

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

* * * **DIVINE PRINCIPLES FOR NATIONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS** * * *
(or, **ISRAEL'S RENEWAL OF THE SINAITIC COVENANT**)

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Soli Deo Gloria!

"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?" (Deut4:8)

AUTHOR: Moses (c. 1406 BC)

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE OF WRITING. Liberal critics, especially since the [so-called] scholarship of Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918), have denied the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch in general, and Deuteronomy in particular. They have alleged that Deuteronomy is a "pious fraud" written c. 722 BC (by an unknown scribe who falsely attributed it to Moses); they identify it as "the Book of the Law" discovered/fabricated during refurbishment of the Temple by Hilkiah (2Kgs22:8; cf. Deut31:24-26), which led to the religious reforms enacted by King Josiah (2Kgs23:1-28). However, the Biblical testimony is unequivocal in attributing Deuteronomy to Moses (e.g., Josh1:7-8; Judg1:20; 3:4; 1Kgs2:3; 8:53; 2Kgs14:6; 18:6,12; Ezr3:2; Matt19:7-8; Mk10:3-5; 12:19; Jn5:46-47; Act3:22; 7:37-38; Rom10:19; 1Cor9:9), written immediately preceding his death (c. 1406 BC). In fact, the death/burial of Moses and his succession by Joshua are recorded at the close of the book (Deut34:5-12); this closing was presumably appended by Joshua, but should in no way cast doubt on the Mosaic authorship of the remainder.

CHARACTER AND NAME OF DEUTERONOMY. Deuteronomy is one of the five books of Moses that are together designated as the Torah in the Hebrew Bible. Deuteronomy is not a book of historical narrative as are Genesis, Exodus and Numbers; more like Leviticus, it is a book of law. Its name in English is a transliteration from the Latin Vulgate meaning "second law" (which really results from a mistranslation of Deut17:18 in the LXX), and largely because of the book's name has been [mis]understood to be merely the record of a rehearsal of the Sinaitic Law by Moses, immediately prior to his death, for the generation who were children at Sinai but had survived the 40 years of wilderness wandering. As will be discussed in the next section, Deuteronomy is much more than just a rehearsal of the Sinaitic Law, it is a **formal renewal of the Mosaic covenant**. The book's name in Hebrew is derived from the opening words of the book (as is common in the TNK), "These are the words" (Deut1:1). As will be discussed in a subsequent section, this opening is an important element in identifying the Book of Deuteronomy as following a Suzerain-vassal treaty in form.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT. Deuteronomy is not merely a reiteration of the Sinaitic Law for a new generation in light of Moses' imminent death. The rebellious Israelites of the previous generation have all died in the wilderness during the preceding 40 years of wandering. The new generation is positioned once again to enter the Promised Land. But the Sinaitic (Mosaic) Covenant needs to be renewed, both from Jehovah's

perspective as well as Israel's. Israel's failure at Kadesh-Barnea in refusing to enter the Promised Land on their first approach (Num13-14) was a catastrophic breach of the covenant on their part and could have resulted in God's termination of the Mosaic Covenant, which was a conditional covenant. As an act of grace, **God renewed the Sinaitic Covenant** with the nation of Israel as represented by the second generation of Jews (those who survived 40 years of wandering in the Sinai wilderness).

NATURE OF THE MOSAIC COVENANT. The Mosaic Covenant is a national covenant (Deut28:1). It is concerned with national righteousness, not personal righteousness. It's promised blessings and cursings are national (Deut28:2-68), not personal (cf. Jer31:29-32). The Law of Moses had nothing to do with personal salvation/damnation. The Law of Moses never promises eternal life for keeping it (it did promise long [earthly] life in the Land), nor does it threaten eternal damnation for failing to keep it (though it did prescribe physical death for some sins). The Law code included in the Mosaic covenant was given to the generation of Israelites who had already been saved by grace through faith (demonstrated at the Egyptian Passover; Ex12:3-13); it was the legal system upon which the *nation* of Israel (a redeemed people) was to be established.

SUZERAIN-VASSAL TREATY FORM. Archeology has revealed that the Book of Deuteronomy precisely follows the (Hittite) Suzerain-vassal treaty form. This is consistent with a 2nd Millennium BC date for composition of Deuteronomy, and entirely incompatible with a mid-to-late 1st Millennium BC date; that is to say, historical/archeological research indicates that this treaty form was no longer in use in the 1st Millennium BC (the timeframe argued by liberal, higher critics for the date of composition of the Book of Deuteronomy). Deuteronomy opens with, "These are the words" (Deut1:1, which is the title of the book in the TNK) which is the precise opening of all Hittite Suzerain-vassal treaties.

OUTLINE OF DEUTERONOMY. The Book of Deuteronomy can be outlined in precise accord with the Suzerain-vassal treaty form, as follows:

- I. Preamble (Deut1:1-5)
- II. Historical Prologue (Deut1:6-4:49)
- III. Stipulations (Deut5:1-26:49)
 - A. General Stipulations (Deut5:1-11:32)
 - 1. The "10" Commandments (Deut5:1-33)
 - 2. Exhortation to **love and obey** Yahweh (Deut6:1-11:32)
 - B. Particular Stipulations (Deut12:1-26:49)
 - 1. Case law related to the 1st commandment (Deut12:1-31)
 - 2. Case law related to the 2nd commandment (Deut12:32-13:18)
 - 3. Case law related to the 3rd commandment (Deut14:1-21)
 - 4. Case law related to the 4th commandment (Deut14:22-16:17)
 - 5. Case law related to the 5th commandment (Deut16:18-18:22)
 - 6. Case law related to the 6th commandment (Deut19:1-22:8)
 - 7. Case law related to the 7th commandment (Deut22:9-23:18)
 - 8. Case law related to the 8th commandment (Deut23:19-24:7)
 - 9. Case law related to the 9th commandment (Deut24:8-25:4)
 - 10. Case law related to the 10th commandment (Deut25:5-19)
- IV. Ratification Procedure and Sanctions (Deut27:1-30:20)
- V. Provision for Succession (Deut31:1-34:12)

Other characteristics of (Hittite) Suzerain-vassal treaties, which are evident in Deuteronomy, included: provision to prepare 2 copies (exact duplicates) of the treaty, one for each party (Deut4:13; 5:22; 10:1,3); provision to publicly read the treaty on a regular basis (Deut31:10-11); designation of witnesses to the treaty (Deut4:26; 32:1; cf. Isal:2); and the enumeration of specific blessings and cursings for obedience/disobedience on the part of the vassal nation (Deut28:1-68).

DEUTERONOMY AND MESSIANIC PROPHECY. Deuteronomy 18:15-19 contains one of the most important Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. Here God reveals that the Messiah who is to come will be a "Prophet . . . like unto [Moses]" who will be raised up from among the Jewish people (v18). That is, Messiah will be the greatest of all the Jewish prophets. It is an obligation of the Jewish nation to "hearken [i.e., obey] . . . unto Him" when He comes (vv15,19). Before the priests and Levites, John the Baptist denied he was "that prophet" (Jn1:21), specifically in reference to the prophecy of Deut18:15 (Cp., Matt16:14).

DEUTERONOMY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT. The Book of Deuteronomy is by far the most quoted book in the Old Testament; it ranks 3rd (behind Psalms and Isaiah) in number of quotations in the New Testament, where it is quoted in 17 of the 27 books of the New Testament. As one measure of the importance of the Book of Deuteronomy, the Lord Jesus quoted from it more than from any other book of the Bible. In His temptation in the wilderness (Matt4:1-11; Luk4:1-13), all three of the Lord's Scripture quotations used to refute the Devil came from Deuteronomy (Deut6:13,16; 8:3; 10:20). Furthermore, when challenged by a lawyer to identify the greatest commandment, the Lord quoted Deut6:5.

CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF DEUTERONOMY. If God were to rule a nation, how would He do it? What would the laws for His nation look like? Israel under the Mosaic covenant, as renewed in the Book of Deuteronomy, is the answer to such questions. The external righteousness embodied in the Mosaic Law-code, to be enforced by the state, served as a legal restraint on both the regenerate and unregenerate citizenry (1Tim1:8-11) **for the good of society**. It should be understood that the Mosaic Covenant and its Law code only applied directly to the nation of Israel under the Dispensation of the Law; it never directly applied to any nation other than ancient Israel, nor does it directly apply to either modern Israel or the Church today. However, encapsulated within it are timeless, divinely-revealed principles of corporate/societal/national righteousness that have at least indirect application to any and every nation (Deut4:8); since "righteousness exalteth a nation" (Prov14:34), the principles expressed in the Law of Moses must be relevant to every nation during every age.

Without calling for a direct application of the Law of Moses (with state enforcement) to society today, as Theonomists (erroneously) do, we must nevertheless recognize that society would function infinitely better if the divine principles expressed in this Law code formed the basis of our national approach to government today, as it once did for virtually all of Western Civilization (cf. the 1905 painting by Paul Robert, "**Justice Lifts the Nations**", which hung on the stairway in the old Supreme Court Building in Lausanne, and by which the justices had to pass as they went to try a case; contrast with the pagan notion of 'Lady Justice'). For centuries the laws of western civilization were rooted in the revealed Law of God, but this historic basis is being

abandoned wholesale (even repudiated) in our generation. That begs the question: are our societies improving, or degenerating?

Finally, while it is not the case that the Law of Moses will be reinstated during the Millennial Kingdom, nonetheless the Lord Jesus Christ will righteously rule over the nations (Isa11:4) with a "rod of iron" (Rev19:15). This means He will enforce a Law code. What will the stipulations in that Millennial Law code be? Since the character of God does not change, His principles for national righteousness then will most certainly be consistent with what they were for Israel under the Law of Moses.

APPENDIX

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR HUMAN GOVERNMENT. Human government is a divinely ordained institution (Gen9:5-6). God's purpose for human government, however, is **not** the redemption of society (i.e., Liberalism's notion of 'social justice'); neither individuals nor society can be redeemed by means of a government-enforced legal system (of any kind! Note that Marxism and all its derivative systems have the redemption of society as their purported goal). Rather, God's purpose for human government is the restraint of sin and punishment of the sinner for the good of society (Rom13:1-4; 1Tim1:8-11). Nations today would do well to recognize and accept God's revealed purpose for human government, along with its limitations. Governments that go beyond the limits of God's revealed purpose do so without divine mandate or sanction, and by so doing may create the **moral necessity** for civil disobedience on the part of its believer citizens (Act5:29).

CHAPTER 1

PREAMBLE (Deut1:1-5)

INTRODUCTION TO THE COVENANT BETWEEN JEHOVAH AND ISREAL

- [1] The following are the "words" of "Moses" acting as the **prophet** (official spokesman) of Jehovah (contrast with Ex20:1, where God spoke directly to Israel). The address is given on "this side of the Jordan" (i.e., east of the Jordan river prior to Israel's entrance into Canaan).

The opening of Deuteronomy, "These are the words", is the precise phrase used to open all (Hittite) Suzerain-vassal treaties in the 2nd millennium BC (i.e., contemporary with God's revelation through Moses) and is an important clue to the structural character of the Book of Deuteronomy: it is a covenant document (i.e., a formal treaty) between the Suzerain, the Great King (Jehovah), and His vassal state (Israel).

The Significance of Divine Covenants. W. F. Albright, the father of American Biblical archeology, made the sweeping observation in 1968 that "only the Hebrews, so far as we know, made covenants with their gods or God." The fact that God deals with man by means of covenants is immensely significant and practical. The ancient pagan lived a life of fear and uncertainty, never sure how to please his "gods" or how they would react to his actions; his gods were by their nature capricious and unpredictable (e.g., this continues to be true today for the Hindu gods, the Allah of Islam, and even the god of Mormonism). In contrast, the Divine Covenants establish a stable and predictable relationship between men and Jehovah. By putting the terms of the covenant in writing that is supernaturally preserved throughout history (Ps12:6-7; Isa40:8; Matt24:35; 1Pet1:24-25), the performance of both parties (i.e., Jehovah and men) with regard to the terms of the covenants can be objectively measured. The Divine Covenants allow Jehovah to demonstrate His attributes of faithfulness and immutability to His creation, and the stable foundation they provide for man allow him to live a life free of fear and uncertainty regarding the future.

- [2] This parenthetical remark highlights the consequences of Israel's unbelief at Kadesh-Barnea. The journey from "Horeb" (i.e., Mt. Sinai) to Kadesh-Barnea, where God was prepared to give Israel the Promised Land (Num13:27,30), ought to have taken "eleven days" (it was a journey of approximately 140 miles).
- [3] However, 40 years later Israel still does not possess the Promised Land because of their previous unbelief and rebellion (Num14:1-10; 28-35). Nevertheless, the 40 years of judgment is about to be complete, the previous generation of Israelites have all died in the wilderness, and the new generation will be given the opportunity to accept and possess the land "the LORD" (Jehovah) wants to give them.

This verse allows us to precisely date the Book of Deuteronomy; Exodus/Mt. Sinai occurred in 1446 BC, so 40 years later puts Deuteronomy at 1406 BC. These events occur in the "eleventh

month" of the Jewish calendar, which is January-February. Entrance into Canaan under Joshua will take place during the first month of the next year (at the time of Passover; Josh5:10), so the time between these addresses of Deuteronomy, the covenant renewal procedure, and Moses' death until the Book of Joshua is about two months.

- [4] The situation in the land of Canaan, 40 years later, has not changed. There are still giants in the land (Num13:32-33) that must be conquered. However, the LORD has proved during the past 40 years in the wilderness that He will give them victory even against giants, as he has already done with kings "Sihon" and "Og" (Num21:21-35); king Og was himself a giant, and Bashan was known as "the land of giants" (Deut3:11,13). The point is that Jehovah is not asking Israel to exercise 'blind faith', but to trust in Him who has already proven Himself to be worthy of their trust.
- [5] The Hebrew word translated "to declare" literally means 'to make clear/plain' (Cp., Hab2:2). In a sense, Moses' addresses in Deuteronomy are a divinely-inspired exposition of the "law" given previously at Sinai; where the Deuteronomy exposition appears to differ from that given previously, it should be understood as an elaboration of the original intent for the purpose of clarity, not as an alteration of the Law. It is evident that **knowing and understanding the Word of God** must be the most important priority of the people of God.

Note also that the Hebrew *torah*, translated as "law" in English, would more accurately be rendered as 'instruction'; it doesn't have such the negative connotation as "law", and it includes much positive instruction (i.e., it's not just a list of prohibitions).

HISTORICAL PROLOGUE (Deut1:6-4:49)

ISRAEL'S INDEBTEDNESS TO JEHOVAH

- [6] In the Book of Exodus, the historical prologue (which establishes the indebtedness of the vassal state to the Suzerain) centered on the Exodus from Egypt (cf. Ex20:2; Deut5:6); now in Deuteronomy, it begins with Sinai and covers the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. In both cases, it is the gracious (and supernatural) deliverance and provision of Jehovah for Israel that indebts the nation to Him as their Great King.

Note on Verbal Revelation. At Mt. Sinai, Jehovah God revealed Himself to all the people of Israel. It was not merely a subjective impression, feeling, or intuition that Israel received, but the entire nation heard the "voice" of God (Ex19:9,19). If they had had a tape recorder, they could have recorded the voice of Jehovah speaking in the Hebrew language. The special revelation of God is objective¹ because it is **verbal**.

¹ That **the Word of God** is verbal, and thus 'objective', means that it **has one and only one meaning**, which is the meaning the Author intended; it cannot mean one thing to one person, and something different to another person, nor can its meaning evolve over time. The task of the interpreter is to determine what God meant when He said what He did (i.e., understand the 'authorial intent').

- [7] God explicitly defined the geographical extent of the Land He had promised to give Israel (Cp., Gen15:18-21); it was to extend all the way to the "river Euphrates", which is much more extensive than Israel has ever possessed in history.
- [8] That generation of Israelites were commanded by Jehovah to "go in and possess the land". God, as Creator, owns the whole earth (Ps24:1-2) has the right to give it to whom He wills; furthermore, the inhabitants of Canaan were under the righteous judgment of God for centuries of abominations (cf. Gen15:16; Lev18:3,24-30; 20:23; Deut9:4-5; 18:9-14; 2Chr33:9). However, Israel must appropriate God's gift by faith (i.e., believing the promise of God). At that point in history, God was prepared to fulfill the **Land** promise of the covenant He had made with Abraham (Gen12:1; 13:15; 15:18-21) and confirmed with Isaac (Gen17:8,19; 26:1-4) and Jacob (Gen35:12).
- [9] When Moses personally attempted to act as judge in every legal dispute among the Israelites (Ex18:13-27), he found it to be too great a burden for one man (Num11:14).
- [10] This verse is an allusion to Gen15:5. It is cited to demonstrate that God has already ("this day") kept the **Seed** promise of the Abrahamic covenant—He has made Abraham's descendants a great and numerous people. This ought to give Israel confidence in God's promise to now give them the land of Canaan.
- [11] The LORD promises to yet increase them "a thousand times as many more" in the future, and ultimately to bring to fulfillment the **Blessing** promise of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen12:2-3).
- Note on the Abrahamic covenant. In vv8-11 Moses has alluded to each of the 3 aspects of the Abrahamic covenant (i.e., God's promise of land, seed, and world-wide blessing via the descendants of Abraham). Though in Deuteronomy it is the Sinaitic covenant and its renewal that is at the forefront, in reality the Abrahamic covenant is the engine behind the scene that is driving God's actions. The bringing in of the Mosaic covenant at Sinai, renewed in Deuteronomy, in no way annuls or alters the terms of the Abrahamic covenant (Gal3:13-18), which Jehovah is unilaterally committed to keep.
- [12] The Hebrew word rendered "strife" is *riv*, which denotes a formal legal dispute or controversy. Moses was acting as judge to resolve legal disputes among the Israelites.
- [13] Moses was correct that the task was too great for one man, and the LORD directs him to appoint "rulers" to assist him (Ex18:19-27; Num11:16-17). The criteria for selecting these rulers were that they be **men** who were "wise", "understanding" (i.e., of the Law of God), and "known among your tribes" (i.e., not a novice, but of proven character); compare these criteria with those God will give for selecting elders in the Church (1Tim3:1-7).
- [14] The Israelites agreed to submit to these additional rulers who would be subordinate to Moses.

- [15] Moses selected the men to rule with him (i.e., the people did not elect their leaders). He adhered to God's requirements and selected "wise men" who were well known among the people. This was the beginning of the development of the structure of human government over the nation of Israel.
- [16] At least some of these "rulers" (v13), if not all, were to act as "judges" (Heb., *shoterim*). The commandment given to these men was that they were to "judge righteously".
- [17] The judges were to be impartial, giving no consideration with respect to the position, wealth, or environmental factors of the persons involved in the dispute. The judges were not to fear the "face [i.e., opinions] of man", but to impartially enforce God's law.

Note that there was to be **no legislative branch of government** in Israel. God instituted all the laws, and He specifically commands that none be added or deleted (Deut4:2; 12:32). Appeal to Moses (i.e., a higher court) occurs only if the lower judge cannot reach a decision. It is the lower court judge that initiates the appeal, not the defendant or plaintiff. The result is swift justice that serves to deter crime (Deut19:20; Eccl8:11).

Divine Principles Regarding Law. 1) Crime (i.e., sin) is defined by the Lawgiver, not by the victim, criminal, or court. 2) The source of all law is God (in contrast with the pagan notion of "positive law"²). 3) God's divine attributes of righteousness and justice are the only sufficient basis for law. 4) God's "laws" are resident in the human consciousness of every man (Rom1:32; 2:14-15), so that all men everywhere are without excuse (Rom1:18-20); this is the basis for the impartial judgment of all men.

- [18] God's revelation of the Law given to the nation of Israel "at that time" (i.e., the general post-Exodus period) was complete; no additional legislation would be needed. Note that with the giving of the Law of Moses, the children of Israel become a NATION, fulfilling yet another aspect of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen17:5; 18:18).

Could the Church Replace Israel? The Mosaic covenant was made with a nation (i.e., Israel) and addresses all aspects of national life for both regenerate and unregenerate citizens. In contrast, the Church is not a nation, but a body comprised of individual believers from all nations. As a transnational entity, the Church does not, and could not, replace the nation of Israel in the plan of God. Furthermore, the divine instructions for the Church as a corporate body revealed in the NT do not address the necessary functions of a nation. Thus, the Church as the Body and Bride of Christ is distinct from the nation of Israel.

² Positive law is the notion that the state, through man-made laws, bestows rights to its citizens (i.e., the only rights an individual has are those granted by the state). The American founding fathers rejected this notion when in the Declaration of Independence they asserted that individuals are endowed by their Creator (God) with certain unalienable rights, and that the purpose of human government is to secure (i.e., protect) these God-given rights.

