmed. How grateful would they be?

Fourth, in v. 9 they are told to take warning and be careful to keep the covenant law. They are dealing with God, not with man, and

heedlessness is thus very dangerous. In v. 4, Israel is told that they have failed to see clearly in the events in Egypt God's miraculous work. The events were viewed apparently as natural ones once they were in the past.

In our time, men have naturalized history to eliminate God. I recall shortly after World War II hearing a veteran describe how his agonized prayer for a miracle was answered. Later, his native unbelief reasserted itself, and he refused to believe that his remarkable deliverance was more than chance. He therefore absolved himself of a necessity to be grateful, because there is no point in gratitude to chance.

Now when the universe is naturalized, we can eliminate both guilt and gratitude. If no God exists, then there is no Lord to whom we are accountable, and men can deny their guilt. Again, if there be no God, there is no Person to whom we must manifest gratitude. Virtue is eliminated by the premise of unbelief. When our Lord declares that the hairs of our head are all numbered (Matt. 10:30), He tells us that the universe is totally the work of, and governed by, God the Father. We cannot remove moral considerations from the smallest aspect of creation.

The doctrine of the covenant tells us that life is totally under God and His law. Nothing exists outside of or apart from God's government. We must therefore see all things religiously, i.e., morally and theologically. The heresy of the Enlightenment was its insistence that man's reason is the universal standard for judgment. The intellectual has therefore exalted himself to the position of the overall judge of all things.

The grim fact is that once priority is transferred downward from God to man, it continues downward in terms of what Cornelius Van Til called "integration downward into the void." The mob replaces the intellectual, the primitive man the mob, animals replace man, and so on downward into mindless chaos.

But men prefer chaos to God because, *first*, there is no need to be grateful to chaos, to chance. Gratitude comes hard to fallen man. *Second*, if all is chance, if there be no God, then man is the working center of the cosmos. Milton's Satan expressed this faith clearly when he said, "Better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven." By rejecting God, men have chosen hell as their supposed dominion.

Chapter One Hundred Two

Obedience

(Deuteronomy 29:10-29)

10. Ye stand this day all of you before the LORD your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel,

11. Your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water:

12. That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day:

13. That he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

14. Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath;

15. But with him that standeth here with us this day before the LORD our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day:

16. (For ye know how we have dwelt in the land of Egypt; and how we came through the nations which ye passed by;

17. And ye have seen their abominations, and their idols, wood and stone, silver and gold, which were among them:)

18. Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood;

19. And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst:

20. The LORD will not spare him, but then the anger of the LORD and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the LORD shall blot out his name from under heaven.

21. And the LORD shall separate him unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this book of the law:

22. So that the generation to come of your children that shall rise up after you, and the stranger that shall come from a far land, shall say, when they see the plagues of that land, and the sicknesses which the LORD hath laid upon it;

23. And that the whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein, like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah,

and Zeboim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath:

24. Even all nations shall say, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this land? what meaneth the heat of this great anger?

25. Then men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt:

26. For they went and served other gods, and worshipped them, gods whom they knew not, and whom he had not given unto them:

27. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written in this book:

28. And the LORD rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.

29. The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

(Deuteronomy 29:10-29)

Our text is concerned with the covenant oath. The Hebrew word used for oath is *awlah*, which means *curse*. To take an oath is to place oneself under a curse if there be any faithlessness to it. In v. 12, we are told that the purpose of the day's rite is "That thou shouldest enter [or, pass] into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day." The word *oath* in Hebrew appears also in vv. 12, 14, and 19-21, and it is translated both as *oath* and *curse*.

In Deuteronomy 10:20, we are told,

Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name.

The phrase, to "swear by his name," means to adhere to Him, to be totally loyal and faithful to Him as a matter of life and death. An oath places our life on the line as a surety of faithfulness. Oaths could be taken only by freemen because they alone could give their word without reservation.

In v. 10, Moses declares, "Ye stand this day all of you before the LORD your God." Now we can understand what v. 12 says. J. A. Thompson translates it very literally as "for your crossing over into the covenant of Yahweh your God and into his curse." This places the covenant in a God-centered context. We do not choose God; He chooses us. We are placed in the realm of blessings, but we dare not see ourselves only as blessed. We are under the penalty of the curse for disobedience, for faithlessness. Mankind is already under Adam's

curse. If we reject the renewed covenant in Christ by our disobedience, we are doubly accursed. In vv. 14-15, this covenant demand is inherited by our posterity. They are now in a position to receive both blessings and curses. Our lives have future consequences.

Man can never step outside of God and His government. The atmosphere and environment of our life is God and His covenant. To depersonalize that world is to falsify it. Man, however, seeks to remove himself from the world of guilt and the curse by reducing the world to brute or meaningless factuality. If life is meaningless, then our sins are meaningless.

The oath is also a confession of loyalty and gratitude for what God has done. Hence, they are reminded of all God's miraculous deliverances, in Egypt and the wilderness (29:1-9). In "choosing" God, man "chooses" life: God reminds the people that He chose them for life.

Apostasy means serving other gods "whom they knew not" (v. 26). This can be rendered, gods whom they had not confessed nor truly known. It refers to an ignorant adherence to false faiths, the reason being to escape from the covenant God they knew. Man's dislike of the God of Scripture stems from knowing Him too well; man seeks to flee from this living God to the harmless gods of his imagination. Verse 26 can thus be paraphrased in these words: "For they went and served other gods, and worshipped them, gods whom they did not know, and gods who had given them nothing." Their apostasy to false gods was thus in essence a choice of their self-will against the living God.