- [19] In 1871, the British orientalist E.H. Palmer attempted to retrace the journey of Israel through the wilderness of Sinai. Afterward he wrote in The Desert of the Exodus: Journeys on Foot in the Wilderness of the Forty Years' Wanderings, "The country is nearly waterless, with the exception of a few springs in the larger wadis; but even here water can only be obtained by scraping small holes or pits in the ground and bailing it out with the hand. All that is obtained by the process is a yellowish solution which baffles all attempts at filtering."

The "wilderness" of Sinai, through which the more than 2 million men, women and children of Israel had to travel on their way from "Horeb" (i.e., Mt. Sinai) to the Promised Land of Canaan, and in which they had to live for 40 years because of their rebellion at "Kadesh-barnea", was "great and terrible" indeed. Were it not for the supernatural provision of the LORD for the nation on a daily basis during this extended period of time, the nation would have quickly perished.

Location of Kadesh-barnea. The location given for Kadesh-barnea on most Bible maps is probably wrong. The camp of Israel immediately preceding Kadesh-barnea was Ezion-geber (Num33:35-36; Deut2:8), which is known with certainty to be at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba, and which is far too distant from the traditional site of Kadesh-barnea to make it feasible. Furthermore, Moses requested of the King of Edom to allow the Israelites to pass through his nation using "the King's Highway" (Num20:17), which began at the port located at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba (i.e., Ezion-geber) and went north-northeast through Edom to Damascus, passing on the east side of the Dead Sea. These combine to suggest that the actual location of Kadesh-barnea was probably a considerable distance southeast of what is indicated on most Bible maps.

JEHOVAH'S FIRST ATTEMPT TO GIVE ISRAEL THE LAND

- [20] At Kadesh-barnea, the LORD declared to Israel that He was giving them the Land. The Hebrew participle used indicates sustained, continuous action; the LORD was in the process of giving Israel the Land, and He would continue to give them the Land (as Israel took action to possess it).
- [21] The LORD gave the Land, but Israel must possess it by faith (i.e., believing the promise of God). Although it will take divine intervention for Israel to conquer the nations dwelling in Canaan, who are indeed greater and stronger than the Jews, the LORD had promised to deliver them into the hand of Israel. Israel must believe this promise of God; and this required faith is not even 'blind faith', as the LORD has already delivered Israel from Egypt, an empire vastly superior in size and strength to the nations of Canaan. The LORD has given Israel every reason to believe He is both willing and able to keep His promise.

Note the reference to "the LORD" as the "God of thy fathers"; the LORD is committed to keep the unconditional promise He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Gen13:15; 26:3-4; 35:12). When one

knows he is walking in the perfect will of God, no matter what the circumstances, there is absolutely no reason to "fear" or "be discouraged".

Believing the Promise of God. This requirement/test of faith in order for Israel to inherit the Promised Land is entirely analogous to God's offer/promise of salvation to all men (Jn3:16); though available to all, each individual must appropriate it by personal faith.

- [22] In Numbers 3:1-3, it would appear that the command to send ahead spies into the Land came from the LORD. Here, it indicates the idea originated with the people. There is no contradiction. The idea originated with the people, in order to know "by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come".
- [23] This was a reasonable tactic (it did not necessarily indicate a lapse of faith by Israel) which "pleased [Moses]", and which the LORD endorsed by commanding how the "twelve men" should be selected (Num13:3).
- [24] The reconnaissance of the Land by the spies not limited to "the valley of Eshcol", but included the entire Land from the extreme south to the extreme north (Num13:21). Eshcol is probably mentioned by name since it was from there that the remarkable "cluster of grapes" that required two men to carry was found (Num13:23).
- [25] The result of the reconnaissance mission was that the spies returned with empirical evidence that the Land the LORD was giving them was everything He had promised it would be, a "good land" that "floweth with milk and honey" (Num13:27). This should have served to confirm and increase Israel's faith in the promise of God.

ISRAEL'S BREACH OF THE SINAIATIC COVENANT

- [26] Despite the clear promise of God, His miraculous deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage to the superpower Egypt, His supernatural preservation in the wilderness of Sinai, and empirical evidence that the Promised Land was all that God had said it would be, Israel "rebelled against the commandment of the LORD" to enter and possess Canaan (Num14:9). This rebellion of Israel was a catastrophic breach of the Sinaitic covenant (which was a conditional covenant) on the part of Israel; at this time, the LORD would have been entirely just in annulling the covenant made with Israel at Sinai (Num14:11-12). This catastrophic breach of the Sinaitic covenant sets up the need for covenant renewal documented in the Book of Deuteronomy.
- [27] This sin of Israel is particularly heinous, since it impugns the righteous character of God.
- [28] Though hyperbole is obviously being employed, the fact of the matter is that report of the spies was accurate. Indeed, the cities in Canaan were well fortified (which discoveries of modern

archeology affirms), and "the sons of the Anakim" dwelt in the Land (Num13:28). The Anakim were a race of giants, analogous to the Nephilim (Gen6:4), produced by the interbreeding of fallen angels with human women. This perversion was part of a Satanic strategy (2Pet2:4-5; Jude 6-7) to so corrupt the human gene pool as to prevent the prophesied coming of Messiah as "the seed of the woman" (Gen3:15); in the days of Noah, this diabolical plan was prosecuted worldwide, whereas by the days of Moses it could be limited to the geographical area inhabited by Israel.

- [30] Moses exhorts Israel to trust the promise of the LORD to "fight" for them, just as He did in delivering them from Egypt—an infinitely greater work³. Consider carefully the 10 plagues on Egypt. Delivering Israel from Egypt was not merely a military victory; Jehovah had shown both Israel and Egypt that He alone (in contrast to the gods of Egypt; Ex12:12; 18:11) was in sovereign control of every aspect of the universe.
- [31] The people's charge that God's intention was to destroy them (v27) was not only unfounded, but irrational. Had He wanted them to perish, why did He supernaturally preserve them in the wilderness?
- [32] Moses' conclusion is that the unbelief of Israel at Kadesh-barnea was unreasonable. The nation had every reason to believe the word of the LORD; that they would not was an act of pure rebellion (v26; Num14:9).

Note that though no one hearing Moses' words were actually part of the decision to rebel at Kadesh-barnea (the previous rebellious generation has all died in the wilderness, excepting Moses, Caleb and Joshua), he nonetheless asserts that "ye did not believe". Again, the Sinaitic covenant is a national covenant, so it is national behavior, not individual behavior, that is in view. It was the nation of Israel that rebelled, and this second generation of Jews still represent the nation of Israel.

- [33] Moses recounts how the LORD was visibly present with the nation in the wilderness in the form of "a cloud by day" and "fire by night", leading the way and directing their every movement (Ex13:21-22).

CONSEQUENCES OF ISRAEL'S REBELLION AT KADESH-BARNEA

- [34] Again, after the LORD had demonstrated His love for Israel, His presence with them, and His supernatural provision for them, it was not reasonable for Israel to fail to trust Him. Their rebellion made the LORD "wroth" (i.e., a righteous indignation that precipitates retributive judgment).
- [35] Israel's rebellion results in "this evil generation" forfeiting the privilege of entering the Promised Land. Note that the

³ This is a form of an argument from the greater to the lesser. Based on the LORD's supernatural work (of cosmic proportions) in delivering Israel from the superpower Egypt, He asks them to believe He will deliver into their hands the lesser nations of Canaan. God did not ask Israel, nor does he ever ask us, to exercise 'blind faith'; He asks men to put their faith in One who has already demonstrated Himself to be worthy of unqualified trust.

promise that God made "unto your fathers" (i.e., the Abrahamic covenant) was not annulled by Israel's rebellion (impossible since it was an unconditional covenant), but it will not be fulfilled by this generation of Israelites because of their unbelief.

The men of that generation (20 years and older; Num14:29) were held responsible for the rebellion, and the LORD decreed that they would all die in the wilderness, "not see[ing] that good land", as judgment; this judgment did not apply to women, nor males under the age of 20.

- [36] Caleb was exempted from the judgment, since he had exercised faith in the promise of God (Num13:30; 14:6-9,24). So great was Caleb's faith that, upon entering Canaan in his old age, he specifically requested that his allotment of land include the mountain region of Hebron (Josh14:12-14), the very region that headquartered the Anakim (the giants that had struck fear in the previous generation; Num13:23-33), from which he successfully drove out the "sons of Anak" (Judg1:20).
- [37] Moses believed God at Kadesh-barnea, but was later judged at Meribah for personal pride that led him to misrepresent the LORD before the people (Num20:7-13), which the LORD also labeled as rebellion (Num27:14), so that even Moses was not allowed to "go in there" (i.e., Canaan).
- [38] Joshua also was exempted from the judgment at Kadesh-barnea, since like Caleb he had exercised faith in the promise of God (Num14:6-9,30). In fact, the LORD decrees that Joshua will succeed Moses as leader of the nation, and that it will be Joshua that the LORD uses to "cause" a new generation of "Israel" to "inherit" the Land (Josh1:5-6).
- [39] The LORD pointed out the irony of the people's concern, and its consequences, at Kadesh-barnea (Num14:31). They expressed concern that their "children" would die in attempting to go into the Land (Num13:3); however, the unbelief of the parents brought about their own deaths in the wilderness, whereas their "little ones" would grow up to be the generation to successfully "go in" and "possess" the Land.

Trusting the Character of God. Mankind (including believers) continues to repeat this catastrophic error to this day. We think we know what is better for us, or for our children, than God does. We think our own love and concern for our children exceeds God's concern for them. Nothing could be more foolish! God loves our children more than we do. God's will for our children is infinitely better than ours. Do we believe this? Are we willing to believe God, who throughout six millennia of human history has unflinchingly demonstrated Himself to be the One worthy of our unqualified trust? As was the case for the nation of Israel, so for us: it is unreasonable/irrational for us not to do so!

- [40] The LORD's judgment on that unbelieving generation was for them to wander in the "wilderness" for 40 years, a year for each day of the spies' reconnaissance mission (Num14:33-34), so that every adult male of that unbelieving generation would die (Num14:32,35). **The consequence of their unbelief was that the LORD would not**

allow that generation of Israelites to inherit the Promised Land. The Promised Land would be given to a subsequent generation of Israelites.

A New Test of Faith. Thus, that generation of Israelites failed the test of faith at Kadesh-barnea. Though judgment came on them for that failure, God did not abandon nor forsake them. He would still be with them, and He would still supernaturally preserve them in the wilderness. At that point, however, a new test of faith began. **Would the Israelites trust God to help them live with the consequences of their prior bad choice/failure?**

Note that bad choices/failures (i.e., sin), even on the part of believers, bring consequences (including discipline from God). While repentance/confession brings forgiveness/cleansing from God (1Jn1:9) and a complete restoration to fellowship with Him, it may not eradicate the consequences of our sin⁴. We must trust God for the strength to live with such consequences.

- [41] While their confession is good (if sincere), "We have sinned against the LORD", their failure to accept the consequences of their sin is just more sin. Thus, that generation of Israelites also failed the new test of faith. Rather than accepting the just discipline of God, and relying on Him to help them live with the consequences of their sin, they launch out on a human attempt to avert the consequences that God has decreed.
- [42] Then, in attempting to possess the Land when God had closed the window of opportunity, the LORD is "not among [them]" (Cp., Num14:42-43). It is not God's will for this unbelieving and rebellious generation to enter the Land.
- [43] Israel ignored the clearly revealed will of the LORD and attempted to enter the Land "presumptuously" (i.e., under the pretense that they were acting in the will of the LORD); note that in the Numbers account, it specifically says that neither "the ark of the covenant" nor "Moses" departed from the camp when the Israelites set out, a clear indication that the LORD was not with them (Num14:44). How often do we attempt things in the name of God of which He wants no part? The LORD labels this for what it is, "rebell[ion]".
- [44] Just as certainly as Israel could not be defeated when the LORD fought for them, so it is impossible for Israel to be victorious when the LORD is not with them. This will be true even on the second attempt to enter the Land under Joshua (e.g., Ai; Josh7). Believers CANNOT act according to their own will, attach God's name to it, and automatically expect Him to bless their selfish lusts.
- [45] Was Israel's weeping genuine sorrow for their sin of rebellion? Apparently not (merely sorrow for their suffering), for the LORD refused to hear them.

⁴ A study of the life of David, the man after God's own heart (Act13:22), is virtually a primer on the subject of the consequences of sin in the life of a believer.

- [46] With this initial (and devastating) defeat by the Amorites, Israel resolves to remain in the wilderness under the discipline of the LORD. For the next 38 years (Deut2:14), Israel will dwell in the vicinity of "Kadesh" waiting for that unbelieving generation to die.

CHAPTER 2

ISRAEL'S WANDERING IN THE WILDERNESS

Chapter 2 continues the "Historical Prologue" portion of Deuteronomy, recounting Jehovah's provision for Israel in the wilderness after their rebellion at Kadesh.

- [1] After initially rejecting the LORD's discipline, the nation now submits to it. Israel spends the next 38 years (Deut2:14) in the vicinity of Kadesh. This does not mean the nation was entirely stationary; their camp did move, primarily southward and eastward, but a priority during this time was to avoid "Mount Seir", the territory of the Edomites (i.e., the descendants of Esau).
- [2] At this time, "the LORD spoke" to Moses giving specific instructions regarding the lands He had given to Esau (v5) and Lot (vv9,19).
- [3] Eventually, to journey toward the Promised Land, the nation must move "northward".
- [4] A northward trek would force an interaction between Israel and "the children of Esau", who dwell around Mount "Seir" (i.e., the Edomites). This interaction, with the children of Israel numbering in excess of 2 million, will strike fear in the Edomites; much like the Amorites (Josh2:9-11), the Edomites are aware of how Jehovah delivered Israel from Egypt, destroying that nation with mighty, supernatural works in the process.
- [5] The LORD's instructions are clear and specific. He is **not** giving Israel the land of Edom. The land promised to Abraham does not include Edom (Cp., Gen15:18-21); furthermore, Jehovah has given this land to the descendents of Esau (Gen27:39; 36:8), a people who also descend from Abraham and Isaac (thus Edom is closely related to Israel), and Israel has no right to it. Note that Jehovah's sovereign land grants include lands other than Canaan and nations other than Israel. It is permissible for Israel to pass through Edom, but the conquest of Edom was forbidden.
- [6] Israel was not even authorized to take the food they would need while passing through Edom; they must pay the Edomites for any food and water used.

Note the divinely-mandated distinction between the Edomites and the peoples dwelling in Canaan; the Canaanites have come under the just judgment of God (Gen15:16), and Israel is His instrument of judgment at this time. This is not true for the Edomites; a time will come in the future when God visits Edom in judgment (cf. Jer49:7-22; Obad1-21), but this is not the time.

- [7] Jehovah reminds Israel of His supernatural provision for them during 40 years in the wilderness, without which they would have quickly perished. Forty years before Jehovah had promised to preserve the children of the rebellious generation and to bring them into the Promised Land (Num14:31); Jehovah has kept His promise.
- [8] At this time Israel requested permission of the Edomites to pass through their territory (Num20:14-17). They promised to stay on "the king's highway", an international caravan route that went from the port at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba to Damascus, and they offered to pay for the water they and their cattle would drink (Num20:19). However, the Edomites refused this request (Num20:18), even mustering a show of force to prevent any attempt by Israel to pass through Edom (Num20:20-21). This caused Israel to turn eastward in order to bypass Edom, which led to an interaction with the Moabites.
- [9] Similarly, the LORD forbids Israel from taking the land of the Moabites, for He has given that land "unto the children of Lot for a possession" (Gen19:36-38). Since the Moabites are descendants of Lot, the nephew of Abraham, Moab is closely related to Israel.
- [10] When Jehovah granted this land to the Moabites, it was inhabited by the Emim (Gen14:5).
- [11] The Emim were a race of "giants" who dwelt in the land granted to Moab, just like the "Anakim" were giants who dwelt in the land granted to Israel (Num13:33).
- [12] The land Jehovah granted to the descendants of Esau (i.e., Edom) also had an indigenous people, the Horites (Gen36:20), dwelling in it.

Edom and Moab as Illustrations. Edom and Moab, peoples closely related to Israel, were also given sovereign land grants by Jehovah. These lands were inhabited by indigenous peoples, some of which were literal giants, which the descendants of Esau and Lot had to conquer in order to claim their lands. Both Edom and Moab succeeded in dispossessing their lands of inhabitants. If they could do it, *how much more so* Israel, who had both the promise of Jehovah assuring them of victory and His Presence among them providing infallible guidance. This is a classic argument from the lesser to the greater, used often in Scripture.

The reference to Israel's possession of the Promised Land in the past tense has been used by liberals as evidence that Deuteronomy was written not contemporary with the events it records, but much later and by someone other than Moses. This does not have to be the case. There are two possible and very acceptable solutions. 1) This is an instance of the *prophetic past tense* in which, to emphasize its certainty, God speaks of His promise as if already fulfilled. 2) This is a divinely authorized editorial comment inserted later, after Israel had possessed the Promised Land, which commonly occurs in the Torah, especially Genesis (e.g., Gen14:14; 36:31; 47:11); in this case, the comment need not have been inserted centuries later, but could just have easily been

made by Joshua when editing the text to include the death of Moses (Deut34:5-12).

- [13] Moses returns to his narrative from v8 regarding Israel's bypassing of Edom and Moab.
- [14] From the time of Israel's departure from Kadesh-barnea until the crossing of the Wadi "Zered" (Num21:12) was 38 years. The 40 years of wilderness wandering was almost complete, and the previous "generation of the men of war" had all died. The new generation of Israelites has never experienced war, so the impending victories in the Transjordan and Canaan must be attributed to the power of Jehovah, not Israel.
- [15] Note that the apparently natural deaths of the Israelites from the previous rebellious generation over the span of 38 years in the wilderness is interpreted as being by "the hand of the LORD" (i.e., divine providence).

Divine Providence and the Interpretation of History. Henry Ford gave an infamous definition of history as "just one damn thing after another", by which he meant to imply that history is nothing more than a series of disconnected and unrelated events having no overall plan or purpose. Such a view of history is unbiblical (cf. Isa46:9-11). In vv14-15, Moses observes real historical events around him, recognizes them as occurring according to divine providence, and interprets them in light of the revealed Word of God; would that this were our approach to historical analysis today!

- [16] The purpose for the 40 years of wilderness wandering was to wait for all the men of the previous generation, who were 20 years old or older at the time of the rebellion at Kadesh-barnea, to die (Num14:29).
- [17] Once the last man of that generation had died, the LORD spoke to Moses.

Chronological and Thematic Note. Deut2:16-17 marks an important point of division both chronologically and thematically. Up until this point, Moses' discourse has centered on the previous, rebellious generation, their wandering in the wilderness, and their battles which were defensive in nature only. From this point on, Moses will shift his focus to the new (current), obedient generation, their determined march toward the Promised Land, and the initiation of Holy War to eradicate the current inhabitants of that land; in this campaign of Holy War, Israel is the instrument of divine wrath on the Canaanites, who have come under the just judgment of Jehovah (cf. Gen15:16; Lev18:24-30; 20:23; Deut9:4).

- [18] Again, as previously, Israel is faced with the need to pass through Moab. The LORD's previous command that Moab is not to be conquered has not changed (v9).
- [19] To the north of Moab will come Ammon, whose land has also been granted to "the children of Lot" (Gen19:36-38) by Jehovah. Thus,

Israel is forbidden any attempt to take the land of Ammon; the land of Ammon is not part of the land promised to Israel, and the people of Ammon are not under the judgment of God (at this time).

- [20] Incidentally, Moses notes that the land Jehovah granted to the Ammonites also contained "giants", which the Ammonites called "Zamzummim" (Cp., Gen14:5).
- [21] The "Zamzummim" that the Ammonites had to overcome in order to possess the land that Jehovah granted them were every bit as tall and as powerful as the "Anakim" that dwell in Canaan. With the LORD's blessing, the Ammonites had succeeded in dispossessing their land of its gigantic inhabitants. Again, if the Ammonites could do it, how much more so the Israelites (see Edom and Moab as Illustrations, p. 15).
- [22] The conquest of Seir by "the children of Esau" (v12), as Ammon by "the children of Lot" (v21), was according to the decree and empowerment of the LORD.
- [23] Yet another example of the same is given as the "Caphtorim", a people who immigrated to "Gaza" from Caphtor (i.e., Crete) and become known as the Philistines (Gen10:14; Amos9:7), who God used to destroy the "Avvim", a race of people dwelling in Gaza who had also been infiltrated by the Anakim (Josh11:22; 13:3).