The choice is thus in essence between God and themselves. In terms of man's original sin, his desire to be his own god and law (Gen. 3:5), men choose other gods as a façade for themselves. The premise of covenant faithlessness is cited in vv. 18-19:

18. Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood;
19. And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst. (Deut. 29:18-19)

These verses go totally against the premises of modern man whose reigning premise is that our problems are essentially intellectual ones. Our concern then should be with understanding. As against this, the Bible tells us that our problems are moral and religious

ones. Where we do not understand, it is commonly because we do not want to understand. Humanistic intellectualism neutralizes all moral problems and calls for a rationalistic solution, or, a scientific and technical one. In this scheme of things, the offender is the one who insists that the moral and religious aspects of a question be given priority.

As a result, vv. 22-28 speak of religious education and a willingness to learn from God's judgments. If we reject the fact of God's judgments, we blind ourselves to the realities of God's world. The emphasis throughout Deuteronomy, and our text, is on the obedience of faith. Our everyday life is full of things we use which we do not understand. We do not wait until we understand electricity to use it, nor do we postpone driving a car until we master its mechanics. Few users of computers know the intricacies thereof, and so on and on. The demand for a fullness of understanding of the Bible is thus an evasion. Certainly we seek to know the Bible better always, but we do not wait on believing in God until we have mastered every verse of the Bible.

In v. 29, we are told,

The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

In virtually all things, total knowledge is an impossibility for man. This is most true where the triune God is concerned. This does not mean ignorance. Where God is concerned, whatever we know of God is totally consistent with all His being. There are no surprises in God. We cannot know Him *exhaustively*, but we can know Him *truly*. We are told in 1 John 2:20, "But ye have an unction from the Holy One and ye know all things." God's people do not and cannot know all things exhaustively, but they can know them truly because God's world has an inner coherence and meaning. We do not know the future, but we know who ordains it, and the moral law that governs it. We are given God's revelation, and we can understand what we are given to understand. Moreover, as Payne observed of v. 29, "Its chief point is that we can see quite enough!"¹ It follows, therefore, that the eyes of the Israelites, and ours, "were directed not towards tomorrow's surprises, but towards today's responsibilities."²

¹ David F. Payne, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985), 162.

² *Ibid.*

Chapter One Hundred Three

The Solution (Deuteronomy 30:1-20)

1. And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee,
2. And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul;
3. That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee.
4. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee:
5. And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers.
6. And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.
7. And the LORD thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee.
8. And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the LORD, and do all his commandments which I command thee this day.
9. And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good: for the LORD will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers:
10. If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.
11. For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off.
12. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?
13. Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?
14. But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.

15. See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil;

16. In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it.

17. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them;

18. I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it.

19. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:

20. That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

(Deuteronomy 30:1-20)

The curse appears early in history, in Genesis 3 and often thereafter. But the curse is not God's last word to man, and this chapter makes it clear that, although Israel's future will see them under God's curse, the curse is not God's final word to any nation. Israel is told plainly that it is a wayward people but that God's grace is greater than His curse. It is this chapter that Nehemiah 1:8-9 cites. Nehemiah prays to God, saying,

8. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandest thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations:

9. But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.

Verse 9 is a notable one. God says plainly that, if they repent, He will not only forgive them their sins but will transfer their judgment on to their captors; they will then inherit the curses which had previously been on Israel.

In J. A. Thompson's words, "The outcome of obedience is blessing."¹ To believe that God has now become antinomian, and does

¹ J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, [1974] 1978), 285.

not want obedience, is monstrous; such a faith is destructive of character. Verses 15-20 make it clear that commitment means obedience. It is more than a verbal profession: it is the way of life. Verses 11ff. make it clear that there is no excuse for disobedience. The covenant law is not a changing one: it does not vary from generation to generation. It is not impossible to keep, and man has a plain and clear-cut path to follow. The requirements of the covenant are simple; the consequences are very great, both in blessings and curses.

The witnesses to the covenant oath are both heaven and earth (v. 19). God's creation works to bless our faithfulness and to curse our disobedience. God's appeal to obedience is cited in vv. 19-20:

19. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:

20. That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

We are here confronted with the mystery of human responsibility. God predicts what He has ordained, Israel's apostasy, captivity, and restoration. Israel is fully responsible for its sins, yet God decrees them. A biblical perspective *requires* us to accept both God's total predestination *and* our human responsibility, whether or not we understand the meaning of this. Proverbs 20:24 tells us,

Man's goings are of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way?

In. v. 20, God promises long life for obedience. Before this, in vv. 11-14, we have what Sir George Adam Smith, almost a century ago, called "The Conscience of the Law." There is no such thing as a contentless conscience. If men therefore deny God's law, they are denying a content to their conscience. According to Romans 1:18-21, God's witness is in every man's being, but men suppress it in their unrighteousness or injustice. If they are antinomian, they insistently substitute for God's law their own feelings and intuitions as the equivalent of a sound conscience. The result is Phariseism and evil. The law gives content to our conscience.

As Hoppe noted, "The law is designed as a guide to human life." It is not mysterious nor inaccessible but open to all. It is a very practical

guide to daily living; it is “the way of life open to all.”² Moreover, as Hoppe points out, *life* means life in the Lord, and “Death is life without God.”³

The law is life because it is an aspect of life, God’s creation. It is the condition of life: the good air we breathe, so that to forsake the law is to forsake life. Because the law is not alien to life, nor an imposition upon it, the law as the condition of life means that it is the health of our being.

In Romans 10:5-10, St. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 30:11-14 to set forth the supremacy of the Gospel as the regeneration of man’s heart. The law is the way of life of the redeemed man: it is in his heart, and in all his being; it is not alien to man.

In vv. 11-14, Moses presents the way of the Lord, obedience to the covenant and its law, as the easy and natural way, which it is, because we were created in God’s image to serve and obey Him. Because of the fall, it has become the hard way because it goes against our will to be our own God and law. Our warped being leads to a warped response, and only our regeneration makes us willing to be obedient. Mankind was made to serve and obey God. When man the creature attempts to play God, he plays the fool and moves under judgment and death.

Greek civilization made the solution to the problems of this world one of knowledge. Man’s salvation was thus from ignorance into factuality, into knowledge. Now if man’s problem is ignorance, not sin, then there is no moral guilt in ignorance. The state and its educators are not regenerative but therapeutic. They provide healing by education.

Because of our departure from Christianity, we now have a therapeutic state and therapeutic schools. In this perspective, man is not a sinner but a patient. This view only aggravates man’s predicament because his problem is a moral perversity, not a question of ignorance. As a result, this failure to face up to the human problem is aggravating the problem. Moses here states simply that the fact of moral dereliction is death for man and society. The solution is a very simple one: believe and obey God.

² Leslie J. Hoppe, O.F.M., *Deuteronomy* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1985), 90.

³ *Ibid.*, 91.

Chapter One Hundred Four

Covenant Renewals (Deuteronomy 31:1-13)

1. And Moses went and spake these words unto all Israel.
 2. And he said unto them, I am an hundred and twenty years old this day; I can no more go out and come in: also the LORD hath said unto me, Thou shalt not go over this Jordan.
 3. The LORD thy God, he will go over before thee, and he will destroy these nations from before thee, and thou shalt possess them: and Joshua, he shall go over before thee, as the LORD hath said.
 4. And the LORD shall do unto them as he did to Sihon and to Og, kings of the Amorites, and unto the land of them, whom he destroyed.
 5. And the LORD shall give them up before your face, that ye may do unto them according unto all the commandments which I have commanded you.
 6. Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.
 7. And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it.
 8. And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.
 9. And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and unto all the elders of Israel.
 10. And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles,
 11. When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing.
 12. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law:
 13. And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.
- (Deuteronomy 31:1-13)

Deuteronomy 31-33 gives us Moses's last words. He knows that very grim apostasies will in time mark Israel's future, and that God's judgments will be severe. Despite his intense partiality to his people, Moses's faith and hope are in God. God cannot be deflected from His purpose, nor can He ever fail. Moses is now 120 years old. He says, "I can no more go out and come in" (v. 2). His statement perhaps reflects his sense of aging more than an inability to function. It also reflects his awareness that God would take him before the nation crossed over Jordan. In Hebraic terms, 120 years meant three generations, a generation being generally reckoned as forty years. The generation that left Egypt as adults was now dead, their children were aging men, and their grandchildren had reached maturity.

The result of Moses's imminent death is that a change of leadership is necessary. His successor, Joshua, has already been chosen by God. This transfer of authority is made easier because Israel faces battle, and Joshua is a tested man. At the same time, religious authority is given to the Levites, the duty of teaching and covenant duties.

In vv. 9-13, we are told that Moses had written the text of Deuteronomy. It was now delivered to the priests, the Levites, and the elders of the clans or tribes. Every year, at the feast of tabernacles, this law was to be read in its entirety during the week of celebrations together. This was a *legal* requirement because it is covenant law. Covenants are treaties of law, and in this case also a treaty of grace because it is initiated by a great King, God, who in His mercy gives His law to a people. The *requirement* of such royal covenants or treaties was that the covenant law be read to all the people regularly. God here stipulates the seventh or sabbatical year. The law is their charter of freedom, as the words of James remind Christians (James 1:25; 2:12). The reading of the law was thus usually a joyful reminder of their privileged status, although when King Josiah ordered its reading after a long apostasy, the general disobedience meant fearfulness (2 Kings 23; 2 Chron. 34:27-28). To break one's word to another man, or to the state, is no trifle, but to break one's word to God can be very deadly. The neglect of Deuteronomy in our time is no light matter.

Every society requires law, and the law determines what is good and what is evil. Law is always a religious matter, and the only question is, which religion does a legal system express and establish? Every legal system is an establishment of religion because it defines good and evil.

The reading of the law is thus both a civil and a religious act. It defines the moral imperative of the society. This reading is not the same as religious instruction in the law. According to J. A. Thompson, writing in the ancient Near East had been in common use for well over a thousand years before Moses.¹ In this ceremony, church and state, to use our modern terms, renewed their allegiance to God's covenant. The law was to be taught in every household. In this ritual, more than a private allegiance to the covenant was affirmed. The total community, church and state alike, to use our terms, had to be under the covenant and its law.

The source of Israel's strength, as of any man or nation, can only be God the King. What Moses is told God repeats later to Joshua in Joshua 1:2-9. Verses 6 and 8 are especially stressed:

6. Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

8. And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.

This statement is expanded in Joshua 1:5-9.

The reading of this book of the law was to take place in the sabbatical year, every seventh year. This was a time of rest from work and from debt. This sabbatical was a requirement of the law. It freed man from debt and oppression into godly living. For this reason, the law was seen as a cause for joy, and there are still echoes of this equation of the law with freedom and joy in Orthodox Jewish circles.

Although this requirement was neglected in times of apostasy, its observance is recorded in Joshua 8:34-35, and in Nehemiah 8.