Holy War and the Giants. It is not coincidental that all the lands that the LORD grants to Israel and her close relatives (i.e., peoples immediately descended from Abraham) are occupied by giants. This almost certainly has to do with the subsequent outbreak of demon-bred "giants" (Heb., *Nephilim*) referred to in Genesis 6:2-4 (Cp., 2Pet2:4-5; Jud6-7). This Satanically-inspired phenomenon took place on a global scale in the antediluvian world, and is in fact the reason for the world-wide Flood "to destroy all flesh" (Gen6:17) in the days of Noah. Centuries later in the days of Moses, the repeat of the phenomenon is not global, but is focused on those lands granted to the descendents of Abraham. In both cases, the strategy of Satan would appear to be an attempt to so corrupt the genetic line, first of the entire human race, then of the descendents of Abraham, that it will be impossible for the Messiah, who must be of the (human) seed of the woman (Gen3:15), to be born. This further explains why all flesh (i.e., men, women, and children; cf. Deut2:34; 3:6) among the inhabitants occupying the Promised Land, which had been genetically corrupted by the race of giants, must be destroyed.

DIVINE COMMAND TO INITIATE HOLY WAR

- [24] With the preceding examples of Edom, Moab, Ammon, and even the Philistines successfully dispossessing lands granted to them by Jehovah of indigenous peoples (which included demon-bred giants), the LORD commands the new generation of Israelites to initiate "battle" in order to "possess" the land Jehovah has granted to them. This is the command to begin a **Holy War** of conquest; its scope is limited geographically to the Promised Land and ethnically to the peoples of Canaan who have come under the just

judgment of God (it is NOT a license for Israel to kill indiscriminately or take whatever they want). It is to begin with "Sihon", the Amorite king of "Heshbon", a portion of the Promised Land lying east of the Jordan.

- [25] The previous rebellious generation had been terrified of the inhabitants of Canaan (Num13:32-14:3), but the LORD assures this generation that the Canaanites will be terrified of them (cf. Josh2:9).
- [26] Actually, Israel initially requests of Sihon permission to pass through his land in "peace".
- [27] Israel offers to remain on the King's "highway" (Num21:21-22) while passing through the land of Sihon.
- [28] Israel even offers to pay for the food and water they use while in passage, as they had with Edom (v6).
- [29] Are you confused? Israel's offer of peace to Sihon after Jehovah's decree of Holy War (v24), with no apparent rebuke from the LORD, causes some confusion; what is going on here? The land that Sihon and his Amorite people were occupying was apparently part of the land that the LORD had previously granted to Moab (Num21:26). Although it is included in the land ultimately promised to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (i.e., Israel; Gen15:18-21; Deut1:7), apparently it is not the LORD's intention to give this part of it to this generation of Israelites at this time, focusing rather on that portion of the Promised Land west of the Jordan. To give this land to Israel would in effect be giving them part of the land granted (conditionally) to Moab, but Moab is not at this time under the divine judgment of Jehovah, as are the Canaanites/Amorites. However, the fact that an Amorite people has already usurped and possessed a portion of Moab's land, which is east of the Jordan river, apparently allows for a new contingency; if Sihon and his Amorite people resist the will of Jehovah, His timetable will be accelerated and this portion of the Promised Land will come into play at this time.
- [30] Sihon refused to permit Israel unmolested passage through his usurped land (Num21:23). In this decision, Moses asserts that Jehovah had "hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate" in order that he could be judged at this time. It is assumed that this is analogous to the LORD's hardening of Pharaoh's heart for the purpose of judging him (Ex7:3), which was in addition to Pharaoh repeatedly hardening his own heart (cf. Ex8:15,32). When this occurred (Num21:21-35), there was no mention of the LORD hardening Sihon's heart; Sihon's decision to resist Jehovah was there presented as his own. That Moses brings it up now is yet another instance of his overarching understanding of divine providence and its relationship to a correct interpretation of history.
- [31] Since Sihon resisted the will of the LORD, he showed himself and his people ripe for immediate judgment, and the land he had usurped from Moab was added to the land included for this generation of Israelites to "possess".

- [33] To come into battle against Israel at this time is to resist the revealed will of Jehovah; thus, God "delivered" Sihon and his people to judgment at the hands of Israel.
- [34] This is the first instance (of many more to come in Israel's campaign against the Canaanites/Amorites) of what in Hebrew is termed *haram*, a word that comes from a root meaning "devote" (i.e., to the LORD) and often translated "ban". It is used to identify those things Jehovah requires be devoted exclusively to Him; there is no allowance to redeem (i.e., spare) those things Jehovah specifies as coming under *haram* (cf. Lev27:28-29). This is the Hebrew word that underlies the English phrase, "utterly destroyed" in this verse. Sihon, his sons, and all his people (v33), here clarified as "the men, and the women, and the little ones of every city" were destroyed; "we left none to remain". Again, this was the LORD's command, and there were just reasons for it⁵ (see Holy War and the Giants, p. 17). But note carefully that this was Jehovah's command for this particular people at this particular time, and is NOT applied to every people that Israel will go to war with throughout her subsequent history.
- [35] The LORD permits Israel to claim the booty from this campaign against Sihon, but this will not always be allowed (Cp., Josh6:18; 7:1).
- [36] This is all land east of the Jordan river, initially (conditionally) granted to Moab but usurped by Sihon and the Amorites. It is included in the ultimate (and unconditional) land grant to Israel, which the LORD permits this generation to possess.
- [37] Again, the land (conditionally) granted to Ammon (and still possessed by her at this point in history) is forbidden for Israel to possess at this time. Jehovah's call for Israel to wage Holy War on His behalf has clearly defined geographical boundaries and ethnic limitations.

CHAPTER 3

CONQUEST OF GILEAD AND BASHAN, LANDS EAST OF THE JORDAN

- [1] Continuing north, Israel entered the land east of the Jordan known as Bashan. This would have also taken them through Gilead (but avoiding Ammon which was farther east). Endrei was a city on the northern border of Gilead/southern border of Bashan, almost due east of the Sea of Galilee.

⁵ The LORD's policy of *haram* in the occupation of the Promised Land by Israel has been a sustained source of feigned moral outrage on the part of unbelievers, and even believers have a long track record of embarrassment over it. We must remember, however, that man's sense of morality is not superior to God's, nor is morality something that is independent of God. The very fact that God commands an "utter" judgment of these people at this time means that it is (by definition) moral and just, consistent with His divine nature/character. The liberals/unbelievers who have difficulty with these parts of the Old Testament have the same alleged difficulty with how a "good God" could ultimately condemn people to an eternity in Hell.

- [2] There is no indication that any offer of peace was extended to "Og, the king of Bashan". As a fellow Amorite (v8), Og may have been in league with Sihon, and he is himself a giant (v11). The LORD makes clear that he is giving Bashan (and by implication Gilead) to this generation of Israelites. Again, this is land included in the original grant made to Abraham (Gen15:18-21).
- [3] The LORD gave victory to Israel over "Og, the king of Bashan" (Num21:33-35).
- [5] The conquest of Bashan included the taking of sixty cities, all of which were "fortified with high walls". The details are not given, but the city structures were apparently preserved so that they could be immediately occupied by the Israelites. There is no explanation for such a victory other than "God delivered into [Israel's] hands, Og . . . and all his people" (v3).
- [6] Again the practice of *haram* is commanded by Jehovah, and Israel "utterly destroyed . . . the men, women, and children of every city".
- [7] In this instance, the LORD allows Israel to take booty from the cities of Bashan for themselves.
- [8] Thus, Israel utterly annihilated (Heb., *haram*) the two Amorite kings and their people who dwelt east of the Jordan and possessed their land, which was given to them by the LORD.

The boundaries of this land are said to extend from "the river of Arnon" in the south (which represented the northern boarder of Moab, due east of the Dead Sea) to "Mount Hermon" in the north (far north of the Sea of Galilee, almost due east of Sidon). This is a very large swath of land, almost 150 miles from south to north.

- [11] Here the interesting detail is added that "Og, king of Bashan" was himself of the race of "giants". His bed was made of iron and measured "nine cubits" (approximately 13.5 feet) in length. The bed was so unusual it was kept as a museum piece, and was still on display in "Rabbah", the capital city of the Ammonites (at least at the time this post-Mosaic gloss was added by a scribe).

Note the qualification made that the measurement of the bed was "after the cubit of a *man*"; mankind as a race, distinct from that of the giants, may be included the force of this qualification (cf. Heb2:14-16).

DIVISION OF THE LAND EAST OF THE JORDAN

- [12] Moses calls these lands of Gilead and Bashan "this land", drawing attention to the fact that they (all of Israel) are standing in this very land as they are now listening to Moses speak; the very fact that Israel already possesses "this land" is objective evidence that the LORD is fighting for Israel and is keeping His promise to give them the Promised Land with every step of faith they take.

- [13] Moses recalls that he had already promised to divide this land east of the Jordan among Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh as their tribal allotments of the Promised Land (Num32:1-42).

Note the comment that "Bashan" had at this time long been known as "the land of giants", and yet the LORD has already given Israel victory over Bashan. Moses presents this as yet more objective evidence that the LORD is fighting for Israel, and they should not fear to enter into Canaan to possess the remainder of the Promised Land, though it be occupied by giants (cf. Num13:31-14:4).

- [17] Verses 14-17 review the geographical details of the geographical allotments in the Transjordan promised to these two-and-a-half tribes.
- [18] Moses' promise to give the Transjordan lands to these two-and-a-half tribes was contingent on all of their fighting men accompanying the remainder of Israel into Canaan to complete the conquest of the Promised Land; in fact, they were required to lead procession (Num32:20-22).
- [19] The wives and children of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh were permitted to stay behind in their new homes in the Transjordan; only the men "fit for the war" (v18) were required to accompany Israel into Canaan.
- [20] All of Israel had participated in the conquest of the Transjordan lands, and all of Israel must participate in the conquest of Canaan. The fighting men from Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh could only return to their own Transjordan lands after Canaan had been conquered, which will turn out to take at least 7 years (Josh22:1-4). The nation will only have "rest" when in possession of all the Promised Land.
- [21] Moses addresses Joshua, who will be the one to lead Israel into Canaan. He points out that the LORD has demonstrated that He is able and willing to give Israel victory over the Amorites; the utter annihilation of Sihon and Og, "these two kings", have already been completed.
- [22] Because of what the LORD has already done for Israel in history, there is no rational reason for the Israelites to fear the Canaanites. Jehovah is not asking Israel to exercise so-called 'blind faith', He is asking them to trust the One who has already demonstrated Himself to be faithful and powerful on their behalf.

MOSES WILL NOT ENTER THE PROMISED LAND

- [23] As an aside from the historical narrative, Moses petitions the LORD with a personal request (Cp., 2Cor12:7-9).
- [24] With Israel already in possession of the Transjordan (which required the conquest of giants), and on the brink of entry into the Promised Land proper, Moses acknowledges being a witness to the "greatness" and the "mighty hand" of Jehovah, which exceeds every other "god" (Heb., el) which is "in heaven or in earth".

This is not a concession to the validity of paganism's pantheon of gods, but should be viewed as a contrast between Jehovah and every other pagan conception; the reality of Jehovah far exceeds in greatness and power even what the perverted pagan mind has imagined.

- [25] Having begun to see this mighty work of God, Moses petitions the LORD in prayer to see its fulfillment (i.e., to personally enter Canaan along with this generation of Israelites).
- [26] However, the LORD rejects this request (even from Moses!) because of his previous act of rebellion at Meribah in which he misrepresented the LORD before the people of Israel (Num20:2-12; 27:12-14). Note that even the repentance of a believer and his restoration to fellowship and ministry does not necessarily remove the earthly consequences of past sin.
- [27] In His grace, God allows Moses to "behold it with [his] eyes" from the top of Mount Pisgah, but Moses will not be allowed to enter Canaan. Moses will delay ascending Pisgah until his discourses are complete, so that beholding the Promised Land is the final act of his earthly life (Deut34:1-5).
- [28] The LORD reiterates His prior decision that Joshua, as Moses' successor, will lead Israel into the Promised Land (Deut1:38). The duty of Moses is to "encourage him" and "strengthen him" before the people for this task.
- [29] Moses submits to the LORD's decision, remaining in Beth-peor (east of the Jordan river, in the land of Moab) to complete his discourses, and he makes no attempt to personally enter the Promised Land.

CHAPTER 4

THE GREATNESS OF THE LAW, THE PRIVILEGES OF THE COVENANT

- [1] "Now therefore hearken..." With this transition, Israel is called to "hearken" (i.e., give attention to with the intention of obeying) to the "statutes" and "ordinances" of the Sinaitic covenant. This exhortation, coming as it does at the end of the historical review, suggests that the obedience of Israel to the demands of Jehovah is nothing more than a logical and reasonable response based on all that the LORD has already done (in grace) for the Jewish people.

Note that "possess[ion]" of the Promised Land, and long (earthly) "life" dwelling in it, for this generation is conditioned on obedience to their obligations under the Sinaitic covenant, the renewal of which is the topic of the Book of Deuteronomy. The Sinaitic covenant is a conditional covenant. In contrast, the Abrahamic covenant is an unconditional covenant, promising that the descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will ultimately come to forever possess the Promised Land; however, the participation of this generation of Israelites in this promise depends on their obedience to the Sinaitic covenant. Note also that in context, the "life" promised for obedience to the Sinaitic covenant is a

long **earthly** life dwelling in the Promised Land, not eternal life. Eternal life is never promised as a reward for keeping the Law! Personal (individual) salvation, which results in eternal life, has always been "by grace . . . through faith . . . not by works" (Eph2:8-9), even for Jews in the OT living under the Sinaitic covenant.

- [2] The reason there was no legislative branch of government in Israel is because the LORD wrote all the laws needed for the nation, then commanded that they never be increased or decreased. Judges were to render decisions by applying the general principles of the Divinely-given Law to particular situations; there would be no need to write new laws. At the end of the Dispensation of the Law, the Lord Jesus vehemently condemned both the Pharisees and the Sadducees; the Pharisees had added to the Law (Matt15:1-9; Mk7:13), whereas the Sadducees had subtracted from it (Matt22:23-33).

Application for Governments Today. The fact that the laws (or at least general principles) governing a nation were not subject to change would provide for a stable society that could proceed with confidence regarding the future. This is the opposite of what we have in the USA (and all other modern nations) today. Because our nation has increasingly distanced itself from the principles of righteousness revealed by our Creator in His Word, we no longer have an absolute standard of righteousness. Thus, what is "right" no longer has any meaning, only what is "legal", and what is legal today may not be legal tomorrow (and vice-versa)⁶. This creates an unstable society that cannot long endure (i.e., will not be allowed by God to endure).

- [3] In v1, the LORD has promised long life to those who obey the Law. The flipside of that is that disobedience will bring judgment, up to and including death (i.e., physical death, not necessarily eternal damnation). To illustrate this point, Moses makes an allusion to the occasion of fornication and idolatry with the pagan women of Moab/Midian that took place during the wilderness wanderings (Num25:1-3), which resulted in the death of 24,000 Jews (Num25:9).

⁶ As simple but obvious examples: capital punishment, quarantining of those with communicable diseases, and Bible reading/prayer in public services were all formerly legal in the US and throughout western civilization (in line with God's principles of national righteousness as revealed in the Torah), but are today illegal; on the other hand, abortion, sodomy (renamed as homosexuality), no-cause divorce, property taxes, and government printing of paper money were all formerly illegal (again, consistent with God's law), but are today legal.

Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes (1841-1935) wrote, "Truth is the majority vote of that nation that could lick all others." Supreme Court Chief Justice Frederick Moore Vinson (1890-1953) wrote, "Nothing is more certain in modern society than the principle that there are no absolutes." (Quoted in Frances A. Schaeffer, How Should We Then Live?, p. 217) President Barak Obama, in his book Audacity of Hope (p. 93), writes, "Implicit in [the US Constitution's] structure . . . was a rejection of absolute truth, the infallibility of any idea or ideology or theology or 'ism', any tyrannical consistency that might lock future generations into a single, unalterable course". Sadly, such opinions expressed by our nation's highest leaders do not reflect the principles on which our nation was founded, and (even worse) they are diametrically opposed to the truth revealed in the Word of God.

- [4] In contrast, those who did not sin with "Baal-peor" are alive "this day" (i.e., with Moses on the border of the Promised Land). This is a very real example of how obedience to the Law brings long (physical) life, while disobedience brings (physical) death. Again, be careful to note that eternal life/damnation are not the subject. Those who attempt to make salvation dependent upon keeping the Law misunderstand/misinterpret verses from the Law talking about physical life and physical death.
- [5] The "statutes" and "ordinances" that Moses was given at Sinai, and which he faithfully "taught" to Israel, were given for the purpose of establishing and governing a righteous nation that would be planted in the Promised Land. When we get to all the particular stipulations included in the Law, we will see that a huge number of them have no application to the individual (i.e., there is no possibility that an individual alone, no matter how righteous he may be, could keep particular statutes), but can only be kept in the context of the government of a nation. The covenant, which included these laws, must now be renewed with this generation if they are to possess the land and establish a nation.
- [6] Israel is commanded to "keep" and to "do" these divine statutes and ordinances; benefit to the individual and the nation comes from keeping God's law, not merely knowing it (Cp., Jas1:22). By keeping it will come "wisdom" (i.e., skill in living) and "understanding" (i.e., discernment). Israel's keeping of God's Law was to have two purposes: 1) Israel as a righteous nation would be uniquely blessed above all other nations (Deut28:1-14), and 2) this blessing would be a witness to all other nations, drawing them to seek Jehovah as the One true God. Thus, when Israel forsakes the Law, they resist not only God's purpose for them, but His purpose for all nations as well!
- [7] In our postmodern world where absolute truth is rejected and multiculturalism is embraced, it is unacceptable (i.e., politically incorrect) to speak of one culture/nation being 'better' than another; such thinking is diametrically opposed to Biblical truth. Here, a nation's "great[ness]" is expressly linked to its "near[ness]" to Jehovah God.
- [8] Legal Terms. Three different legal words are used in this verse. 1) **Statutes** (Heb., *hakkim*) are prescribed (or prohibited) tasks or assignments. Note that some of these will be prescribed ethical standards that cannot be enforced (e.g., "thou shalt not covet"). Personal ethics and national law are mixed together in the Law of Moses⁷. 2) **Judgments** (Heb., *mishpatim*) can be thought of as case law derived from the more general statutes, which are meant to aid in our understanding of the correct application of general principles to specific situations; these often come with

⁷ To a great extent, the laws of most nations comprising what has been termed "Western civilization" (i.e., those societies most influenced by Christianity) have formally embodied Biblical ethics. This situation endured for centuries, and Western civilization was blessed above all other societies during this time. Increasingly, however, Biblical (ethical) standards are being eliminated from the laws of western nations. Ironically, historians label the period of time when Western civilization was dominated by Biblical ethical standards as the "Dark Ages", and the time when these nations began to abandon these standards as the "Enlightenment" (Cp., Jn3:19).

prescribed sentences for violation of the ordinance (cf. 1Kgs6:12). 3) **Law** (Heb., *torah*) is the most general of the terms used, simply meaning instruction (Cp. with the purpose of "all Scripture" in 2Tim3:16, which is "instruction in righteousness").

Application of God's Law to All Nations. Although the Mosaic covenant was formally made with the nation of Israel, and only Israel was commanded to keep every detail of its Law, the emphasis on the greatness and righteousness of its Law strongly suggests that every nation would be wise to adhere to the righteous principles of lifestyle and government revealed by God in it, since "righteousness exalteth [any] nation" (Prov14:34).

- [9] Here is the first of many times in Deuteronomy that fathers are commanded to teach this law and its historical context to their children and grandchildren, "lest" they be "forgotten". Effort is required and must be expended to remember past historical events; God gives the mandate for this (i.e., education) to families, not the government.

The Secular Teaching of History. All secular textbooks list the Greeks, beginning with Herodotus (c. 484-425 BC), as the first historians. They fail to recognize the Israelites (moved by God) began recording and analyzing history more than 1,000 years early, for the important purpose of monitoring their covenant with the LORD. Pagan cultures began their study of history much later, for obvious reasons; to the pagan, since history has no purpose, it is meaningless.

- [10] It is not merely the "words" the LORD spoke that are to be taught to the children, but also their historical context. All the people of Israel heard the voice of Jehovah speak the words at "Horeb" (i.e., Mt. Sinai; cf. Ex19:9). This was an utterly unique **historical event**. Note that the revelation of God has always been linked to historical events—they are inseparably intertwined. If the historical event recorded in Scripture is not true, the message is invalidated (cf. Paul's discourse on the historicity of Christ's resurrection, apart from which the gospel cannot be true; 1Cor15:1-19).
- [11] The 2nd person personal pronouns used in these verses ("ye" and "you") are plural. It is not just Moses, but the entire nation of Israel that see the "fire" and hear the "voice" (cf. Ex19:17-19).
- [12] All Israel "heard the voice" of Jehovah when He spoke with Moses. But note carefully that they did not see a "similitude" (i.e., and image) of God (Cp., Jn1:18; 1Jn4:12).
- [13] It was the LORD Himself that carved the words of the "ten commandments" onto the "two tables of stone" (Ex31:18). Someone once said, all the Word of God is inspired, but only the ten commandments are engraved (2Cor3:7)! If Deuteronomy follows the Suzerain-vassal treaty form, then these two tables would have been identical, each containing all ten commandments; they represented a copy for each party to the covenant (Israel and Jehovah), and would satisfy the LORD's requirement for a minimum of two witnesses (Deut19:15).