Deuteronomy is essentially established on the premise of covenantal family life; it is addressed to the families within the covenant, but also to the nation and to its priests and Levites. Biblical religion is not simply personal as pietism is; its concern is all-inclusive: the individual, the family, the sanctuary, civil government, and all things else. It is a negation of biblical faith to limit its scope; because God's government is universal, so too is His law and His providence. Every sphere of life, thought, and government, all kinds of

¹ J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, [1974] 1978), 291.

activities, vocations, and sciences, must be under His rule. *To limit God is to deny Him.* No less than Moses, we are all called by God to serve and obey Him and to be His royal servants in our place and time in history.

Chapter One Hundred Five
Imagination, Memory, and Song
(*Deuteronomy 31:14-30*)

14. And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thy days approach that thou must die: call Joshua, and present yourselves in the tabernacle of the congregation, that I may give him a charge. And Moses and Joshua went, and presented themselves in the tabernacle of the congregation.

15. And the LORD appeared in the tabernacle in a pillar of a cloud: and the pillar of the cloud stood over the door of the tabernacle.

16. And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a-whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them.

17. Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?

18. And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods.

19. Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel.

20. For when I shall have brought them into the land which I swore unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant.

21. And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed: for I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swore.

22. Moses therefore wrote this song the same day, and taught it the children of Israel.

23. And he gave Joshua the son of Nun a charge, and said, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I swore unto them: and I will be with thee.

24. And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished,

25. That Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying,
26. Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee.
27. For I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the LORD; and how much more after my death?
28. Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them.
29. For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands.
30. And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended.
(Deuteronomy 31:14-30)

There are four main facts in our text, if we include vv. 1-13. *First*, Moses is told that the time for his death has come. This is stated clearly in vv. 1-13, and Moses is aware that the great task ahead requires another leader. Then, *second*, Joshua is to take over leadership. This is not a new announcement; rather, it is a confirmation of a known and established order of succession. *Third*, what is especially important is that Moses and Joshua were required to go to the sanctuary (vv. 14ff.) for God to speak there to them. *Fourth*, Moses is commanded to write a song (vv. 19ff.) for Israel to sing as a national anthem. The song will set forth God's grace and Israel's waywardness and apostasy, to be a continuing reminder to them that it is not their merit that sustains them but God's mercy.

God tells Moses in v. 16 that, after his death, in due time the people "will rise up, and go a-whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land." The expression "go a-whoring" after other gods plainly refers to apostasy, to involvement with false faiths. However, it also refers to a basic fact, the radical involvement of paganism with sexual rites and practices. Every kind of perverse sexual act has been a part of some religious group and activity as an affirmation of the natural (we would say *fallen*) as against the supernatural.

The declaration by God of Israel's future apostasies is intended to be an encouragement to all who hear or read this prediction. God's foreknowledge and ordination compass all things, so that we must

see man's depravity as a step in God's purpose to bring about His great Kingdom. We can *only* have hope if we know that God is in absolute control of all things.

Verses 17-18 make it clear that no bland, neutral world exists for man to live in: it is either the realm of blessings or of curses. Man wants to believe in a vast neutral realm of operations wherein man is free to do as he pleases. But there is not a single neutral fact in all of creation, and truly godly living begins only when this is recognized, "For in him we live, and move, and have our being." (Acts 17:28). There is thus no escaping God. He is closer to us than we are to ourselves, and He knows us better than we want to know ourselves.

Because the relationship between God and Israel is covenantal, God is the King and Sovereign, and Israel (and now Christian churches and nations) is the vassal. A vassal is a man under the protection of a lord to whom he has sworn homage and fealty. He has a duty to his lord to serve him and to obey him. The law of his lord is the vassal's protection.

This chapter has a strong emphasis on *the book of the law*, Deuteronomy; this is simply one of the continuous stresses in the Bible on the enscriptured word of God. We are not to rely on man's changing word but on the eternal word of God. There is also the very strong emphasis on *the person of God*. He is eternally present and determinative, so that all of history is simply His determination and His purpose in progress. To live apart from God and His word is to live under the curse and for death, not life.

God speaks plainly to Moses concerning his coming death (v. 16), and Moses just as plainly speaks of it to the people. Because it is in God's providence and after a life of faithful service, it is not a tragedy but a triumph.

In vv. 16-21, God tells Moses of the coming apostasies of Israel. God does not keep Moses in the dark, nor does He spare him. Moses must rely on the certainty of God's purpose, not on Israel. God's Kingdom will triumph, His covenant prevail, and the world triumph will come. Psalm 90, a psalm of Moses, sets forth his faith.

Verse 26 is an important statement of one aspect of the law:

Take this book of the law, and put in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee.

The law is a blessing to the faithful, and a curse to the lawless, and also a witness against them. The law is like a recorder to the lawless, keeping an account of their covenant-breaking. The law was not placed in the ark, but on its side, where the other books of law had already been placed. The Ten Commandments were in the ark. The law here was given to the priests and to the elders of the people to deposit in its proper place, so that, to use modern terminology, both church and state were to be governed by it (v. 12).

The song Moses is *commanded* to write as a national religious anthem has a purpose described in v. 21. God declares,

And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed: for I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swear.

Since man is fallen, his imagination is evil; redeemed man is not perfectly sanctified in this world, and his imagination is commonly his expression of supposed free space outside of God. We are told in Genesis 6:5 and 8:21 that, with fallen men, "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually [or, every day]." In Psalm 103:14, we read, "For he knoweth our *frame*; he remembereth that we are dust." *Frame* is the same word in Hebrew as *imagination*, *yaytzer*; the frame of our life is our thinking independently of God, so that even the redeemed are not entirely free of this. We who are dust, and will in time return to dust in our flesh, will still in our imaginations play god. The Song of Moses has as its purpose to so imbed God's word in our hearts and minds that it becomes a witness against our imagination. One of the many evils of modern education is its neglect of memorization.

The Song of Moses has as its purpose to establish a perpetual standard of reference in the minds of men. Three songs by Moses are recorded in the Bible: Exodus 15, Deuteronomy 32, and Psalm 90.

This Song of Moses was commanded by God when Moses and Joshua appeared at the sanctuary. It is commonly stated that Joshua's presence there was for his investiture, but, while this *may* be true, nothing is said about it. Instead, in Joshua's presence, the writing of the song is ordered. Joshua is ordered to the sanctuary by God "that I may give him a charge" (v. 14). Part of that charge was that the Song of Moses be made a part of the life of the people.

There is also the promise, "I will be with thee" (v. 23) in all the battles ahead, so "Be strong and of a good courage" because you shall triumph (v. 23).

There is a contrast in our text between *imagination* and *memory*. Men must not trust in their imagination, because it reflects their fallen history. God's appointed servants must discipline and teach, so that man's memory is mindful of God's works, covenant, law, grace, and mercy.

The issue is between educational approaches stressing *memory* versus those stressing *imagination*. To stress imagination means to believe in the child's or person's creative powers, whereas to emphasize memory is to maintain that the future must be built on the knowledge of the past under God. Knowledge is not manufactured anew with every generation. It is a growing structure based on biblical premises, whereas modern education is deliberately rootless and barren.

Chapter One Hundred Six

The Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32:1-52)

1. Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.
2. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass:
3. Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God.
4. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.
5. They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation.
6. Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?
7. Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee.
8. When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.
9. For the LORD's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.
10. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.
11. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings:
12. So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.
13. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock;
14. Butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat; and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape.
15. But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.
16. They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger.

17. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not.

18. Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee.

19. And when the LORD saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters.

20. And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith.

21. They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.

22. For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains.

23. I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend mine arrows upon them.

24. They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction: I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust.

25. The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of gray hairs.

26. I said, I would scatter them into corners, I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men:

27. Were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the LORD hath not done all this.

28. For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them.

29. O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!

30. How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut them up?

31. For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.

32. For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter:

33. Their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps.

34. Is not this laid up in store with me, and sealed up among my treasures?

35. To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.
36. For the LORD shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left.
37. And he shall say, Where are their gods, their rock in whom they trusted,
38. Which did eat the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offerings? let them rise up and help you, and be your protection.
39. See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.
40. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever.
41. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me.
42. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy.
43. Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.
44. And Moses came and spake all the words of this song in the ears of the people, he, and Hoshea the son of Nun.
45. And Moses made an end of speaking all these words to all Israel:
46. And he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law.
47. For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life: and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land, whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.
48. And the LORD spake unto Moses that selfsame day, saying,
49. Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, unto mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, that is over against Jericho; and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession:
50. And die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people; as Aaron thy brother died in mount Hor, and was gathered unto his people:
51. Because ye trespassed against me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah-Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin; because ye sanctified me not in the midst of the children of Israel.

52. Yet thou shalt see the land before thee; but thou shalt not go thither unto the land which I give the children of Israel.
(Deuteronomy 32:1-52)

In vv. 1-43, we have the Song of Moses; in vv. 44-52, after a word from Moses, God commands Moses to go to Mount Nebo; from there, he can see the Promised land before he dies. The Song of Moses is a vindication of the ways of God.

It begins rather strangely for us. In vv. 1-3, the reference to *doctrine* is to a received teaching. The doctrine is not a teaching that needs to be drilled into unwilling minds, because it is like dew or like rain falling on a thirsty earth and on wilting plants. It revives and gives life to all who receive it. Thus, the doctrine of God is life to all who receive it. It comes (v. 4) from the perfect Rock, the foundation, God, whose ways are perfect.

In the Song of Moses, as elsewhere, the term *Rock* refers to God, except when used to designate false or pretended gods, as in vv. 31 and 37. In Matthew 16:18, our Lord speaks of Simon as Peter, *Petros*, belonging to the Rock, Jesus Christ.

In vv. 5-6, Moses declares that Israel has been corrupt and traitorous because it has repaid God's grace with unfaithfulness. God has been a father to them, and they are rebellious sons. In vv. 7-14, Moses reviews God's mercy to Israel, and His many blessings. God's protection surrounded Israel in a remarkable way. In vv. 15-18, Moses begins by referring to Israel as *Jeshurun*, which means, *upright*. This is a satirical term and it has in mind what later became an important facet of the national life, Phariseeism. Israel confused *grace* with *nature* and saw itself as naturally superior. They thereby "forsook God" (v. 15) and provoked God to anger. They adopted false gods and forgot their Redeemer. The Song of Moses looks ahead in history to a recurring pattern of apostasy.

In vv. 19-25, we are told that God's reaction to this is anger and contempt. He stands to one side in anger to send judgments upon the faithless covenant people. They will face four kinds of judgments or "plagues," 1) hunger, 2) pestilence, 3) wild beasts, and 4) war (vv. 23-25). The only thing restraining God from totally obliterating them from the world is that they bear God's Name, and He does not want Israel's enemies to gloat over their death (vv. 26-27).

In v. 28, we have a grim description of Israel: "For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them." Their

sin has blinded them, and they have forsaken justice. The same description today fits the former nations of Christendom. If they were wise, they would see from their history what the consequences are (v. 29). As against Leviticus 26:8, a handful of enemies will put thousands of Israelites to flight. This failure is God's doing, and it is His surrender of them to their enemies (v. 30). Even their enemies recognize what they refuse to see, that God has abandoned them (v. 30-31).