- [14] All Israel heard the voice of the LORD speak the ten commandments. Then "the LORD commanded me" (i.e., Moses) to "teach you [i.e., Israel] statutes and judgments", which would be all the additional commandments (612 more by Jewish reckoning) instructing Israel in the application of these ten (foundational and overarching) commandments to real life in a fallen society.
- [15] It is reiterated (from v12) that when Israel heard the voice of the LORD, they "saw no manner of similitude".
- [16] The emphasis on the fact that Israel had never seen a "similitude" of the LORD undergirds His prohibition against making any "image" intended to represent Him. How can man, who has never seen God, fashion an image that properly represents Him? He cannot, and he is expressly forbidden any attempt to do so!

Why Idolatry Rather Than Immorality? In both the Old and New Testaments, God's emphasis is always on the prohibition of idolatry (cf. 1Jn5:21), even over immorality. The reason is that idolatry always (logically) takes place first, with immorality inevitably following (cf. Rom1:18-32). Romans 1:18-22 indicates that God's revelation of Himself in the creation (i.e., general revelation) is clearly seen by all men, everywhere. The pagan mind must re-engineer reality in order to suppress the implications of this clear revelation, which is his personal responsibility to his Creator. This re-engineering of reality to suppress God's clear revelation of Himself (which manifests itself in various and diverse forms) is nothing else but IDOLATRY. [Even if man's idolatry gives lip service to other "gods", they are gods made by man, after man's likeness, acceptable, manageable, etc.] Once the creature's accountability to his Creator has been dismissed, he is free to engage in any form of immorality with a 'clear conscience' (so to speak). This is why idolatry always comes first (even in our modern world), and this is why God's prohibition of it always takes pre-eminence, even over immorality. Idolatry is what enables immorality.

- [18] There is more behind the prohibition of idolatry than the mere fact that man has never seen God. Unlike the pagan notion of 'gods' who were nothing more than the personification of the forces of nature, Jehovah is a God that is separate from and transcends His creation, such that it is impossible for anything in His creation to properly represent Him (Cp., Rom1:25). Furthermore, these same creature categories (vv17-18) are those over which man was given dominion (Gen1:26).

Creator-creature Distinction. In the Bible, the Creator is never confused with any part of His creation; He is not dependent on it in any way (i.e., the fundamental attribute of God is aseity; Ex3:14), nor can He be represented by anything in it. This doctrinal concept is termed the **Creator-creature distinction**; it is unique to the Bible, and it is the hallmark of the biblical understanding of reality.

- [19] Whereas the pagans all around the Israelites worshipped "all the host of heaven", Israel was called to understand that it was "the

LORD [their] God" who had created these heavenly bodies, and that He did so to be an aid to them in recognizing "seasons", "days", and "years" (Gen1:14); they were to worship Him who had created the sun, moon, and stars, but never those parts of the creation.

- [20] Here Moses reaches back beyond the LORD's preservation of Israel in the wilderness (which has been his primary theme in Deuteronomy) to His original work of deliverance from Egypt. By all accounts, Egypt was the superpower of its day. There was absolutely no hope that a small people enslaved to Egypt for 400 years would ever escape. And yet, the LORD delivered Israel "out of the iron furnace" of Egypt with all manner of signs and miracles; because of the LORD's grace toward Israel, it is only reasonable that the nation love and obey Jehovah their God.
- [21] But note that disobedience in a relationship with Jehovah has serious consequences. Again Moses recalls his own act of disobedience (Num20:7-12) that disqualified him from entering "that good land".
- [22] Unlike the previous generation of Israelites who rebelled against the discipline of the LORD and attempted to enter the Promised Land (Num14:39-45), Moses has personally submitted to it; Moses will die in "this land" (i.e., Moab).
- [23] A third time (vv. 9,15) Moses issues the warning to "take heed" to not "forget" (i.e., remember) their covenant obligation to the LORD. Again, the sign of their doing so would not be immorality, but idolatry. The very first of the 10 commandment is, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me" (Deut5:7). The Sinaitic covenant (as renewed in Deuteronomy) is a conditional covenant, and idolatry on the part of Israel will be covenant violation of the highest sort.
- [24] Breach of the covenant will bring judgment from the LORD, who is "a consuming fire" (cf. Lev10:1-2; Num16:35). Some have been disturbed by this verse, which describes Jehovah as "a jealous God". Whereas jealousy is generally a sin when it is manifested in the creature, the context here is different (i.e., idolatry on the part of the creature). Jehovah is pictured as a divine craftsman who has personally created, delivered, preserved and graciously blessed a particular people above all others; for that people to then attribute the work of Jehovah to another is an unspeakable sin that robs the LORD of the glory to which He (and He alone) is entitled. Thus, the jealousy of Jehovah is something very different than the petty jealousies practiced by men.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF COVENANT DISOBEDIENCE

- [25] The LORD in His foreknowledge anticipates that subsequent generations of Israelites will forget the covenant and turn to idolatry (Judg1:7-11).
- [26] The witnesses to the Mosaic covenant are to be "heaven and earth" (Cp., Deut32:1; Isal:2-4; Jer2:9-13; Mic6:1-2), which is the ancient Hebrew way of saying 'all of creation' (Cp., Gen1:1); this reiterates the point that Israel's covenant relationship with

Jehovah is intended to be a witness to all nations (Deut4:6-8). In this relationship, Jehovah reveals His righteous standards for men and nations. Part of this witness is the divine judgment that must come when a nation departs from this (divinely-revealed) righteous standard, which is that the nation will not continue to dwell in a land of (the LORD's) blessing, "but shall be utterly destroyed". Hebrew has many words that get translated into English as 'destroy' (e.g., a different Hebrew word is used in v31); the one used here, translated "utterly destroyed", in the present context simply means that Israel AS A NATION will be removed from the Promised Land.

- [27] Here it is clear that the utter destruction of all Jews is not in view, but rather the removal of the nation of Israel from the Promised Land, with Jewish individuals being scattered "among the nations"; though Jews will be reduced to "few in number", they will not be eliminated as a race.
- [28] The Hebrew idiom "serve other gods" denotes exile from the land of Israel (cf. 1Sam26:19). If Israel pursues idolatry, the LORD will exile them from the Promised Land, putting them into bondage in a foreign land to experience the fullness of what paganism produces (i.e., no Temple, no levitical welfare system, no Sabbath rest, no personal protections afforded by the Mosaic law code, forced to labor for and support heathen "gods").
- [29] But even in exile, Israel is afforded the possibility of repentance (i.e., the divine discipline of dispersion does not dissolve Israel's relationship with Jehovah; Cp., Jer29:11-14).
- [30] Israel's covenant disobedience which results in exile from the Land is explicitly foreseen by God; it will result in times of national "tribulation" in 722 BC, 586 BC, 70 AD, and ultimately climax during the 70th Week of Daniel. Israel's repentance which brings restoration to the Land, however, is also explicitly foreseen (Deut30:1-5; Hos5:15-6:3; Zech12:10).
- [31] There are two covenants in play: the conditional Mosaic covenant made with the nation of Israel allows for the possibility of dispersion as chastisement for covenant disobedience, but the Abrahamic covenant made with "thy fathers" (i.e., Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) ensures an ultimate and final return (Jer30:3-11).
- [32] The LORD's revelation of Himself to the nation of Israel is **utterly unique** in history; He has NOT so revealed Himself to any other people (cf. Rom3:1-2).
- [33] No other nation, at any time in history, ever heard God speak to them in human language (i.e., Hebrew); at Mt. Sinai, all 2 million-plus members of the nation of Israel (not just Moses) heard the Word of God spoken by Jehovah Himself (cf. Ex19:17-19). This was a real event in history⁸!

⁸ God's revelation of Himself is always linked to real, historical events. This is incredibly important! If the historicity of the event is denied, the authority of the message is undermined. The liberal notion of accepting the so-called 'spiritual message' of the Bible (e.g., the gospel), while denying its historical record (Cp., 1Cor15:12-19), is impossible.

- [34] This generation of Israelites are the children of the generation that experienced the supernatural deliverance from Egypt that the LORD wrought at the time of the Exodus; this was a far greater work than that of giving Israel victory over the tribes of Canaan.
- [35] In the context of the pagan milieu of gods at this time in history, this is a radical assertion. It is NOT merely that the LORD (i.e., Jehovah) is greater than other gods (which the pagan could readily accept with no alteration of his worldview at all), but that **Jehovah ALONE is God**, and there are no others; this is the truth of which the nation of Israel was called to testify before all nations (cf. Isa42:8; 43:9-12; 44:8; 45:18-22).
- [36] Note the implication that human language (in this case Hebrew) is an adequate vehicle for God to effectively communicate with man. Since He inspired Scripture in three different languages (i.e., Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), this conclusion can logically be extended to all languages. Language is not a human invention; it was used by God existed before the creation (Cp., Gen1:3).
- [37] The LORD's basis for choosing Israel (i.e., national election) to be a peculiar people in unique relationship with Himself (Ex19:5-6) was His "love" (Heb., *ahab*) for their "fathers" (i.e., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). The Abrahamic covenant, which rides over and above the Mosaic covenant, is the unconditional promise the LORD made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to preserve and bless their descendents (and through them the world); for this reason, discipline and even judgments brought on the nation of Israel for disobedience under the Mosaic covenant cannot annul the ultimate blessings promised in the Abrahamic covenant (Gal3:17).
- [38] The LORD is not asking Israel to believe they are greater than the nations of Canaan; they are not! The LORD is asking Israel to trust the promise He made to Abraham to give them this Land.
- [39] The LORD is not asking Israel to believe that He is greater than the gods of Canaan, but to believe that **Jehovah ALONE is God!**
- [40] Note that the promised blessing for "keep[ing]... His statutes, and His commandments" (i.e., the Mosaic covenant) is a long life "upon the Land". A long, physical life dwelling in the Promised Land of Canaan is the blessing of the Mosaic covenant, not eternal life; eternal life (i.e., personal salvation) could not be obtained, even by Israel under the Mosaic covenant, by keeping the Law. The last clause, "which the LORD thy God giveth thee, **forever**", however, refers to the Abrahamic covenant, which does indeed grant to the nation of Israel an eternal right to the Land⁹.

⁹ During his attempts to broker a peace agreement with the so-called Palestinians, in which he offered to exchange "land for peace", Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin repeatedly gave public speeches in which he asserted that the Bible did not grant Israel a divine right to the Land; he was assassinated on November 4, 1995 (cf. Dan5:1-4,30; Act12:21-23). How would Moses have interpreted this event of history?

THREE CITIES OF REFUGE EAST IN TRANSJORDAN

- [41] Three of the six "cities of refuge" (Num35:14; Josh20:2) were established on the east side of the Jordan river.
- [42] Directions concerning the functioning of the cities of refuge will be given later (Deut19:1-13); they are mentioned here since Moses is designating the three cities in the Transjordan (the land just conquered by Israel) that will fall under this designation.

The purpose of the cities of refuge was to provide a mechanism of mercy for one who had killed another accidentally. The Law distinguished between intentional murder and an act that inadvertently caused the death of another (it is this Biblical distinction that is the basis of our own legal concept of 'manslaughter'). The Law's criterion for distinction was intent (i.e., was the action that caused the death based on "hate", or a desire to inflict harm).

Capital Punishment under the Law. Capital punishment (i.e., the execution of criminals) was common under the Mosaic covenant for a wide variety of crimes (e.g., murder, adultery, sodomy, rape, witchcraft, kidnapping, and even the habitual committing of crimes that in themselves did not carry the death penalty). The intent of the Law was not to rehabilitate criminals, but to protect society. Since the consequences of being convicted of law-breaking in the Mosaic economy were so severe, the rules of evidence were very strict (much stricter than ours today). Namely, a minimum of two eye-witnesses were required; there could be no conviction on the testimony of a single witness (Deut19:15), nor on the basis of circumstantial evidence. Rules regarding the testimony of witnesses were also strict, and perjury itself carried a serious penalty (Deut19:16-21). In fact, the prohibition of perjury is one of the 10 commandments (Deut5:20)!

- [43] The three cities of refuge east of the Jordan river were Bezer, in the tribal allotment of Reuben (south), Ramoth in the tribal allotment of Gad (central), and Golan, in the tribal allotment of Manasseh (north). Thus, the cities were spaced so that all in the Transjordan were 'near' one of them.

SETTING FOR THE (2ND) GIVING OF THE LAW

- [44] Moses now draws the historical prologue to a close. The history of Israel, and Jehovah's past gracious acts of provision and blessing for the nation, provides the context for the renewal of the covenantal relationship between Israel and the LORD.
- [45] The "law" (v44; Heb., *torah*) is the overarching term used to designate all of the commandments and instruction that the LORD revealed through Moses.
- [47] The discourses contained in the Book of Deuteronomy take place in Moab, after the second generation of Israelites (following the Exodus from Egypt) had defeated the Amorites kings Sihon and Og

and possessed that portion of the Promised Land lying to the east of the Jordan river.

[48] Mount Sion is Mount Hermon, well north of the Sea Galilee (it is not Mount Zion, atop which Jerusalem will sit).

CHAPTER 5

GENERAL STIPULATIONS (Deut5:1-11:32)

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Though the **Ten Commandments** are revealed within the framework of a covenant between Jehovah and the nation of Israel, they express the very character of God and His righteousness, which never change. Encapsulated in them are timeless, divinely-revealed principles of corporate/societal/national righteousness that have application to all nations (Deut4:8); since "righteousness exalteth a nation" (Prov14:34), and "blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD" (Ps33:12), the principles expressed in the Ten Commandments must be relevant to every nation during every age.

"If there is no absolute by which to judge society, society is absolute."¹⁰ In light of this observation by Schaeffer, note the current trend in America to forbid the display of the Ten Commandments in public settings.

"The central unit of the General Stipulations section of the Sinai Covenant consists of ten statutes or commands (Heb., 'ten words'; Deut10:4) that comprise the legal, moral, and spiritual foundation of the nation's life. **Everything else in the law is an interpretation and/or application of these basic principles.**"¹¹ Even if the particular stipulations are added, Jewish tradition reckons the number of commandments contained in Law of Moses to be 613. Contrast this number of laws with that of the U.S. The Code of Laws of the United States of America is published every 6 years and purports to enumerate all federal laws; the most recent set of 51 volumes was published in 2006 and contains over 200,000 pages.

- [1] Moses addresses "all Israel" to instruct them on "the statutes and ordinances" (i.e., their obligations) of the covenant. The first obligation is the "learn" the Law, and second is to "keep and do" its requirements (Cp., Ezr7:10).
- [2] The covenant made at "Horeb" (i.e., Sinai) was with the previous generation of Israelites, 40 years prior. The covenant in Deuteronomy is not new in content, but it is the initiation of a formal renewal of the Sinaitic covenant (completed in Josh24:24-25) that had been broken by the first generation of Israelites.
- [3] The Sinaitic covenant, being a national covenant, applies to this second generation of Israelites as much as it does to the first generation.

¹⁰ Francis A. Schaeffer, How Should We Then Live, p. 224.

¹¹ Eugene H. Merrill, Everlasting Dominion, p. 330.

- [4] Moses and many of the Israelite adults (as children or youth) were present at Sinai when the LORD first gave the covenant. They literally heard the voice of Jehovah, speaking in the Hebrew language, with their own ears (Ex19:9; 20:22).
- [5] Hearing the very voice of the LORD was so overwhelming for the people of Israel that they pleaded for Moses to be the mediator between them and God (Ex20:19).
- [6] Jehovah, the God of Israel, has a two-fold claim on Israel: 1) as their Creator (not mentioned here), and 2) as their Redeemer from "the land of Egypt". It is because of Jehovah's supernatural deliverance from Egypt that the nation of Israel even exists, so they owe their exclusive devotion to Jehovah alone.

Chiastic Structure of the Ten Commandments. There is a chiastic structure to the 10 Commandments, which serves to emphasize that the central issue in God's design for society is the respect for, and preservation of, human life. This is the basis of the divine mandate for human government established in the Noahic Covenant; human life is to be protected because it bears the image of God (Gen9:5-6). See accompanying charts on "Chiastic Structure of the 10 Commandments" and "God's Design for Society".

(1ST COMMANDMENT)

- [7] At this time, monotheistic faith was already a normative truth for the Hebrews (Ex9:14; Deut4:35,39). Thus, this first commandment has not so much (or even primarily) to do with monotheism *per se* as it has to do with the LORD's exclusive claims on Israel as the nation's only God. Hypothetically speaking, even if there did exist other gods, Jehovah deserves the exclusive devotion and worship of the Israelites because of His gracious acts in history on behalf of the nation, most especially their recent redemption from Egypt. This is in the cultural and religious context of that day, in which the pagan peoples surrounding Israel attributed every phenomena (both natural and supernatural) to a milieu of gods and goddesses that had to be worshipped/placated in order to enjoy a life of blessing and stability. This principle of exclusive devotion to Jehovah as God extends beyond Israel to every nation; "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD" (Ps33:12).

(2ND COMMANDMENT)

- [8] Whereas the first commandment concerns the exclusive devotion to Jehovah as God, the second commandment concerns how Jehovah is to be worshipped; He must not be worshipped by means of any "image" or any "likeness" (cf. Ex32:4; 1Kgs12:28). The backdrop here is the Creator-creature distinction. The Creator God transcends His creation, so that there is nothing within His creation (whether in heaven, on earth, or below the earth) that can appropriately represent Him (Cp., Isa40:18). Any attempt to do so must necessarily portray God as infinitely less than He is. Thus, this

command prohibits the inadequate representation of Jehovah's nature.

- [9] The fact that Jehovah is called a "jealous God" causes some consternation if misunderstood. This jealousy has nothing to do with the petty envies and insecurities man experiences. According to Merrill, "the Hebrew term has the idea, when describing the 'feelings' or 'emotions' of the Lord, that he is insistent on establishing and maintaining his uniqueness in the face of all competing claims."¹² This is particularly true when the works and blessings of Jehovah, for which He should rightly be glorified, are attributed to another (Isa42:8).

Some have viewed God's promise of "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children" as unfair. Such, however, is the nature of a *national* covenant; when one generation of the nation sins against the covenant, the national discipline such rebellion invites necessarily extends to multiple generations. In contrast, the New Covenant will function at the individual level (Jer31:29-33), since in the Millennial Kingdom the government/leadership will be perfect (i.e., Christ and His glorified saints).

- [10] Note that "hate" (v9) and "love" must be understood here in the context of the covenant. Those who "love" Jehovah are those who "keep [His] commandments" as enumerated in the Mosaic Covenant (Cp., Jn14:15; 1Jn2:3-6), whereas those who do not are said to "hate" Him. God's "mercy" (Heb., *chesed*, covenant commitment) is showered abundantly on those who love Him, with resultant blessings extending to far more generations than does His discipline.

(3RD COMMANDMENT)

- [11] The various names and epithets of God are revelatory of His nature and character, so much so that 'the LORD' and 'the name of the LORD' are often used synonymously in the OT. Thus, this command prohibits the inadequate representation of Jehovah's character. Under the Mosaic Covenant, violation of this commandment was punishable by death (Lev24:16). Concern for violating this commandment in time led to the Jews' refusal to use the personal name of God for any reason. This commandment, however, does not prohibit the use of God's name, but does demand that it be used in a way that appropriately honors Him for who He is as revealed in Scripture. For this reason, consider that the denial of Jehovah as Creator, or of the deity of Jesus Christ, are far more egregious violations of this commandment than is cursing that involves the name of God.

(4TH COMMANDMENT)

- [12] Sabbath observance is the "sign" of the Mosaic Covenant (Ex31:12-18). It is the only commandment of the 10 not repeated after Pentecost; this may be because it can only be appropriately "kept" in a national context (Israel was a nation, but the Church is

¹² Eugene H. Merrill, Everlasting Dominion, p. 335.

transnational by design). Though not a commandment for the Church per se (Rom14:5), it endures as God's righteous standard regarding labor that can rightly be applied to any nation.

- [13] Labor is good. God commanded man to labor (Gen2:15), even before the Fall. To labor is the commandment, "thou shalt labor", for 6 days of the week.
- [14] The 7th day of the week, however, is a day of "rest" (Sabbath means "rest"). By God's design, both men and beasts need rest according to this frequency.