The enemies of God have a strength that comes from consistency: they are unequivocally the heirs of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 32-33). Clear-cut evil is always stronger than the pharisaical, who claim a character they do not have, and who live in terms of an equivocal and divided premise. Whenever the godly become compromisers, they become weaker than the evil. They have no consistency and their strength is diluted and destroyed. A once strong Western world is now a faltering cripple because it has no uncompromising premise.

But in due time God's vengeance will bring a "day of calamity" upon all the evil nations (vv. 34-35). As against all false gods, who are incapable of cursing or blessing, God says, "To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense" (v. 35). The Lord will judge His people, and also their enemies. The false gods can do nothing for Israel. "Let them be your protection," God says.

"See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand" (v. 39). The living God alone has power over life and death, and it is an absolute and sovereign power.

God therefore declares He will take vengeance on the enemies of the covenant people after judging and punishing them (vv. 40-43). He turns His weapons, first used against His people, against their enemies. Let all other nations congratulate Israel for the vengeance God takes on their enemies (v. 43).

In vv. 44-52, we have some final comments. *First*, in vv. 45-47, we are told that God's law is a testimony and a witness against man's sin. In v. 46, "all the words which I testify among you this day" can be read as testify *against* you. The law spells out our moral rebellion and it points us to strength. *Second*, to obey the law, Moses says, "is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life: and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land, whither ye go over Jordan to possess it" (v. 47). Life is thus associated with obedience to God's law. *Third*, Moses is told to climb Mount Nebo in order to see

from afar the Promised Land (vv. 48-52). Because place names change with time, we have no certainty which mountain Nebo is.

Although this is called the Song of Moses, the Speaker throughout is God, not Moses. Moreover, the song does not give any commandment: it simply states the consequences of disobedience. It stresses the simplicity of man's choice: it is between God's way and man's way, between God's law and man's law, between good and evil. The issue cannot be legitimately complicated into problems of foreign affairs, diplomacy, and the like.

The twentieth century has seen the steady blurring of moral lines. Prior to World War I, most Americans saw national and international issues in biblical moral terms. Woodrow Wilson shifted the moral grounds quietly to a humanistic world and life view. Since then, the prevailing view opposes any emphasis on moral problems. President John F. Kennedy insisted that our problems are technological, not moral ones. The view from Washington, D.C., is now anti-moral and anti-Christian.

The Song of Moses very simply tells us that the only efficacious force in history is God the Lord. To forget that fact is to invite judgment, and it shall come, for we have seen God's *grace* to us as a nation as evidence of our supposed *natural* superiority. History is littered with peoples who assumed that what God had given them was their *natural* powers.

Chapter One Hundred Seven

Blessing (Deuteronomy 33:1-29)

1. And this is the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death.
2. And he said, The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them.
3. Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand: and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words.
4. Moses commanded us a law, even the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob.
5. And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together.
6. Let Reuben live, and not die; and let not his men be few.
7. And this is the blessing of Judah: and he said, Hear, LORD, the voice of Judah, and bring him unto his people: let his hands be sufficient for him; and be thou an help to him from his enemies.
8. And of Levi he said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah;
9. Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant.
10. They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar.
11. Bless, LORD, his substance, and accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again.
12. And of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the LORD shall dwell in safety by him; and the LORD shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders.
13. And of Joseph he said, Blessed of the LORD be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath,
14. And for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon,
15. And for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills,
16. And for the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof, and for the good will of him that dwelt in the bush: let the bless-

ing come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him that was separated from his brethren.

17. His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh.

18. And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and, Issachar, in thy tents.

19. They shall call the people unto the mountain; there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness: for they shall suck of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand.

20. And of Gad he said, Blessed be he that enlargeth Gad: he dwelleth as a lion, and teareth the arm with the crown of the head.

21. And he provided the first part for himself, because there, in a portion of the lawgiver, was he seated; and he came with the heads of the people, he executed the justice of the LORD, and his judgments with Israel.

22. And of Dan he said, Dan is a lion's whelp: he shall leap from Bashan.

23. And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the LORD: possess thou the west and the south.

24. And of Asher he said, Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil.

25. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.

26. There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky.

27. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them.

28. Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew.

29. Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.

(Deuteronomy 33:1-29)

In the closing section of Deuteronomy, we encounter verses written by someone other than Moses, probably Joshua, who concluded the book with minor additions. This chapter is mainly the blessings pronounced by Moses on each of the tribes or clans of Israel.

A blessing invokes God's favor on someone. It presupposes that God is the sole author of all things. A blessing also requires an obedience to God's law so that the results of obedience are declared in the blessing to be God's reward and grace to the person blessed. The blessing thus calls attention to God's ways and man's faithfulness. In v. 6, for example, the Reubenites, descended from Jacob's first-born, had been set aside because of Reuben's sin (Gen. 49:4). The blessing simply states the hope that the Reubenites will not disappear as a tribe. Simeon is not mentioned at all: the tribe was absorbed into Judah.

The great blessing to all the clans is described in vv. 2-5, *the inheritance of God's law*. God is the Lord, King over Israel, and His greatest gift to His people is the covenant law. Until modern times, to have a law *normally* meant protection. Rome debauched its law to make it an enemy to the people and thereby contributed to its own collapse. Usually, people looked to the King's law for their security. God's coming to Israel, and His self-revelation, meant the giving of His law, and to receive God's law meant to receive God's protection.

In v. 7, Judah is blessed, and the blessing is a plea that God hear Judah's prayer and protect him from enemies.

In vv. 8-11, Levi is blessed. This tribe, with a bad beginning in its founder, became the defender of the faith at Sinai. Levi as a tribe had set duty above all tribal and family claims (Ex. 32:25-29). For this reason, God appointed the Levites to guard God's law and to teach it. They were to have a central part in worship. The prayer for Levi's blessing includes a prayer for the overthrow of his enemies.

In v. 12, Benjamin is blessed with God's special care, as of a child carried on his father's shoulders.

The blessing of Joseph is a long one, vv. 13-17:

13. And of Joseph he said, Blessed of the LORD be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath,

14. And for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon,

15. And for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills,

16. And for the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof, and for the good will of him that dwelt in the bush: let the blessing come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him that was separated from his brethren.

17. His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh. (Deut. 33:13-17)

The blessing of God is here invoked upon the land which the two Josephite tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, will inherit. Not only will their land be especially fertile, but as a people they will be like a wild ox or buffalo, goring and trampling down their enemies. Until 722 BC, this blessing was true of these two tribes.

In vv. 18-19, Zebulun and Issachar are blessed, then in vv. 20-21, Gad, and in v. 22, Dan:

18. And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and Issachar, in thy tents.

19. They shall call the people unto the mountain; there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness: for they shall suck of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand.

20. And of Gad he said, Blessed be he that enlargeth Gad: he dwelleth as a lion, and teareth the arm with the crown of the head.

21. And he provided the first part for himself, because there, in a portion of the lawgiver, was he seated; and he came with the heads of the people, he executed the justice of the LORD, and his judgments with Israel.

22. And of Dan he said, Dan is a lion's whelp: he shall leap from Bashan. (Deut. 33:18-22)

Zebulun and Gad are promised that they will have cause for celebration. Both tribes apparently had access to the Sea of Galilee, and Zebulun perhaps the Mediterranean as well. Both would gain wealth from shipping and fishing. The reference to sand may mean the manufacture of glass, to which Josephus refers (*The Jewish War*, 2.10.2). Dan is described as a fearless lion's whelp, ready to leap upon his enemies.

Then, in vv. 23-29, the blessings of Naphtali, and of Asher are cited, and Moses's conclusion:

23. And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the LORD: possess thou the west and the south.

24. And of Asher he said, Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil.

25. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.

26. There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and his excellency on the sky.

27. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them.

28. Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew.

29. Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.

(Deut. 33:23-29)

Naphtali will be richly blessed (v. 23) and will expand its territory. Asher will be prosperous. The reference to oil refers to the rich olive orchards this tribe would develop (vv. 24-25). The brass and iron shoes refers to its fortifications, since Asher was located on a route used for both trade and invasions.

Verses 26-29 take us back to the beginning, to the covenant Lord. Verse 27 is one of the most heartening sentences in the Bible. God is our refuge, and underneath all the experiences of life are His everlasting arms. God is the Creator of heaven and earth and all things therein. This means that everything that happens, and all the circumstances of life, are ordained by Him. This is the ground of our security and strength.

These blessings are pronounced on tribes or clans no longer in existence. Their meaning for us now rests in the fact of blessings.

The words blessing and benediction are essentially the same. Church services end with a blessing or a benediction. The word of God as proclaimed or taught is the covenant word of God. As we hear and obey that word, we are blessed, or, if we disregard it, we are cursed. God's blessings are practical ones: they mean health, success, long life, and much more. For a people, it can mean victory, prosperity, good weather, and the like. God chooses our blessings for us, and yet, at the same time, by our obedience we prepare ourselves to be blessed. The biblical phrase "to fear God" means to obey Him, to keep His commandments. It is a mistake to read "fear" simply as an emotion: it is to give God the respect of hearing and obeying Him. At one time, all greetings were blessings, as in Ruth 2:4, where Boaz

greet the reapers, saying, "The LORD be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee." Our "good-bye" was originally "God be with you." At one time, men felt the need for grace and blessings and therefore used them on meeting one another and in departing. The premise was to bless one another, and also to be a blessing, i.e., someone who in faithfulness to God kept His law and became a source of grace and blessing to others. The belief now is that a person can either do everything on his own, or, if he needs help, he seeks the state's help or blessing. The modern state has become modern man's source of blessings. To paraphrase our Lord's comment on the sword's power, They that live by the state shall die by the state.

Chapter One Hundred Eight

The Death of Moses (Deuteronomy 34:1-12)

1. And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the LORD shewed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan,
 2. And all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea,
 3. And the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar.
 4. And the LORD said unto him, This is the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither.
 5. So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD.
 6. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.
 7. And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.
 8. And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days: so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.
 9. And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses.
 10. And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face,
 11. In all the signs and the wonders, which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land,
 12. And in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel.
- (Deuteronomy 34:1-12)

The man Moses died, but the law of God is eternal, because it expresses the nature of God's being.

The setting was the plains area of Moab. Since names have changed over the centuries, we do not know now where the Nebo mountains are, nor which is Pisgah.

We learn something more about Moses. In Deuteronomy 31:1, when Moses tells us he is 120 years old that day, he adds, "I can no

more go out and come in.” Compared to his earlier years, this no doubt seemed true to Moses, but the fact is that, however much ailing, he was still able to climb to the top of Pisgah to see the land of Canaan spread out before him. Moreover, Deuteronomy 34:7 tells us something remarkable: “his eye was not dim, nor his natural force [or, moisture] abated.” In other words, Moses’s vision was still that of a young man, nor had his sexual ability diminished and disappeared.