Ubiquity of the 7-Day Week. The LORD has ordained that the pattern of man's labor is to follow that of God Himself, working six days and resting one (Ex20:11). Note that the command is not to worship on the 7th day, but to **rest**. Unlike the day, month, and year, the 7-day week has no astronomical basis, and no explanation at all apart from God's revelation. The 7-day week has been observed by all societies at all times; the occasional rare attempt to depart from it (as in both France and Russia after their modern revolutions) has always resulted in frustration, with hoped for gains in productivity never being realized, so that a return to the 7-day week is always inevitable. Dr. Henry Morris observed, "Even those who deny the six-day week of creation must observe it, for their biological rhythms are constructed that way by God". Indeed, "The sabbath was made for man" (Mk2:27).

Sabbath observance as a day of "rest" was/is to be a blessing for man. A serious error of the Pharisees was that by their traditions they turned what God had intended to be a tremendous blessing for the nation into an onerous burden (cf. Matt12:1-8).

- [15] Beyond simply the need for man to rest according to this frequency, Sabbath observance was to be the highest expression of Israel's dependence on Jehovah to provide for the needs of the nation. National prosperity would not ultimately come from man's labor, but from God's blessing. Israel was to "remember" that when the nation was in bondage in Egypt, their deliverance did not come from their own effort but from the "mighty hand" of Jehovah their God. This is an implicit argument from the greater to the lesser; if God would act supernaturally in history to deliver Israel (whom He loved) from bondage to Egypt, He would certainly act providentially to provide for the mundane needs of the nation on a weekly basis (Cp., Ex16:5).

(5TH COMMANDMENT)

- [16] In Israel, as well as in every nation, the fundamental unit of society is not the State, but the **family!** If the family disintegrates, no effort of the State will be able to hold society together. The reason America today is coming apart at the seams is not because corruption in the government is rampant (that is merely a symptom of the problem), but because our families are disintegrating.

When the Apostle Paul alludes to this commandment, he paraphrases it as, "Children, obey your parents" (Eph6:1-3). The family is the primary training ground for respect and obedience for legitimate authority. If we do not learn to honor and obey our parents as children, we will not honor and obey either government as its citizens or God as His creatures. The command to "honor" our parents is irrespective of whether we like them or agree with them on every issue; God's divine pattern of authority must be honored in order to have His blessing and a stable society.

Paul also notes that this "is the first commandment with a "promise" (Eph6:3), emphasizing its foundational importance. This commandment is key to Israel's prosperity and continuation "in the [Promised] Land". The destiny of a nation lies not in the government (nor in the Church in the NT), but in the health of the family.

(6TH COMMANDMENT)

- [17] In the chiasmic structure of the Ten Commandments, the command "Thou shalt not kill" is central; all the other commandments support and enable the goal of this commandment. The primary purpose of human government, the very reason for which it was ordained by God in the Noahic Covenant (Gen9:5-6) and reiterated in the New Testament (Rom13:1-4), is the protection of human life. Human life is to be protected because man bears "the image of God" (Gen9:6).

Made in the Image of God. The unlawful taking of human life is said to be prohibited because "in the image of God made he man" (Gen9:6). In Genesis 1:26-28, man's creation as God's image bearer is linked to his mandate to exercise dominion over all of God's creation. That man was made in God's image means that he is God's divinely designated representative, His vice-regent through whom God will exercise sovereignty over all creation (Ps8:3-8). Man was created to be, in a literal sense, God's official ambassador on earth (Cp., 2Cor5:20). Just as the U.S. would interpret the murder of one of its ambassadors by a foreign government as an act of war directed at the U.S., so God considers the murder of one of His representatives as rebellion against Him that necessitates the ultimate form of earthly retribution (i.e., capital punishment).

The Hebrew word translated "kill" (KJV) would be better rendered **murder**, as it is always used of intentional acts of homicide. Not all incidents of the taking of human life are murder. For instance, this commandment is not meant to include either manslaughter or accidental homicide, which by their nature are unintentional (as will be apparent subsequently in the case law that addresses incidents such as these); it is also not meant to exclude either just acts of war or the execution of criminals by the government (as will also be addressed in the case law to follow; Cp., Gen9:6; Rom13:4), since such acts are authorized by God for the purpose of honoring human life that has been unlawfully taken and deterring its occurrence in the future.

(7TH COMMANDMENT)

[18] Denotatively, this commandment specifically prohibits "adultery", not fornication (two distinctly different words in Hebrew). This is not to suggest that fornication is lawful (as the case law derived from this commandment will clarify), but that something else is the heart of the issue here. Note that in the chiasmic structure of the Ten Commandments, the prohibition of adultery is in parallel with the commandment to honor father/mother. The overriding concern that lies behind this commandment is the health and viability of the family¹³, which adultery destabilizes at best, and often destroys. Again, where families are weak, dysfunctional, or disintegrate, society deteriorates. The health of a society is a reflection of the health of its families.

(8TH COMMANDMENT)

[19] Inherent in the commandment, "Neither shalt thou steal", is the right to private property, for where property is not privately held there can be no theft. This commandment applies to the State just as surely as it does to the individual. Any system of human government that fails to honor and protect the rights of its citizens to labor to procure and benefit from private ownership of property (or worse, seizes/confiscates the property of its citizens) is unbiblical; God grants the right to individuals to own property, not the government. Note that this commandment is in parallel with the commandment to labor six days out of the week. From an economic point of view, the stability of a nation depends on citizens that work hard to produce wealth, which only occurs when those citizens are secure in their right to enjoy the fruits of their labor. This is why all communistic/socialistic societies (which either outlaw private property, or engage in large-scale confiscation of it by the State) are inefficient, unproductive, and inherently unstable, being held together only temporarily by force or the threat of it.

(9TH COMMANDMENT)

[20] Denotatively, this commandment prohibits "bear[ing] false witness against thy neighbor", as in a formal legal proceeding (i.e., **perjury**), not merely lying. As in the 7th commandment (against adultery), this is not to suggest that lying outside of a formal setting is lawful, but (again) that something else is the heart of the issue here. A society based on the rule of law, charged with enforcing the law and exacting prescribed penalties for violating it, depends upon the truthful testimony of witnesses for its just execution. Where witnesses give false testimony, justice is perverted. Perjury was taken so seriously under the Mosaic Law that the punishment for one who falsely testified against another

¹³ The case law that will be given to elaborate on this commandment will be seen to prohibit (by application) all sorts of sexual immorality, including fornication, incest, homosexual behavior, divorce, various prohibited marriages, etc., since all these behaviors weaken or destroy the family, upon which the health of a society depends.

was the same as the punishment prescribed for the alleged crime (i.e., if one falsely accused another of a crime that carried the death penalty, the perjurer was to be executed; Deut19:16-21). Note that in the chiastic structure of the Ten Commandments, this commandment is in parallel with the prohibition against taking the LORD's name in vain; both have to do with the misrepresentation of another's character. A society where justice is routinely perverted is inherently unstable, and can be held together only temporarily by force or the threat of it.

(10TH COMMANDMENT)

- [21] In the chiastic structure of the Ten Commandments, this commandment which prohibits coveting is in parallel with the commandment for devotion to Jehovah alone as God. In the context of a milieu of pagan gods vying for the desires of the nation, Israel is to be satisfied with Jehovah alone. Similarly, each Israelite is to be satisfied with what Jehovah has provided him, not coveting what has been provided to another. This inter-connection is why the Apostle Paul equates "covetousness" with "idolatry" (Col3:5). Both commandments have to do with individual heart commitments; they are unlike the other commandments, in that compliance with them cannot be externally confirmed or enforced.

Scripture makes clear that all we have is the gift of God (Jn3:27; 1Cor4:7; Jas1:17). To covet that which Jehovah has not provided is to assert in the heart that I know what I need (i.e., what is good for me) better than God. Such reasoning is precisely that which led to the original sin (Gen3:4-6). Violation of this commandment is to exalt self into the place of God, which is reserved for Jehovah alone (Cp., Isa14:12-14). If every individual exalts himself into the place of God, there is no basis for an absolute standard of justice and righteousness upon which to establish and operate a nation, and an absolute standard of justice and righteousness is absolutely necessary for a healthy and stable society. Recall the quote from Francis Schaeffer at the beginning of this chapter; "If there is no absolute by which to judge society, society is absolute."

MOSES TO BE MEDIATOR

- [22] At Sinai, the whole assembly of Israelites heard God's audible voice (Cp., v24), speaking in Hebrew, give these ten "words". Exodus 32:15-16 emphasizes that it was God Himself who engraved the words on the two stone tables. The detail is also added that "the tables were written on both their sides" (v15). Almost certainly the two tables were exact copies, with all ten "words" reproduced on each table (Suzerain-vassal treaties required two copies of the covenant be produced, with one copy retained by each party to the covenant).
- [24] It is reiterated that the entire nation of Israel assembled at Mount Sinai heard, in a totally literal sense, the audible voice of the LORD speaking to them. Their source of knowledge about God came from Him by means of language, "God doth talk with man".

Biblical epistemology is **verbal revelation**, which occurred in a public way in real history.

- [26] The Israelites were overwhelmed with the realization that they (sinful creatures) were in the very presence of an infinitely holy God; they want this personal encounter with a holy God to cease, for they fear death (Cp., Luk5:8).
- [27] The Israelites realize they need a man to act as mediator between them and God, and they petition Moses to be that man; in this sense Moses is a **type of Christ**, who will ultimately be the Man who is Mediator between all men and God (1Tim2:5; Cp., Job9:32-33; 16:21; Heb4:13-16).
- [28] The LORD is pleased with their request for a mediator; Israel has rightly understood both Jehovah (and His nature) and themselves (and their natures).
- [29] The LORD equates their heart condition that desires a mediator with one that will "fear Me" and "keep all My commandments always"; this is the heart condition that will be necessary to adhere to their obligations under the Mosaic covenant, to be renewed with this generation, and which is the means for national blessing.
- [30] Their request for a mediator was granted. The nation returned to their "tents", so that they would no longer hear the voice of God speaking directly to them.
- [31] Moses, however, was commanded to "stand thou here by Me". This is the Biblical picture of a mediator, one who stands in the very presence of God on behalf of the people, representing them and their needs. This is why Christ as the antitype Mediator, ascended as a resurrected Man to the right hand of God in Heaven (Eph1:20; Heb1:3; 7:25; 8:1).

The "commandments" are the 10 general principles already given (vv7-21), which all the Israelites heard with their very own ears. The "statutes" are the application of these principles as standards of behavior in particular and diverse circumstances, and the "judgments" are the judicial application (and consequences) these standards require; the "statutes" and "judgments" are the 'Case Law' associated with the 10 Commandments which will be given to the nation through Moses, and which make up the majority of the Book of Deuteronomy (Chs. 12-25).

- [32] Israel's national life under the Mosaic covenant, lived out for all the nations of the earth to witness (Deut4:5-8), is a cause-and-effect relationship. The nation is free to choose which way she will go, but those choices will have consequences.
- [33] If Israel, as a nation, will "walk in all the ways which the LORD [their] God hath commanded" (i.e., adhere to the principles of national righteousness revealed in the Mosaic covenant), the nation will be blessed with long and prosperous life in the Promised Land that the LORD has given them; if not, they will be increasingly disciplined by the LORD, up to the ultimate consequence of dispersion from the Land. **This is to be an object lesson for all**

nations (Deut4:5-8). National prosperity comes only as a blessing from the One true God, which is explicitly linked to national righteousness as judged by the principles revealed in the Mosaic covenant; failure to live before God as a righteous nation will certainly bring His discipline and judgment (inevitably, that is, since God is long-suffering and gives ample time for repentance; cf. Jer17:7-8; Jon3:10; 2Pet3:9).

CHAPTER 6

THE ESSENCE OF THE LAW: LOVING JEHOVAH WITH ALL THE HEART

- [1] In Deuteronomy 5, Moses presented Israel's requirements under the Sinaitic covenant with Jehovah at the highest level (i.e., the General Stipulations); details and applications will follow (Deut11-26). Moses was commanded to teach this revelation from Jehovah to the new generation of Israelites, and every subsequent generation will likewise be obligated to pass the progressive body of revelation from God on to the next (Ezr7:10; 2Tim2:2). The teaching of the Word of God must be a priority in the community of believers of every dispensation; at any moment in history, the community of believers is **only one generation away from extinction** (e.g., Judg2:10).
- [2] Israel's faithfulness to the covenant will be expressed by keeping the "commandments" of Jehovah; their "fear [of] the LORD" (i.e., reverence, honor, love for Him) will be measured by their obedience to Him. Doing so will prolong the days of the nation in the Promised Land (Deut5:33).
- [3] "Hear", or hearken (cf. Deut4:1), a verb given in the imperative, is a command to listen intently with the desire to understand and the intention to obey. In a Hebrew context, 'to hear' is tantamount to 'to obey', especially in the context of a covenant. The blessings of Jehovah come from obeying His commandments, not merely knowing them (Cp., Jas1:2,25).
- [4] This verse begins what is known as the *Shema* (Heb., "Hear"), which extends through v9; it is the central tenet of Orthodox Judaism even to our day, revered as the 'John 3:16' of the Old Testament. A better translation¹⁴ (than that given by the KJV), assuming the controlling context is Deuteronomy 4:39, might be:

Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God, Jehovah [is] one.

This revelation, spoken as it is into the pagan milieu of the second millennium BC, is a bold assertion of monotheism. That is,

¹⁴ Difficulty in translating this verse exists because there is no verb in the Hebrew text, which is not uncommon when the verb is 'to be'; it is appropriate and expected that it be supplied in English. However, in an inflected language, when the verb 'to be' takes a predicate nominative, it will be a noun appearing in the nominative case, just like the subject. There are at least 3 nouns in this verse (and *echad* can be either a 4th noun or an adjective), all in the nominative case, and the verb 'to be' (i.e., "is") must be supplied, but with no clear indication of where in the text it is to be inserted. Context must be a guide in determining how to translate and understand this verse of Scripture.

Jehovah, the God of Israel, is the only true God (Deut4:35; Cp., Isa43:10; 44:8; 45:21-22). And yet, this assertion allows for the subsequent revelation of the triune nature of the one true God, since the Hebrew word translated "one" is *echad*, which can express the idea of unity in diversity (even diversity of persons; e.g., Gen2:24); *echad* is to be distinguished from *yachid*, which is the Hebrew word for expressing absolute oneness. The revered Jewish Sage and Rabbi of the Middle Ages, Maimonides (1135-1204), attempted to substitute *yachid* for *echad* in this verse in his arguments against the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Furthermore, the Hebrew word for "God", *Elohim*, is a plural noun that always takes singular verb forms when used of Jehovah (but not when referring to pagan 'gods').

An even better translation, assuming the controlling context is Deuteronomy 5:7-10 (as well as v5 that immediately follows), might be:

Hear, O Israel: Jehovah [is] our God, Jehovah alone.

Translated in this way, the emphasis is on Jehovah as the exclusive object of worship for the nation of Israel. Clearly, both ways of translating this verse result in truth supported by many other texts of Scripture.

- [5] This verse/command is the very heart of the Law and the key to understanding the Book of Deuteronomy. When asked to give the greatest commandment, Jesus quoted this verse (Matt22:36-37; Mk12:28-30; Cp., Luk10:25-27).

The greatest of all commandments is to "love" (Hebrew, *ahab*) Jehovah with all the "heart" (i.e., mind, intellect, will, emotions). The Hebrew concept of "heart" includes everything **internal** in man, which is why the Lord's quotation of this verse in the Greek New Testament added 'mind'; both "heart" and "mind" are required to express in Greek that which is included in the Hebrew concept of "heart" (Jesus did not add a requirement to this commandment, as many commentators mistakenly suppose). To love the LORD with all the "soul" (Hebrew, *nephesh*) expresses the Hebrew concept of one's **external** life; again, the Hebrew *nephesh* has much broader meaning than the Greek *psuche*, which is generally translated "soul" in the New Testament.

Thus, to love Jehovah God with all one's "might", including both "heart" and "soul" (i.e., all of one's life, both internal and external aspects) is what the Sinaitic Covenant demands. The Book of Deuteronomy is a grand illustration of what loving God looks like **in every area of life** (personal morality, but also integrity in government, business, education, international relations, every aspect of society). Israel was not to keep God's commandments to earn His favor, but as the way of expressing their love for Jehovah. Analogously, Jesus said to His disciples, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (Jn14:15; cf. 1Jn2:3-5).

- [6] In the present context, "these words" (Hebrew, *dabar*) which are given to Israel "this day" are the **10 Commandments** (Deut4:13). The command that they be in "thine heart" means they are to be memorized, but much more than that; they are to be internalized

such that they permeate every aspect of the believer's life. In order to "love the LORD" with "all thine heart" (v5), we must have His Word so deeply engrained in the fabric of our hearts that it dominates our interpretation of every situation and controls our decisions in every area.

- [7] Teaching the Word of God to children was the responsibility of the family (especially the father; Eph6:4). Emphasis here is not on the continual (i.e., non-stop) teaching of Scripture, but that every aspect of life be assessed in light of what Scripture says¹⁵.

The Bible makes clear that the basic unit of a healthy society is the **family** (not the state). If a nation's families are dysfunctional, the state will be dysfunctional. It is impossible to have a functional state without functional families. A righteous nation will be one in which the state promotes healthy (i.e., Biblical) families.

- [8] Zealous Jews take this command literally, wearing *phylacteries* (Matt23:5) on the forehead and the back of the hands that contain portions of Scripture (usually the *Shema*) during prayer times. The spirit of this command, however, is to make the commandments of Jehovah a part of all that one thinks or does.
- [9] Similarly, the front door of most orthodox Jewish homes has a *mezuzah*, a small box that contains portions of Scripture (again, almost always the *Shema*). The spirit of this command is to make the love of Jehovah and His commandments the basis for all that is done in the home, which is the dwelling place of the family (Cp., Josh24:15).

WARNING REGARDING DISLOYALTY TO JEHOVAH

- [10] There will be many ways and temptations for Israel to drift in their relationship with Jehovah. These temptations will be greatest during times of national prosperity, beginning when Jehovah brings the nation into their very own land (Canaan) which He promised Abraham to give to his descendents (i.e., the Abrahamic covenant; cf. Gen15:13-21).
- [11] Not only will Israel be dwelling in the Promised Land, but they will be enjoying abundant economic and material prosperity (as promised for covenant loyalty under the Mosaic covenant).
- [12] It will be most tempting to "forget the LORD" during these times of greatest blessing (at His hand!). Note that the temptation will be to forget the great works of Jehovah (i.e., deliverance

¹⁵ The disastrous error of America's public school system today is the notion that the Word of God has relevance only to 'religious' subjects, and that every other subject can be taught without mention of or regard for the Bible. However, the Word of God speaks authoritatively to every subject area, including science, history, language, government, business, education, etc. Truth in any/every subject area starts with what God has said, and all development must be consistent with God's revelation in the Bible—else truth is not being taught (in that subject area).

from Egypt) on behalf of the nation; the tendency will be to forget (or revise) history, *especially Jehovah's role in it*¹⁶.

- [13] Israel's allegiance must be to "Jehovah [their] God" alone.
- [14] Israel will be most susceptible to **syncretism**. While acknowledging the reality of Jehovah as the God of Israel, the nation will be tempted to also worship "other gods". Paganism has no problem with the existence of Jehovah as the God of Israel. Inherent to the pagan worldview is the existence of many gods, and the addition of another in no way alters its view of reality. But Israel is called to witness to the radical truth that "Jehovah, He is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath; there is none else" (Deut4:39)¹⁷. For Israel to worship Jehovah and "other gods" is to concede that the pagan worldview is correct, and that the Biblical worldview is not; any compromise whatsoever is a total capitulation to paganism.
- [15] Jehovah will not share His glory with any other (Isa42:8). Here, the threat to "destroy [Israel] from off the face of the earth" should be understood as removing the nation from the Promised Land (Cp., Deut4:26-27), the ultimate curse of the Mosaic covenant (Deut28:63-68).
- [16] Idolatry will be regarded as the pre-eminent sign of covenant disloyalty on the part of Israel, which will "tempt" Jehovah to (justifiably) terminate the Mosaic covenant He has made with the nation. Note that this verse is quoted by the Lord Jesus Christ when Satan tempted Him (Matt4:7; Luk4:12). "Massah" (or Meribah) is mentioned as a previous occasion when Israel "tempted" Jehovah by failing to trust in His promise to them (Ex17:7).
- [17] By "diligently keep[ing] the commandments of Jehovah", the nation will express their love for Him (v5).
- [18] Loving Jehovah by keeping His commandments will result in the nation experiencing the blessings of the LORD promised in the Mosaic covenant.
- [19] The Promised Land is filled with "enemies" stronger than Israel (Deut4:38); to overcome them, Israel must have Jehovah's blessing.

DUTY TO TEACH THE MEANING OF THE LAW

- [20] Children must be taught the "mean"[ing] of God's Word.