Our ignorance of Moses’s grave is not accidental. No cult of Moses could develop, nor a shrine center, around his grave. God caused the memory of it to cease, since apparently the people in general were ignorant of the site. We have a tantalizing reference to the body of Moses in Jude 9. Michael the archangel contends, and the word has a legal connotation, with the devil over the body of Moses. This contention is secondary to the fact that Michael’s answer to Satan is God-centered, “The Lord rebuke thee.” Not even Michael presumes to speak in his own authority, however right the cause. Beyond this, we are told nothing. Even in death, Moses was somehow important.

We are not told who was with Moses when he died. Possibly it was Joshua and the angel Michael. The emphasis of the book is on vv. 10-12, the last three verses; these tell us of the uniqueness of Moses. He was a prophet without equal. God had given Moses a status unequaled by any prophet. Only with the coming of Jesus Christ do we see one greater than he.

This greatness was the work of God. In two respects, Moses was unrivalled. *First*, God knew Moses “face to face,” i.e., with a revelation of Himself without equal until the incarnation. Moses was close to God because God so ordained it in a remarkable way.

Second, God through Moses worked amazing signs and wonders against Pharaoh, his people, and the land of Egypt. Such miracles or supernatural wonders appear only in three eras of biblical history: *first*, in Moses’s day; *second*, in the time of Elijah and Elisha; and *third*, in the lives of Christ and His apostles. Their occurrence in the other eras was rare and unique.

There is, however, a *third* aspect of Moses’s life, an obvious one, which is not mentioned here. God gave His law through Moses. This is, of course, the subject of all Deuteronomy, as well as Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Why is it not mentioned in this summary?

Because the law is so radically God's revelation of His being, Moses is simply the one who carries it to the people. The plagues on Egypt manifested God's sovereign power and judgment. The law is a revelation of God's righteousness or justice. We should not speak of it as "the Mosaic law" because it is God's law. The law tells us what God is, the meaning of His justice, and what we should be.

There can be no government without law. This is why the modern parents who seek to replace law by love in governing their children, soon find that they have abandoned law, love, and government: because there can be no government without law. The wrong law means tyranny. Tyranny is in fact simply government without God. True tyranny does not refer to the harshness of a rule but to its humanistic, man-made doctrine of justice. No higher court of God is recognized, and man has no appeal against human injustices. If there is no always valid law of God, there is no salvation, because there is then no eternally valid standard of judgment. Man then simply fails to meet his own or someone else's criteria, a subjective matter, so that salvation becomes a fluid, subjective, and changing idea. We are not saved by the law; Christ delivers us from the death-sentence of the law into faithfulness to it. Harold J. Brokke wrote, "The most evident sign that we may not be believing Moses or Jesus is that the wonderful possibilities of the promise of the Holy Spirit are strangely lacking in the church."¹ The Holy Spirit and the law must not be separated. Romans 7:12 tells us that the "law is holy." This means that it is our way, not of salvation, but of sanctification.

We are told that Israel wept and mourned the death of Moses for a month. However much they had disobeyed him, they also always knew that he was a link to God. Now that link was gone, and they wept.

The God-ordained link, however, was the covenant and the covenant law, and these continued forever. The only question was whether or not the people would be covenant-breakers or covenant-keepers. Not even Joshua was entirely immune to seeing Moses's death as a broken link to God. For this reason, God told Joshua, "Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan..." (Josh. 1:2). God's work did not die with Moses, nor with the death of any man. It continues, and the power of God is always the

¹ Harold J. Brokke, *The Law is Holy* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1963), 26.

same in every generation. Men can be used in God's work, but they cannot frustrate it nor hinder it. Those who tried in the wilderness years to oppose or to the frustrate Moses's work paid a price for it. God's will is done, on earth as in heaven, and no man can stay His hand or alter His decrees. God's will is always done.

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The Author

Rousas John Rushdoony (1916-2001) was a well-known American scholar, writer, and author of over thirty books. He held B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of California and received his theological training at the Pacific School of Religion. An ordained minister, he worked as a missionary among Paiute and Shoshone Indians and pastored two California churches. He founded the Chalcedon Foundation, an educational organization devoted to research, publishing, and cogent communication of a distinctively Christian scholarship to the world at large. His writing in the *Chalcedon Report* and his numerous books spawned a generation of believers active in reconstructing the world to the glory of Jesus Christ. Until his death, he resided in Vallecito, California, where he engaged in research, lecturing, and assisting others in developing programs to put the Christian Faith into action.

The Ministry of Chalcedon

CHALCEDON (kal-see-don) is a Christian educational organization devoted exclusively to research, publishing, and cogent communication of a distinctively Christian scholarship to the world at large. It makes available a variety of services and programs, all geared to the needs of interested ministers, scholars, and laymen who understand the propositions that Jesus Christ speaks to the mind as well as the heart, and that His claims extend beyond the narrow confines of the various institutional churches. We exist in order to support the efforts of all orthodox denominations and churches. Chalcedon derives its name from the great ecclesiastical Council of Chalcedon (AD 451), which produced the crucial Christological definition: "Therefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man...." This formula directly challenges every false claim of divinity by any human institution: state, church, cult, school, or human assembly. Christ alone is both God and man, the unique link between heaven and earth. All human power is therefore derivative: Christ alone can announce that, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). Historically, the Chalcedonian creed is therefore the foundation of Western liberty, for it sets limits on all authoritarian human institutions by acknowledging the validity of the claims of the One who is the source of true human freedom (Galatians 5:1).

The Chalcedon Foundation publishes books under its own name and that of Ross House Books. It produces a magazine, *Faith for All of Life*, and a newsletter, *The Chalcedon Report*, both bimonthly. All gifts to Chalcedon are tax deductible. For complimentary trial subscriptions, or information on other book titles, please contact:

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