¹⁶ As an aid to remembering the great acts of Jehovah in history on behalf of Israel, Jehovah ordained 7 annual feasts commemorating these historic events to be observed by the nation (Lev23). Similarly, during the present age God has ordained 2 ordinances to be observed by the Church (i.e., baptism and communion); although the Church has tended to turn these ordinances into mystical rites, the stated purpose for their observance is as an aid to remembering the historical work of Christ on our behalf (cf. 1Cor11:24-25).

¹⁷ Similarly, our modern, liberal (apostate) religious culture has no problem with Jesus as a way of salvation (i.e., for the Christian), since it is founded on a pagan worldview that already presupposes there are many ways of salvation, many paths that lead to God; the crisis occurs when it is asserted that Jesus is the only way of salvation and the only path to God (Jn14:6).

- [21] The meaning of God's Word is grounded in His real acts of history (Cp., 1Cor15:3-19); in Israel's case, Jehovah's supernatural deliverance of the nation from bondage in Egypt. When we pass our faith in God's Word on to our children, it is not a matter of personal preference or family tradition—our faith is based on real history!
- [22] These supernatural events of history were literally seen by the first generation of the nation of Israel, who are called upon to testify to the truth of this history as eye-witnesses (Cp., 2Pet1:16).
- [23] The LORD brought Israel out of Egypt for a purpose, that of establishing them as a nation in the Land He promised Abraham to give to his descendents (Gen15:13-21); note how the Abrahamic covenant is always in the background, in no way nullified by the Mosaic covenant (Gal3:17).
- [24] The Law given to Israel through Moses was for the "good" of the nation. The LORD's stated purpose for giving the Law was "that He might preserve us alive", which is consistent with the command "thou shalt not kill" (Deut5:17) being the central tenet of the 10 Commandments (per its chiasmatic structure).
- [25] The Law will be the standard of righteousness used to judge the nation of Israel (not the individual) for the purpose of blessing/cursing under the Mosaic covenant.

CHAPTER 7

CONDUCTING JEHOVAH'S HOLY WAR

- [1] The LORD reiterates that these seven nations enumerated, who presently dwell in the Promised Land (i.e., Canaan), are "greater and mightier" than Israel. Israel's victory over them will come only as a blessing from Jehovah. The conquest of Canaan has two aspects, the second of which is often overlooked: 1) Jehovah is graciously giving Israel a land of her own, and 2) Jehovah is using Israel as His instrument of wrath against these pagan nations who are now ripe for divine judgment (Cp., Gen15:16).
- [2] Jehovah's command to Israel is to "utterly destroy" (Heb., *haram*; cf. Lev27:28-29) all the peoples of these Canaanite nations (i.e., every man, woman, and child). It is not the prerogative of Israel to make a covenant with them (Joshua will be deceived into making a covenant with the Gibeonites; Josh9:14-15), "nor show mercy unto them". Jehovah has decreed that they must be destroyed.

Note on *haram* Judgment: The concept of *haram* judgment in the O.T. is entirely analogous to the "sin unto death" in the N.T. (1Jn5:16; Cp., Act5:1-11; 1Cor11:30). Jehovah's *haram* judgment does not mean that every individual that falls under it will necessarily suffer eternal damnation; it is an earthly, temporal judgment for sin of a particularly heinous nature.

- [3] The Law of Moses will not forbid inter-marriage of Jews with Gentiles in general, but inter-marriage with these particular Canaanite nations is expressly forbidden.
- [4] The Canaanites are pagan idolaters of the grossest sort. Fellowship with them in any way, particularly marriage, will only serve as a temptation for Israel to compromise in their absolute devotion to Jehovah (Deut5:7; Cp., 2Cor6:14-17), which would be (Mosaic) covenant unfaithfulness.
- [5] The places of pagan worship must be destroyed. The worship of Jehovah and the worship of pagan gods cannot coexist within Israel—it is a condition that is not stable for society.
- Question: Has America's toleration of non-biblical religions within the very fabric of our society strengthened the nation over time, or weakened it?
- [6] Israel has been "chosen" by Jehovah to be His "special" and "holy people" for the purpose of modeling national righteousness in the sight of all other nations (Deut4:6-8).
- [7] The LORD did not choose Israel as His special recipient of grace because she was great; He chose Israel because **she was weak and few in number** (cf. 2Cor12:9)! The prosperity of Israel must be recognized to be due to the blessing of Jehovah, not the work of the nation.
- [8] The Hebrew word translated "love" is *ahab*. Jehovah was under no obligation to choose Abraham and his seed to be His special people; His choice was pure grace. But now, having unconditionally sworn an "oath" to Abraham (Gen15:18), Jehovah is absolutely committed to the preservation of Abraham's seed; He delivered them from Egypt to give them the Promised Land because of His "oath" to Abraham.
- [9] The Hebrew word translated "mercy" is *chesed*, which emphasizes that Jehovah is one who is "faithful" to "keep [His] covenant" commitments. Israel can rest assured that Jehovah will honor His obligations to them under every covenant He has made with them (both Abrahamic and Mosaic). Israel's obligation under the Mosaic covenant is to "love" (Heb., *ahab*) Jehovah and "keep His commandments", which is how the nation expresses their love Him; if Israel fails to keep Jehovah's commandments, this will be evidence that they have failed to love Him (cf. Jn14:15).
- [10] Notice how in this verse one who disobeys Jehovah is said to "hate Him". Covenant unfaithfulness (i.e., disobedience) will bring judgment, which will be explicitly specified (Deut28:15-68).
- [11] Many have mistakenly attempted to characterize the Law of Moses by means of three divisions, the civil, ceremonial, and moral aspects of the Law—but Scripture never divides the Law in this way. In Deuteronomy, however, it repeatedly refers to the three aspects of the Law as: 1) "**commandments**", which are the broad, all-encompassing principles of righteousness for a nation (i.e., the 10 commandments), 2) "**statutes**", which are applications of these broad principles to manifold particular situations; this body of

'Case Law' serves to elaborate on the full meaning of the 10 commandments, and provides a pattern showing how to apply them in other situations (i.e., even the many particular situations provided are not exhaustive), and 3) "**judgments**", which are the consequences that should be exacted for breaking the commandments.

- [12] In this verse, both the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants are in view. God has made unconditional promises to "thy fathers" (i.e., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) to ultimately bless their descendents, but the participation of this generation of the nation of Israel in the Abrahamic promises depends on their faithfulness to the Mosaic covenant.
- [13] This verse begins an enumeration of the blessings Jehovah promises the nation of Israel for obedience to the Mosaic covenant (Cp., Deut28:1-14). The promised blessings are all physical, earthly, temporal, and national in nature. The blessings include financial prosperity.
- [14] Israel "shall be blessed above all people" in order to be an object lesson for the Gentiles that "blessed is the nation whose God is Jehovah"¹⁸ (Ps33:12). The blessings include an increasing population; note that many children are a blessing from the LORD (Ps127:3-5).
- [15] The blessings include protection from "sickness" and "evil diseases". The Law includes many instructions concerning the sanitary practices of a society, which have long served to make Jewish communities enclaves of health, even in the midst of wide-scale plague (especially in Europe during the Middle Ages, for which they were often persecuted); the promised blessings go beyond the natural, however, and include the supernatural. Such diseases will be directed toward those who "hate" Israel, in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (Gen12:3).
- [16] The blessings include victory over enemies in battle. Note that pagan peoples who practice idolatry are not to be allowed to coexist within the nation of Israel, for coexistence will inevitably lead to compromise, and any compromise with paganism is unfaithfulness to Jehovah¹⁹.
- [17] The nations in the land of Canaan are greater in number and more powerful than Israel. It will not be the strength of Israel that is responsible for their victory, but the work of God.
- [18] This is an argument from the greater to the lesser. Egypt was infinitely greater than the nations of Canaan, and God supernaturally delivered Israel from Egypt. When Jehovah asks Israel to trust His promise to give them victory over the Canaanites, it is only reasonable that they should do so. God is not asking Israel to exercise so-called 'blind faith', but to trust One who has demonstrated Himself to be worthy of trust.

¹⁸ The purpose of this object lesson was to draw the Gentile nations to Jehovah. This was the 'secret' of America's blessing as nation for the better part of two centuries.

¹⁹ This is the reason for America's decline. Our increasing toleration of pagan peoples (within our society), with their unbiblical and ungodly values, is rebellion against Jehovah, for which He will remove His blessing.

- [19] There were at this time **eye-witnesses** to Jehovah's supernatural deliverance from Egypt still alive among them (Cp., 1Cor15:5-6; 2Pet1:16).
- [20] God's eradication of the cursed peoples living in Canaan, in preparation for giving the Land to the descendants of Abraham, will also include supernatural works on behalf of Israel.
- [21] For Israel to fear the inhabitants of Canaan is a lack of faith in Jehovah—it is disbelief that God is able to do what He has promised (cf. Rom4:19-21).
- [22] The LORD had the power to obliterate the Canaanites in an instant, as He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. However, in order to preserve the urban and agricultural infrastructure of Canaan, so that Israel might enjoy maximum benefit from it, "God will put out those nations before thy by little and little"; this God reveals to Israel beforehand, so they should expect it.
- [23] The fact that the destruction of the Canaanite nations is to take place gradually, over an extended period of time, does not diminish the certainty of Jehovah's promise to completely "destroy them".
- [24] It is the decree and purpose of God that Israel be His instrument to utterly "destroy their name [i.e., the Canaanites] from under heaven". This is the second aspect of Israel's conquest of Canaan (see note on Deut7:1); for Israel to show mercy to the Canaanites would be to thwart God's purpose to judge a people who have been justly condemned for their wickedness (cf. Gen9:25; 15:16; Lev18:24-30; 20:23).
- [25] Idolatry, or the worship of other "gods", Jehovah calls an "abomination"²⁰. Paganism cannot be allowed to coexist with the worship of Jehovah within the nation of Israel. Israel is commanded to destroy the temples of pagan worship they find in Canaan, and are not allowed to take for themselves the wealth contained within them. This provision is to keep clear the purpose for their destruction; it is not for the purpose of enriching the nation financially, but because the worship of other gods is "an abomination to the LORD".
- [26] Here "abomination" refers to the actual idols Israel will find among the Canaanites; they are not to be brought as trophies into the LORD's "house" (i.e., the Tabernacle), as was a common practice of the pagan peoples²¹ (Cp., 1Sam5:1-4; Dan5:1-4).

²⁰ It is popular in the world of Christendom today to assert that all sins are equally bad. While it is true that any and every sin is sufficient to condemn man before the infinitely holy God, whose righteous standard is absolute perfection (thus making it certain that all men are in need of a Savior), it is not true that God views all sins as equally bad. Only some sins are declared by God to be an "abomination".

²¹ In doing this, the pagan peoples were asserting that their god was greater than the god of their enemies. For Israel to do this would be to concede the truth of the pagan worldview (i.e., that there exist many gods), which is the very thing Israel was called into existence to refute (Deut4:39; Isa43:10-12).

CHAPTER 8

JEHOVAH THE SOURCE OF PAST AND FUTURE BLESSING

- [1] This is becoming a familiar refrain. The LORD desires to bring Israel into the Promised Land and bless them in order to fulfill His unconditional promise to the "fathers" (i.e., the Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob); however, participation of this generation of Israel in the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant are contingent upon its faithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant.
- [2] The command to "remember" the historical works of Jehovah on behalf of the nation is reiterated. The previous forty years of wandering in the wilderness was discipline of the previous generation for their lack of faith; it was also a "test" of the present generation—would they believe the promises of Jehovah to them and trust in Him alone? Jehovah's exhortation to "remember" the past means He is not asking Israel to exercise blind faith, but to trust the God who has proven Himself in history to be worthy of their complete trust. **A memory of past history and present faith are inseparably linked.**
- [3] For the past forty years, Israel's daily survival depended upon Jehovah's supernatural supply of "manna" for food. The "manna", however, was not their savior; it was merely the means God used to preserve the nation, which He had promised to do. Thus, "man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live" (quoted by the Lord Jesus during His wilderness temptation; Matt4:4; Luk4:4) means that Israel's faith must look beyond the means God uses to their source; Jehovah ALONE is their Savior and the source of blessing for Israel.
- [4] During forty years of wandering in the wilderness, Israel's clothing never wore out, and their feet never swelled; this was a blessing from Jehovah that Israel must remember.
- [5] Jehovah blesses Israel because He loves the nation as a "son" (Hos11:1); however, even a loving father chastens a son for disobedience.
- [6] Israel must take care to "keep the commandments" of the Mosaic Covenant, or else "fear" the chastening that will certainly come from the LORD. Such chastening for disobedience is not a sign that the father-son relationship between Jehovah and Israel is ended, "for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Heb12:6).
- [7] Now the LORD desires to bring Israel into the Promised Land, which is a "good land", to which even the unbelieving spies gave eye-witness testimony (Num13:23-27).
- [9] The land of Canaan, which the LORD has promised to give to Israel, is land of abundant blessing.
- [10] The Land, however, is not the source of blessing; the source of blessing is Jehovah!

- [11] In the midst of prosperity, the temptation to forget the true source of blessing (i.e., God) is always the greatest. If Israel forgets that Jehovah is the source of their blessing, and their faithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant wanes, their prosperity will end. The Land is not the source of their blessing, Jehovah is.
- [14] The temptation to "forget" the LORD as the source of blessing is always greatest during times of prosperity. It is during these times it is most important to remember the major historical works of God on behalf of the nation. These include: 1) deliverance from bondage to Egypt, the super-power of the day;
- [15] 2) preservation during forty years in a desert, even supernaturally supplying the water they needed from a rock (Ex17:6; Num20:11);
- [16] and 3) supernaturally supplying "manna" every day for forty years (Ex16:35).
- [17] For Israel to attribute their prosperity, the source of which is the blessing of Jehovah, to "my power" and "the might of mine hand" is the most egregious form of idolatry imaginable! **Is the present generation of America guilty of this sin?** If so, what can we expect for our future?
- [18] Israel must "remember" that the source of blessing is "the LORD thy God"; their prosperity is only because "He giveth thee power to get wealth", and He desires to bless Israel because of His promise to Abraham (Gen12:1-3).
- [19] The ultimate manifestation of Israel's unfaithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant is for them to "forget the LORD" and "walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them" (Cp., Deut5:7); that is, to seek blessing from gods other than Jehovah. Such unfaithfulness will bring the most severe form of discipline from the LORD on the nation that the Mosaic Covenant allows, which is dispersion from the Land (Deut28:63-68).
- [20] For a discussion of "perish" in this context, see the notes on Deut4:26-29.

CHAPTER 9

WARNING AGAINST SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS THINKING

- [1] Moses begins this section with the now familiar refrain, "Hear, O Israel" (Cp., Deut4:1; 5:1; 6:4). "Hear" is the Hebrew *shema*, which is an imperative to listen to the message, understand it, and obey it (Cp., Ezr7:10). Moses uses this opening to passages having a particularly important message.

The upcoming passage is a warning to the Israelites to guard against self-righteousness in their thinking. Israel is about to enter the Promised Land and dispossess it of the Canaanites. This accomplishment will not be because of Israel's superior military strength, however, as the Canaanites are "greater and mightier"

than the Israelites, and their "fortified" cities are a more than adequate defense against Israel.

- [2] Furthermore, the population of Canaan still includes the "Anakim", as it did 40 years before (Num13:33), who are a demon-spawned race of literal giants.
- [3] From the human point of view, victory for Israel in this situation is **impossible**. The only explanation for an Israelite victory over the Canaanites will be that "[Jehovah] shall destroy them", and "[Jehovah] shall bring them down". "Understand" is an imperative for Israel to recognize this and to give all glory for it to Jehovah (cf. Isa41:8-9; 43:10-12; 45:21-22). Likewise, this will be an object lesson for the Gentile nations of Jehovah's power and His grace toward Israel, His chosen nation.
- [4] Not only is Israel warned not to attribute their victory over the Canaanites to their own power (rather to the power of Jehovah their God), but they are also not to think that the LORD is giving them this victory because they deserve it. The nations of Canaan are being "driven out before [Israel]" because they have fallen under the just judgment of God for their "wickedness"; but this does not mean that Israel is being given the Land for any "righteousness" she possesses. The Canaanites are recipients of justice, and Israel is a recipient of **grace**.
- [5] This is precisely why the LORD told Abraham that his descendants would have to wait four generations to inherit the Land He promised to give to him. In Abraham's day, the "iniquity of the Amorites [was] not yet full" (Gen15:16), but it now is (cf. Lev18:24-25,27; 20:23).
- [6] Again, "understand" is an imperative to the Israelites to guard against any self-righteousness in their thinking. There is also an implicit warning to Israel; if the Canaanites can be removed from the Land by Jehovah for wickedness, so can they (cf. Deut28:63)!

THE HISTORICAL RECORD WITNESSES TO ISRAEL'S UNRIGHTEOUSNESS

- [7] To reinforce the message that Israel will have victory over the Canaanites and possess their Land solely as a recipient of God's grace (i.e., they do not deserve it), Moses calls on Israel to "remember, and forget not" their continuous pattern of rebellion against Jehovah in the recent past, beginning with the very day that they departed Egypt and entered the wilderness.
- [8] Israel so provoked the LORD at "Horeb" (i.e., the golden calf at Mt. Sinai) that He considered destroying this generation and starting over with Moses alone (Ex32:9-10).
- [9] Moses briefly recounts the nation's rebellion at Horeb. It began during the 40 days in which Moses was atop Sinai receiving "the tables of stone", which was to be the written testimony of the "covenant" with Jehovah into which the nation had voluntarily entered.

- [10] These "two tables of stone written with the [very] finger of God" did not contain any 'new' revelation, but were merely the written record of "all the words which the LORD spoke" in the hearing of the entire nation.
- [11] At the end of the 40 days, the LORD gave Moses "the two tables of stone" which He had made, which were "the tables of the covenant".
- [12] No sooner had the LORD given Moses these tables representing the covenant, however, He commanded Moses to go down and witness that the nation was already guilty of breaking the covenant's most fundamental obligation (i.e., devotion to Jehovah as God alone; cf. Deut6:4). In worshipping the "molten image" of the calf while Moses was on Sinai, Israel had broken the covenant.
- [14] Vv. 13-14 are a quotation of Exodus 32:9-10. The LORD cites this rebellion of Israel as sufficient grounds to immediately terminate the [Sinaitic] covenant, which was conditional in nature, and He proposed starting the nation all over again from Moses.
- This proposal, however, gives rise to some serious difficulties. By starting the nation over again with Moses, the LORD would preserve the nation as one descended from Abraham, which was an unconditional promise the LORD made to the patriarch (Gen12:2); however, one might argue that in such a case it would be Moses whose name would be "made great" rather than Abraham? The greater, and insurmountable difficulty, arises from the prophecy given through Jacob that his son Judah would be the progenitor of the Messiah (Gen49:10); Moses is from the tribe of Levi, and starting the nation again from him would render this messianic prophecy incapable of fulfillment (similarly, prophecies regarding the other sons of Jacob had also been made). Thus, termination of the Sinaitic covenant by Jehovah was a real possibility, but destruction of all the Israelites save Moses was not. It seems that the LORD made this proposal 'hypothetically', for the purpose of provoking Moses to take the role of mediator on behalf of the nation, which he did.
- [15] With "the two tables of the covenant" in his hands, Moses descends the mountain knowing the covenant has already been broken.
- [16] Moses saw with his own eyes that the nation had "sinned against the LORD" in such a way that the covenant was "quickly" (i.e., immediately) rendered void due to the failure of Israel to keep its very first provision.
- [17] In the eyes of all the people, Moses broke "the two tables" as an object lesson indicating that the nation had broken their covenant with Jehovah.
- [18] Moses assumes the role of mediator, and for another 40 days he petitions the LORD for mercy on behalf of the nation.
- [19] Moses rightly understands the covenant had been broken, and severe judgment would be just, but the LORD had not yet revealed what His reaction to this rebellion would be.

- [20] The LORD was particularly "angry" with Aaron, who led the people in this great sin (Ex32:2-6). That Aaron was not "destroyed" for his role in the rebellion is apparently due to Moses' intercession for him.
- [21] In the end, Moses pulverized the golden "calf" and scattered its dust in the "brook" that descended from Sinai. Not mentioned here, Moses also made all the nation drink from this water that contained the dust of the idol (Ex32:20), which is remarkably similar to the procedure given by the Law to test a wife suspected of marital unfaithfulness (Cp., Num5:11-31).
- [22] Though the rebellion at Sinai was the pre-eminent failure of the nation, allusions to failures at "Taberah" (Num11:1-3), "Massah" (Ex17:1-7), and "Kibroth-hatta'avah" (Num11:31-34) are also offered as evidence that Israel's rebellion was not limited to the Sinai event, but was a pattern repeated throughout the 40 years in the wilderness.
- [23] Finally, the event that precipitated the LORD's setting aside of the previous generation of Israel, condemning them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years, was their refusal at "Kadesh-barnea" to enter the Promised Land at the LORD's command (Num13:26-14:10); this refusal Moses calls rebellion (Cp., Num14:9) and says that it was due to their failure to believe the LORD.
- [24] The Israelites have always been "rebellious against the LORD", so they should not think that He is giving them victory over the Canaanites because of any righteousness on their part (rather, Jehovah is being gracious to Israel, whom He loves; cf. Deut7:8).
- [25] Israel's rebellion at both Sinai and Kadesh-barnea were legitimate grounds for which Jehovah could have terminated the Mosaic covenant with the nation; in both instances this was averted by Moses' intercession for the nation (Ex32:9-14; Num14:11-20).
- [26] In Moses' intercession for the nation, he never pleaded Israel's righteousness before the LORD.
- [27] Rather, Moses centered his intercession on the promise the LORD had made to "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Ex32:13), which was unconditional (i.e., not dependent on the righteousness of the nation).
- [28] Furthermore, his petition was based on an argument that extending mercy to Israel would maximize Jehovah's own glory before the nations (Ex32:11-12; Num14:15-16). Namely, Moses did not want Egypt or the nations of Canaan to be tempted to think that Jehovah did not bring His chosen people into the Land which He had promised them because of any inability on His part.
- [29] By showing mercy to the rebellious nation of Israel, and giving them an "inheritance" they did not deserve, Jehovah's "mighty power" would be evident to all.

CHAPTER 10

COVENANT RENEWED BY JEHOVAH'S GRACE

- [1] Moses' destruction of the first set of tables was a picture of the covenant broken by Israel's idolatry. The LORD's command for Moses to "hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first" is an offer, by pure grace, to renew the Sinaitic covenant with the nation (cf. Ex34:10).
- [2] Jehovah graciously offers to "write on the tables the words" which He had previously written on the first set, which would then be kept in the "ark" of the covenant.
- [3] After the "ark" and the "two [blank] tables of stone" had been made, Moses returned to the top of Mt. Sinai. Apparently the ark of the covenant was not completed at this point, since Moses would have been unable to carry it by himself up the mountain. By calling it the "ark of acacia wood", it would seem to indicate that only the internal wooden box was taken by Moses, which would have been subsequently overlaid with gold, fitted with the mercy seat, etc., as commanded by God.
- [4] Jehovah Himself "wrote on the tables . . . the ten commandments"; the making of a new set of tables, identical to the first set, indicates the covenant has been renewed by Jehovah. This renewal is an act of pure grace, as Jehovah was under absolutely no obligation to do so.
- [5] At this point in his address to Israel, Moses (apparently quite literally) points to the ark, which contains that second set of tables (1Kgs8:9), and which resides in the midst of the people to that very day, as a testimony to the unrighteousness/rebellion of the nation and the grace of Jehovah in renewing the covenant.
- [6] Aaron perished in the wilderness, never seeing the Promised Land, because of his rebellion with Moses at Meribah (Num20:24; 27:14). He was succeeded by his son Eleazar as high priest.
- [8] The tribe of Levi was set apart to minister full-time to both the LORD and the people. Levi was selected by the LORD for this role, at least in part, because of their faithfulness after the incident of the golden calf at Sinai (Ex32:26); it was still a gracious selection, however, because Levi had participated in the idolatry with the rest of the nation.
- [9] Because the tribe of Levi was to be engaged full-time in service to Jehovah, they were not to inherit any land in Canaan as the other tribes would; rather, "The LORD is his inheritance" (Num18:20).
- [10] In renewing the covenant, Moses communed with the LORD atop Mt. Sinai for 40 days, repeating exactly the pattern followed the previous time.
- [11] At that time, the LORD renewed his intention to give them the Promised Land; that is, He made clear that He desired to fulfill his promise to Abraham (Gen12:7) with that particular generation

of Israel. The fact that that generation did not "go in and possess the land" was due to their rebellion at Kadesh-barnea.

- [12] But for the LORD to offer that generation the Promised Land, the Sinaitic covenant, which they catastrophically broke, must be renewed. Vv. 12-13 are a brief summary of Israel's obligations under the covenant: 1) "love" the LORD (Deut6:5), and
- [13] 2) keep His "commandments" (Deut6:6ff). As before, love comes before obedience. Keeping the LORD's commandments is the way the nation expresses their love for Him (Jn14:15). Salvation is by grace, not law keeping, but the grace of God in salvation ought to motivate a holy life in response (Eph2:8-10; Tit2:11-13).
- [14] The LORD is the Creator of the "heavens" and the "earth", and "all that therein is", meaning He has the authority to do with any and every part of it as He wills.
- [15] The LORD was under no obligation to show grace to "thy fathers" (i.e., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), but it was His "delight" to do so. In entering into an unconditional covenant with Abraham, Jehovah "chose [Abraham's] seed" to be a special recipient of His grace (Gen12:2,7; 13:15).
- [16] The LORD's gracious choice of Israel, however, is a corporate or **national election**. God's election of Israel as a nation does not guarantee personal salvation for any particular Jew—personal salvation is still dependent upon each individual exercising **personal faith**. The LORD exhorts each individual descendent of Abraham to "circumcise . . . your heart", which is the O.T. analog of the N.T.'s new birth (Deut30:6; Ezek36:26; Jn3:3,7).

The Error of Reformed Soteriology. Reformed Theology errs in its doctrine of salvation by failing to recognize that God's choice of Israel was a national, rather than an individual, election. It mistakenly imputes God's election of Israel to individuals (even Gentiles, another problem!), making election the determiner of individual salvation rather than personal faith. Under the O.T. covenants, however, national election never assured anyone's personal salvation. If one carefully compares Gen25:20-23, Mal1:1-3, and Rom9:11-13, the key passages upon which Reformed Theology builds its doctrine of election, it is clear that this discussion of election pertains to nations, not individuals; the elect nation of Israel was always comprised of both saved and unsaved Jews (cf. Rom9:6).

- [17] With apologies to Mormon theology, this verse does not imply that Jehovah is merely one of many "gods" or "lords" (neither does 1Cor8:5); the fact that Jehovah is the only God has already been expressly asserted (Deut4:39). This verse asserts the absolute sovereignty and aseity of the LORD. His choice (i.e., of Israel's His elect nation) was not based on any consideration outside of Himself; His choice was made according to grace (Rom11:5-6).
- [18] Just because God chose Israel as His elect nation, to be a special recipient of His grace, however, does not mean He loves Israel to the exclusion of others. God loves the Gentiles as well, even

though they are not in special covenant with Him as is Israel. His love for the Gentiles is seen in the providential care He shows the "fatherless", the "widow", and the "sojourner" (i.e., homeless).

- [19] If Jehovah loves the "sojourner" (i.e., Gentiles), then Israel as His elect nation should likewise.
- [20] The LORD's purpose in choosing Israel includes, at least in part, His desire to use them as a "light [i.e., a channel of revelation] to the Gentiles" (cf. Isa49:6; Luk2:32; Act13:47). Israel's primary way of being this light to the Gentiles was to live before them in absolute and exclusive devotion to Jehovah and His laws, thereby receiving His blessing which they would covet (Deut4:6-8).
- [21] Israel should recognize that all they have has come from Jehovah by His grace.
- [22] Four generations before, Jacob and his family numbering a mere "threescore and ten persons" went into "Egypt". There the seed of Abraham became slaves of Pharaoh, who in time determined to exterminate them as a people. Just forty years prior to this present time, Jehovah delivered the Israelites from this bondage in Egypt, and He has brought them to the border of the Promised Land as a great nation numbering "as the stars of heaven for multitude" (i.e., in the millions). There is no explanation for this apart from the grace of Jehovah.

CHAPTER 11

PREVIEW OF THE BLESSINGS/CURSINGS OF THE COVENANT

The national blessings for keeping the Sinaitic covenant, and the national cursings (i.e., discipline, chastisement) for failing to keep the covenant, will be spelled out for Israel in specific detail in Deuteronomy 28. These blessings/cursings are previewed in summary fashion in Deuteronomy 11 prior to proceeding into the particular stipulations that will be the subject of Deuteronomy 12-26.

- [1] To "love the LORD", and to "keep . . . His commandments" as an expression of that love (Cp., Jn14:15), is the heart of the Sinaitic (i.e., Mosaic) covenant (Deut6:4-9).
- [2] Moses addresses the adults/elders of the nation; these are those alive at the present hour who were also present in Egypt 40 years before. He calls on them to remember the history that has led them up to this point.
- [3] The elders of the nation personally witnessed the "miracles" Jehovah performed on behalf of the nation in bringing them out of Egypt, mighty works that literally decimated "Pharaoh" and "all his land"; after the plagues visited upon Egypt in the days of the Exodus, the superpower Egypt was a non-player on the world scene for the next 5 centuries.
- [4] At the Red Sea the army of Egypt was destroyed, to the last man, in a moment (Ex14:26-30).

- [5] The LORD supernaturally preserved the nation "in the wilderness", on a daily basis, for 40 years.
- [6] These elders also witnessed the LORD's judgment on "Dathan and Abiram", Reubenites who along with Korah the Levite had challenged Moses and Aaron for the leadership of the nation and the priesthood. They, along with their entire families, "went down alive into *sheol*" (Num16:1-35).
- [7] The point is that there are those among this generation who were eyewitnesses to these mighty works of Jehovah (Cp., 2Pet1:16).
- [8] These eyewitnesses can testify to the supernatural blessing of Jehovah on the nation for faithfulness as well as swift judgment for rebellion. For this generation to enter and possess the Promised Land requires faithfulness (to the covenant) on their part.
- [9] Once in the Land, the nation's continued possession of it will also require covenant faithfulness.
- [10] The environment of Canaan will be very different from Egypt. Egypt received little or no rain, but sustained its agricultural cycle by using the Nile River for irrigation; thus, it was virtually immune to seasons of famine²².
- [11] In contrast, the Jordan River in Canaan is hundreds of feet below sea level, so its waters are not able to be used for irrigation of a "land of hills and valleys". Agricultural production in Canaan is absolutely dependent upon "rain" in its appointed seasons, making it always susceptible to famine.
- [12] This will make the nation ever dependent upon the LORD, who "careth for" the Land, and whose "eyes . . . are always upon it".
- [13] The nation must acknowledge their dependence upon the LORD by remaining faithful to the covenant; that is, they must "love the LORD" and express that love by "hearken[ing] diligently unto [His] commandments".
- [14] One of the major blessings promised to the nation in the Sinaitic covenant is that the LORD will "give you the rain of your land in its due season" (cf. Deut28:12).
- [15] If the nation is faithful, the LORD promises to give rain in its appointed times so that the Land will be abundantly productive and the nation will prosper.
- [16] Covenant unfaithfulness, however, which will manifest itself pre-eminently in idolatry, will be cause for discipline/chastisement (i.e., cursing).

²² The 7-year famine in the days of Joseph was an obvious exception to this general rule, for which the Egyptians were totally unprepared and would have perished as a nation had the LORD not provided Joseph as a savior.

- [17] One of the major cursings threatened upon the nation in the Sinaitic covenant is drought (i.e., "no rain"; Deut28:24), which will imperil the nation's very survival. Many occasions of drought in the history of Israel are recorded in the O.T., and they **always** indicate a national, spiritual problem exists.
- [18] Vv. 18-20 are a quotation from the *Shema* (Deut6:6-9). Enjoying Jehovah's blessing, and guarding against His cursing, requires that His "words" become engrafted in the "heart" and "soul" of every Israelite.
- [21] Though the Land has been unconditionally promised to Abraham and his descendants (in the Abrahamic covenant), the possession of it by any particular generation of Israel is dependent upon faithfulness under the Sinaitic (Mosaic) covenant.
- [22] The success of this present generation of Israel in dispossessing the Land of its current inhabitants is dependent upon their faithfulness to Jehovah, expressed by "diligently keep[ing] all the commandments" contained in the Sinaitic covenant.
- [23] The LORD has promised to do a mighty work on behalf of the nation, contingent upon Israel's faithfulness to Him.
- [24] Contingent upon the nation's faithfulness to the LORD, it is possible that this generation of Israel could possess the full extent of the Land promised to Abraham (Cp., Gen13:14-17; 15:18), which extends from the "uttermost sea" (i.e., the Mediterranean) in the west to the "Euphrates River" in the east.
- [25] Though Israel at this time was a largely unarmed people with women, children and the elderly making up a large fraction of the population (i.e., apparently not a military force), the miraculous and utterly decisive victories Jehovah will give them will strike fear into the hearts of the inhabitants of Canaan (Cp., Josh2;9). Israel should not fear their enemies, their enemies fear them!
- [26] This language seems to indicate that the LORD is offering to renew the Sinaitic covenant, broken by the unfaithfulness of the previous generation at Kadesh-barnea, to **this generation** of Israel, on "this day".
- [27] The blessings promised for obedience under the covenant will be given in detail in Deuteronomy 28:1-14.
- [28] The cursings threatened for disobedience under the covenant will be given in detail in Deuteronomy 28:15-68.
- [29] The formal ratification procedure for renewing the Sinaitic (Mosaic) covenant upon the mountains of Gerizim and Ebal once in the Promised Land will be detailed in Deuteronomy 27:9-26; it is recorded as being performed by the nation in Joshua 8:30-35.
- [30] By requiring Israel to actually enter the Promised Land in order to ratify the renewed covenant, it appears that the LORD is requiring an initial act of faith on the part of the nation; similarly, the previous generation had to leave Egypt and go to Mount Sinai in order to be offered the original covenant.

- [31] The LORD promises that this act of faith by the nation will be rewarded: "Ye **shall** possess [the Land], and dwell therein".
- [32] But entering the Land at the command of the LORD was merely the nation's initial expression of faith toward Jehovah; it must be followed by strict adherence to "all the statutes and judgments which I set before you this day" in order to continue in the Land under His hand of blessing and prosperity.

CHAPTER 12

PARTICULAR STIPULATIONS (Deut12:1-26:49)

The particular stipulations given in Deuteronomy 12-26 are really not new or additional commandments, but are rather an elaboration and application of the 10 Commandments (Deut5:6-21). There is a sense in which the "10 Commandments" are the only commandments upon which the nation of Israel was founded. All the statutes and judgments that follow are simply the application of one or more of the 10 commandments to a multitude of particular settings and/or situations. In the legal language of today, the particular stipulations are the **case law** that explicitly define what the 10 Commandments look like functioning in the 'real world'.

Influence of Deuteronomy on U.S. Constitution. In 1984, political science professors Drs. Donald Lutz and Charles Heineman published findings from their research into 15,000 original documents (books, essays, letters, diaries, sermons, etc.) written by leading American politicians and statesmen during the years 1760-1805. Their desire was to learn who or what most influenced the thinking of America's so-called founding fathers—from where did their ideas on government come? They identified 3,154 direct quotations in these writings. They determined that 34% of all quotations were from the Bible, which was a factor of four greater frequency than the next most-quoted source; within these Biblical quotations, **Deuteronomy was the most-quoted book** of the Bible. Furthermore, a majority of the remaining quotations were from men who could similarly be shown to have taken their ideas from the Bible (e.g., Charles Montesquieu was 2nd at 8.3%, William Blackstone was 3rd at 7.9%, and John Locke was 4th at 2.9%). There can be little doubt that the Bible in general, and the Book of Deuteronomy in particular, was the chief influence upon the men who wrote the Declaration of Independence and created the Constitution of the United States with its Bill of Rights (i.e., the first Ten Amendments).

CASE LAW RELATING TO THE 1ST COMMANDMENT

The first commandment is, "Thou shalt have no other gods before [Jehovah]" (Deut5:7).

EXCLUSIVE WORSHIP OF JEHOVAH

- [1] Notice that the following section is introduced as "statutes" and "judgments", not commandments. These are not additional commandments, but the applications of the 10 Commandments to

particular, real-world settings in Israel, along with the penalties associated with disobedience. God, in giving 15 divinely inspired chapters (i.e., Deut12-26) of case law associated with the 10 Commandments, demonstrates a pattern of correct interpretation/application for Israel (and us) to follow.

The Sermon on the Mount. Much confusion exists on the correct understanding of the Sermon on the Mount given by the Lord Jesus, recorded in Matthew 5-7. Does the Sermon contain new commandments? Do Christ's 'commandments' in the Sermon apply only to national Israel under the Mosaic covenant, or do they also have application to the NT Church? The best understanding of the Sermon on the Mount is that it does not contain any 'new' commandments, but in it Jesus provides additional divine interpretation (or case law) of the 10 Commandments (e.g., **murder** in Matt5:21-26; **adultery** in Matt5:27-32; **perjury** in Matt5:33-42; acceptable **worship** in Matt6:1-18; **covetousness** in Matt6:19-34); in the Sermon He corrects misunderstanding/misapplication of the 10 Commandments that has been built up in the centuries preceding His Coming. Since the 10 Commandments embody God's divine principles for national righteousness, Jesus' commentary on them have enduring application to all nations today.

- [2] Israel is commanded to "utterly destroy" (i.e., leave no vestige or remnant whatsoever) all places of pagan worship in the Land they are possessing. Religious diversity was not to be tolerated in the nation of Israel. This is the appropriate understanding of the commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before [Jehovah]" (Deut5:7).

Question: If the LORD commanded that false religions were not to be allowed to coexist along side devotion to Him in the nation of Israel, would He accept such religious pluralism in a righteous Gentile nation? Consider, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD" (Ps33:12).

- [3] No person within Israel, whether Jew or Gentile, is to be allowed to worship any God besides Jehovah. The nation of Israel, in its entirety, is to be totally and exclusively devoted to Jehovah alone.
- [4] Jehovah is not to be worshipped in the way that other 'gods' are. The other 'gods' are inventions of mankind (i.e., gods made in the image of man), as are the methods used to worship them. Jehovah, the One (and only) true God, has revealed to mankind both Himself and the prescribed way of worshipping Him.
- [5] Whereas the pagan gods could be worshipped in any place or in many places, Jehovah was to be worshipped solely in the "place" (singular) specified by Him. At the time of Israel's entering into the Land, the LORD had not yet specified this location, but He clearly anticipates doing so; that place will be Jerusalem (1Kgs14:21; 2Chr7:12; Ps132:13).
- [6] Offerings to Jehovah cannot be made in any place, but only in the place specified by Him.

- [7] Portions of certain offerings to Jehovah are permitted to be eaten (either by the priest, or shared between priest and the one bringing the offering), but this can only be done in the place specified by the LORD.
- [8] Individual Israelites are not free to worship Jehovah in any way of their own choosing (no matter how 'sincere' they may be); Jehovah has specified the only acceptable means of worship.
- Question: In the NT Church, much more freedom has been granted to the Christian in the area of worship (cf. Matt18:20). Where not explicitly commanded, there is liberty (cf. Rom14:5); however, Christ has specified certain things (e.g., recipients and mode of baptism). Is it permissible for us to choose to worship the Lord in ways other than those He has explicitly specified?
- [9] Once Israel enters the Promised Land, the LORD will begin to institute the forms of worship He intends to be permanent.
- [10] Worship in the Tabernacle, which moves from place to place, is only a temporary arrangement, necessary before the nation is established in the Land. Even after entering Canaan, many permanent forms of worship will have to await the time when Israel has "rest" from their enemies (e.g., Jerusalem would not be liberated from the Jebusites until the time of David, 4 centuries later; Judg1:21; 2Sam5:6-7).
- [11] Jehovah not only requires exclusive worship, He also specifies in detail how and where He is to be worshipped.
- [12] The Levites will not inherit land in Canaan like the other tribes. They will be given (a portion of) the tithes and offerings made by the other 11 tribes. It is their full-time responsibility to faithfully teach the Scriptures and the true worship of Jehovah, and their very subsistence depends on it.
- [13] It was not acceptable to make offerings to the LORD in the place of one's own choosing.
- [14] Worship acceptable to the LORD could only occur in the Tabernacle, which would be permanently transferred to the Temple in Jerusalem in Solomon's day (cf. 1Chr6:6,10; 7:1-3; Ps132:13).
- [15] In contrast to the killing of animals as offerings to the LORD, which could occur exclusively at the Tabernacle/Temple, animals could be slaughtered for food in any place. A further contrast was that only the ceremonially clean person could participate in Temple worship, but both the "clean" and the "unclean" person were permitted to kill an animal for food.
- [16] However, in either of these two cases the blood of the slain animal is holy, in that blood is the *sine qua non* of life (Lev17:11) and is always reserved for Jehovah (the Creator of life) alone; it is either to be poured upon the "earth" (for an animal slaughtered for food) or upon the altar (for an animal offered to the LORD; cf. Lev1:5; 3:2; 4:7; 5:9). Thus, there is an element of worship even in the mundane act of killing animals and preparing their flesh to be eaten for food.

The prohibition of eating blood was instituted at the time of the Noahic covenant (Gen9:4), which first authorized mankind to eat animals for food (Gen9:3).

- [17] The Israelite was not free, however, to eat from his (required) tithes or (voluntary) offerings "within [his] gates" (i.e., where he lived).
- [18] A portion of some offerings could be eaten by the Israelite, but only at the Tabernacle/Temple so as to ensure that the Levite received his due portion.
- [19] The very subsistence of the Levites depended on the tithes and offerings made by the other 11 tribes (Cp., Deut26:12-13). During times of apostasy, when the worship of Jehovah waned, the Levites had to abandon the Temple in order to work to feed their families (Cp., Neh13:10).
- [20] The rationale for allowing animals to be killed for food in any place is in vv20-22; the LORD foresees the time when He will expand the borders of Israel to be so large it would simply be impractical for the slaughter of animals (for food) to be performed only in Jerusalem.
- [23] It is reiterated that under no circumstances is it ever permissible to eat the blood of an animal.
- [24] Even the blood of an animal slaughtered for food is to be "pour[ed] upon the earth", an acknowledgment of Jehovah as the Creator of all life.
- [25] Implication is that "it [**will not**] go well with thee" for the Israelite who neglects this principle of reverence for life.
- [26] In contrast to animals killed for food, which was permitted to occur at any place, those to be offered to the LORD in worship must be taken to the Tabernacle/Temple, regardless of the distance one lived from Jerusalem.
- [27] Animals to be offered to the LORD had to be taken to the Tabernacle/Temple, and "the blood of thy sacrifices shall be poured out **upon the altar** of the LORD thy God", and any flesh permitted to be eaten had to be eaten there.
- [28] Failure to worship the LORD as He specifies will have consequences. It is not the case that any manner of worship, so long as it is 'sincere', will be accepted by Jehovah.
- [30] Coexistence of the worship (worshippers) of Jehovah and other gods within the nation of Israel will inevitably result in compromise on the part of the Jews, which is why coexistence (or religious pluralism) is forbidden. Israel will be judged for going after other gods, even as the Canaanites were (although Israel has Jehovah's promise to Abraham that they will never be utterly destroyed).

A nation that condones the worship of false gods (even in the name of 'religious freedom?'), whether Jewish or Gentile, does not meet Jehovah's standard of being a "righteous nation" (Deut4:8).

- [31] Jehovah is not capriciously destroying the Canaanites merely so He can give their land to the Israelites. The Canaanites are being exterminated as a people for heinous sins, especially their "abominations" committed in the worship of false gods; Israel is the LORD's instrument for their just judgment.
- [32] There was no legislative branch of government needed in Israel. Jehovah gave the laws once, and they were never to be increased, decreased, or changed. This is the basis for a righteous and stable society, religiously, judicially, and economically.

CHAPTER 13

CASE LAW RELATING TO THE 2ND COMMANDMENT

The second commandment includes, "Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto to *them* [i.e., the representations of any god/gods other than Jehovah], nor serve *them*" (Deut5:9).

THE TESTING AND JUDGMENT OF FALSE PROPHETS

- [1] Definition: A **prophet** is one who officially represents Jehovah and speaks with infallible authority when doing so, often (but not always) delivering new revelation from the LORD. The message of the prophet was frequently accompanied by "signs" and "wonders" (i.e. supernatural works, miracles) intended to validate the message of the prophet in the eyes of the people. The apostles in the N.T. were a class of prophets (cf. 2Cor12:12).
- [2] However, "signs" and "wonders", even if they "come to pass", do not necessarily confirm the authenticity of one who claims to be a prophet of Jehovah; signs and wonders (i.e., miracles, or predictions that come true) may be a necessary "sign" of a genuine prophet, but they are not by themselves sufficient to authenticate one who would claim to speak for Jehovah. For example, the coming of Antichrist will be "after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders" (2Thess2:9).

In addition to the "signs" and "wonders" that may accompany one who presents himself as a prophet, Israel must evaluate the message of the would-be prophet. A genuine prophet from Jehovah will never give revelation that, even if 'new', is inconsistent with already existing revelation (cf. Isa8:20; Act17:11), nor will he direct worship away from Jehovah and toward "other gods". For the believer to exercise this kind of discernment required spiritual maturity (i.e., sanctification) and an in-depth knowledge of Scripture (Cp., Eph4:11-15).

- [3] Jehovah says He will allow false prophets to arise in order to "test" Israel, specifically as to whether they "love the LORD" (which is the heart of the Law; Deut6:5). This is as true for the Church in the N.T. (cf. Act20:29-30; 2Cor11:3-4; 1Jn4:1; Rev2:2) as it was for Israel in the O.T.

- [4] Israel's "love" for Jehovah will be shown by "keep[ing] His commandments", and not "hearken[ing] unto the words of that [false] prophet".
- [5] The LORD commands that the false prophet "shall be put to death". Even today in the USA (and also true in most modern nations), a citizen convicted of treason is given the death penalty, which is entirely analogous. A false prophet commits treason against Jehovah, the God who "redeemed" Israel (as a nation), and by attempting to persuade others to follow in his rebellion he is guilty of sedition.
- [6] The principle applies equally, whether the false prophet is a stranger or a close family member, or whether he attempts to "entice" others to follow him publicly or "secretly" (i.e., privately).
- [7] The immediate concern was that Israel not be enticed to "go and serve" the gods of the Canaanites, who dwelt in the Land the LORD was giving them.
- [8] One's love for Jehovah, and loyalty to Him, must take priority over one's love for both friends and family (cf. Matt12:46-50; Luk14:26).
- [9] Even in the instance where the false prophet is one's own "friend", "brother", "son", "daughter", or "wife" (v6), it is one's duty, out of love for Jehovah, to testify against that false prophet; this necessarily means that the witness must participate in the execution.
- [10] Execution in Israel was to be carried out by stoning, which was a corporate process in which the entire community participated. In putting a person to death by stoning, the witness was required to cast the first stone (v9).
- [11] Irrespective of the claims of modern liberals today, the LORD asserts that capital punishment does indeed serve to deter crime, which is one of its purposes, another being to "put the evil away from the midst of [the nation]" (v5).

JUDGMENT OF CITIES THAT FOLLOW FALSE PROPHETS

- [12] Consider the situation in which the testing and judgment of false prophets, as discussed in vv1-11, are not executed properly.
- [13] The danger is that an entire "city" (i.e., community) can be drawn away from devotion to Jehovah to "serve other gods".
- [14] For an entire community to turn from Jehovah to serve other gods is called an "abomination" (i.e., a particularly heinous sin, which requires severe judgment). Such a report of apostasy must be "diligently" investigated to establish its "truth".
- [15] If the report of apostasy is true, that city is to be "utterly" destroyed, including men, women, children, and even "cattle". In

this the LORD is seen to be no respecter of persons (Act10:34), for this is exactly the judgment God meted out upon the Canaanites for their idolatries (Cp., Deut7:2,24-25).

- [16] In such a case of *haram* judgment (see note on Deut7:2), all possessions of the apostate city are devoted to the LORD and must be destroyed; they cannot be taken as "spoil".
- [17] Here, "cursed thing" is the Hebrew *haram*, which can also mean 'dedicated' or 'devoted' (i.e., to Jehovah). In a very practical way, this stipulation removes covetousness as a potential motive for charging a city with apostasy²³.
- [18] The LORD reiterates that the continuation of His blessing on the nation of Israel is dependent (under the Mosaic covenant) on its national righteousness; this means that every city within the nation must be devoted to Jehovah, love Him, and serve Him, or else be cut off. A failure on the part of the nation to cut off apostate cities is an indication of unrighteousness on the part of the nation.

CHAPTER 14

CASE LAW RELATING TO THE 3RD COMMANDMENT

The third commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain" (Deut5:11), has to do with appropriately representing the character of Jehovah as revealed by His Name.

JEHOVAH IS NOT LIKE OTHER GODS, SO HIS PEOPLE ARE NOT LIKE OTHER PEOPLE

- [1] The pagan gods of the Canaanites were assumed to be placated by human works of devotion that were silly, senseless, and irrational. Israel was not to adopt pagan practices in their worship of Jehovah.
- [2] Rather, Jehovah is a holy God, and the nation of Israel is to be His "holy people". Here, "holy" is used especially in its sense of 'distinct' or '**separate**'. If Israel were to worship Jehovah in ways that were like those by which the pagans worshiped their gods, then that would portray Jehovah as being like other gods; but Jehovah is utterly unlike any pagan conception of god. As Jehovah is unlike any pagan god, so Israel is to be a people unlike any pagan nation, even a "peculiar people [separated] unto [Jehovah] Himself" (Ex19:5).
- [3] Dietary Laws of the Mosaic Covenant. The dietary restrictions Jehovah placed on Israel, more than any other aspect of the Mosaic covenant, served to keep Israel distinct and separated from other peoples/nations. The diet prescribed to Israel effectively

²³ Contrast the LORD's policy with that of the Roman Catholic Church. During its campaigns of Inquisition during the Middle Ages, charges of heresy against the Jews in Europe were motivated primarily by their wealth, which was confiscated by the Pope when a Jew was 'convicted' (i.e., confessed after extended torture).

precluded Jews from eating with Gentiles. The dietary laws are about keeping Israel separate from other nations, not about the nutritional value (or lack thereof) of eating certain animals (since both before and after the period when the Mosaic covenant was in effect, all of these prohibited animals are said by Jehovah to be acceptable as food for mankind; Gen9:3; Act10:12-15); thus, the animals designated as unclean are an "abominable thing" only because the LORD has excluded them under the Mosaic covenant.

- [4] Animals Israel was permitted to eat for food were: the "ox", the "sheep", and the "goat", all of which were domesticated animals.
- [5] Israel was also permitted to eat the undomesticated (and therefore hunt) "deer", the "gazelle", and the wild versions of the ox, sheep, and goat.
- [6] Here the general rule for determining whether a "beast" (i.e., a land animal) can be eaten is given. To be eaten, the animal must: 1) have a "cleft hoof", and 2) "cheweth the cud". Thus, among the land animals only split-hoofed ruminants were permitted.
- [7] For example, "camels", "rabbits", and "badgers" were not permitted, since although "they chew the cud" they "divide not the hoof". These are "unclean", not inherently, but because Jehovah has designated them so under the Mosaic covenant.
- [8] Similarly, the "swine" is "unclean", and not permitted to be eaten for food, since although "it divideth the hoof", it does not "cheweth the cud". Not only were the Jews forbidden from eating such "unclean" animals, they were not even permitted to touch the meat that came from them.
- [9] Here the general rule for determining whether an animal that comes out of the "waters" can be eaten is given. To be eaten, it must have both "fins" and "scales".
- [10] Thus, most of what we today call 'fish' were considered clean (but not catfish!), whereas shellfish (i.e., shrimp, crab, lobsters), squid, whales and sharks were "unclean" and could not be eaten.
- [11] No general rule is given for determining what "birds" were clean and could be eaten. However, a list of birds that are designated as "unclean" are given in vv12-18.

Note that the list of unclean birds includes birds of prey (e.g., "eagle", v12; "owl", v16), birds of carrion (e.g., "buzzard", v13; "raven", v14), birds that cannot fly (e.g., "ostrich", v15), water fowl (e.g., "swan", v16; "pelican", v17), and even "bats" (though modern science would classify the bat as a mammal rather than a bird, that is an arbitrary classification of man; God classifies the bat with birds).

- [19] The general rule for determining whether a "creeping thing" (i.e., and insect/bug) can be eaten is given here at the end of the section on "birds". Any creeping thing that "flieth" (Lit., *swarm*) is unclean and cannot be eaten (basically all flying insects are categorized with unclean birds); however, some insects that do fly are clean and can be eaten, such grasshoppers and

locusts (cf. Matt3:4). More clarification regarding clean insects is given in Leviticus 11:20-23.

- [20] Israel was also forbidden from eating any animal that died naturally. To be eaten as food, an animal had to be slaughtered. This gives profound spiritual significance to even the mundane act of preparing and eating a meal; it is a daily reminder to fallen man that, in order for him to live, an innocent life must be sacrificed.

There was nothing wrong, *per se*, with eating meat from an animal that died naturally, and a Jew was permitted to give and/or sell such meat to the "stranger" (i.e., Gentile). However, under the Mosaic covenant Israel was forbidden from eating such meat. This distinction makes clear, however, that Gentiles were not under the Mosaic covenant; nevertheless, Gentiles were (and will forever be) under the dietary restrictions of the Noahic covenant (Gen9:3-4).

- [21] Archeological discoveries have revealed that this is a reference to a pagan practice widespread in the Ancient Near East of sacrificing a firstborn animal by boiling it in its own mother's milk, which is implied in Exodus 34:26 where it is contrasted with Israel's requirement to bring all of their "firstfruits" to "the house of the LORD" as an offering to Jehovah. Over time, Jews transformed this single commandment into an elaborate system of **Kosher** laws, the objective of which is to forbid the eating of meat and dairy at the same meal; this aspect of the traditional Kosher laws seems to miss the point²⁴, since even Abraham had no problem serving such a meal to the LORD Himself (cf. Gen18:8).

Pagan Perversion. Note the perversion of God's created order in this pagan practice. Milk, provided by the Creator to nourish and sustain infant life, is transformed by the creature into an instrument of death.

CASE LAW RELATING TO THE 4TH COMMANDMENT

The fourth commandment, "Six days thou shalt labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath . . . in it thou shalt not do any work" (Deut5:13-14), is the general principle that was to govern Israel's economic life (notice that there is nothing in the commandment regarding 'worship' on the Sabbath; it is **rest** (which is the meaning of "Sabbath"), not worship, that is mandated on the 7th day). All of Israel's economic regulations are grouped with the statutes that are derived from the 4th Commandment.

PAYING THE TITHE

- [22] The English word "tithe" means 'tenth', and the underlying Hebrew word has exactly the same meaning. Expressed here in agricultural terms, the "tithe" was a 10% tax on the "increase" of one's "year by year" (i.e., annual) income, which was the LORD's portion by long-standing precedent (e.g., Abraham in Gen14:20; Jacob in

²⁴ Also included in the Kosher rules are provisions for butchers to ensure that animals are: 1) properly slaughtered, and 2) thoroughly drained of all blood, both of which are legitimate requirements of the Mosaic covenant.

Gen28:22). In effect, the tithe was a **10% income tax**; it was a flat tax in the sense that all persons paid 10% on their personal income, regardless of the magnitude of that income (i.e., the poor did not pay less than 10%, nor did the rich pay more than 10%). There is absolutely no basis in the Mosaic Law for a tax on property.

- [23] This verse makes clear that the tithe is to be paid on one's total increase, including "grain", "wine", "oil", "herds" and "flocks". The tithe is to be brought to "the LORD thy God, in the place which He shall choose to place His name", which will become the Temple in Jerusalem. The tithe is the LORD's, but the one paying the tithe gets to enjoy eating a portion of it (at the Temple; in effect, sharing a meal with the LORD; cf. Ex24:1-11).
- [25] The tithe must be paid, in person, in Jerusalem. If the quantity of the tithe be so large, or the distance to be traveled so great, that transporting it to Jerusalem is a hardship, it is permissible to sell the produce and travel to Jerusalem with the "money" (Lit., *silver*) from the sale.
- [26] Once in Jerusalem, however, the tithe money must be converted again into real (agricultural) goods, a portion of which was to be eaten by the Israelite family in the Temple; rather than merely paying a tax, the concept of literally sharing a meal (i.e., fellowshiping) with the LORD seems to have been paramount. This continuing need for pilgrims to Jerusalem to convert their money into produce is what lay behind the abuses of the moneychangers so prominent in the Gospels (e.g., Matt21:12-13; Jn2:13-16).
- [27] A portion of these agricultural products is provided to the "Levite[s]", since they have no land of their own on which to raise crops or herds/flocks for food.
- [28] Common Interpretation. Some have interpreted this verse as requiring an 'additional' tithe paid every third year, in addition to the annual tithe (perhaps designated exclusively for support of the Levites), but such an interpretation is not warranted by the text. Furthermore, related passages specify "all the tenth" (i.e., tithe), without qualification, to be given to the Levites (e.g., Num18:21-24).

Better Interpretation. The tithe was a tax on annual income, but travel to Jerusalem to pay the tithe was only required every third year. By mandating that the annual tithe be delivered to Jerusalem only once every three years, it would appear that the LORD was minimizing the hardship on the Israelite associated with paying the tithe, since organizing a trip to Jerusalem that included the driving of livestock as well as the transport of a sizable quantity of agricultural products would have been a significant undertaking.

- [29] The tithe went to support the Levites, who were occupied in full-time service for the LORD and had no land of their own, but it was also to be used in the charitable support of the "sojourner", the "fatherless" (i.e., orphan children), and the "widow" (Cp., 1Tim5:3-10; Jas1:27).

Note that the LORD's promise to "bless" Israel under the Mosaic covenant is contingent on individual Israelites faithfully paying the tithe (cf. Mal3:8-12).

CHAPTER 15

THE SABBATICAL YEAR

- [1] Every seventh year there was to be a "release". The LORD did not want His people (or nation) to remain in a perpetual state of indebtedness; rather, it was His desire that their labor have **purpose** and result in a finished achievement (as His own six days of labor did; Gen2:1-3).
- [2] For this reason, the LORD commanded that all debts (of any and every kind) were to be forgiven in their entirety every "seventh year, the year of release" (v9). Obviously, this would put serious limits on the amount of credit any "creditor" would have been willing to extend to his "neighbor". In fact, lending money to a fellow Israelite was to be for charitable reasons only, not for financial gain (as the charging of interest on loans was forbidden; cf. v9; Deut24:19-20).
- [3] This principle of "release" applied only to Israelites within the nation of Israel. The debts of "foreigners" were not subject to this "release". This would be yet another illustration for the Gentiles of the blessings of being in covenant with Jehovah.
- [4] The issue of poverty and the very need for indebtedness, in principle, ought to be a moot point in Israel. Every Israelite family was to be given their own land in perpetuity, and abundant blessing on the nation was promised by Jehovah for covenant faithfulness.
- [5] This elimination of poverty in Israel, however, was only hypothetical; it was dependent on the nation's faithfulness to their (Mosaic) covenant obligations. That is, the very fact that there were poor in Israel was a sign that the nation (not necessarily the individuals who were suffering; cf. Jer31:29) was failing in its covenant obligations.
- [6] Jehovah's desire was that Israel, under His hand of blessing (and as a witness to every Gentile nation), would become the greatest of all the world's nations, lending to others and never borrowing from them.
- [7] This verse, in which the LORD foresees poverty in Israel, is not in conflict with the principle of v4; it simply recognizes that Israel will at times (as well as ultimately) wane in their covenant faithfulness.
- [8] During these times, Jehovah expects His people to show compassion for the one who is suffering and in need, and "lend him sufficient for his need".
- [9] The LORD warns the Israelite against the hesitation to lend to a brother in need when "the seventh year, the year of release" is

near (knowing that the debt will be forgiven at that point, with the likelihood that the lender will not be repaid in full). Indeed, the LORD will consider stinginess in such a situation as "sin" (i.e., covetousness) on the part of the (potential) lender.

- [10] The lender should not fear his potential loss, since the LORD promises to bless him abundantly for his compassion and generosity; in effect, the LORD will repay any loss he incurs.
- [11] Foreseeing Israel's failure to keep their obligations under the Mosaic covenant (owing to universal human depravity after the Fall), the LORD prophesies that "the poor shall never cease out of the land".

THE SLAVE (i.e., INDENTURED SERVANT)

- [12] This is a reference not to human slavery, but so-called indentured servitude (i.e., involuntary servitude for the purpose of working off a debt). Throughout the pagan world, such slavery was often perpetual, but such was not to be the case in Israel. Since all debts owed by Israelites to Israelites are forgiven every "seventh year" (vv1-2), all "Hebrew" indentured servants must be released at this time as well.
- [13] The indentured servant who was freed (after a maximum servitude of 6 years) was to be provided with the means to reestablish himself as a productive member of the community.
- [14] Even as the LORD provided the Israelites with an initial stake from the Egyptians, following their servitude under them (Exod12:35-36), so the Hebrew creditor was to bestow a similar blessing on a freed Hebrew servant.
- [15] The virtues of individual redemption and freedom were to be demonstrated in the economics of Israel as a nation, typifying those virtues in the spiritual realm.

THE BONDSLAVE

- [16] Although all debts were to be forgiven every seventh year (vv1-2), and thus all slaves were at that time free (v12), it was possible that a slave, "because he loveth thee" (i.e., the master), could voluntarily choose to bind himself to the master and his household, forever. This special position of the *perpetual, voluntary* servant was designated as the **bondslave**²⁵.

Definition. The **bondslave** was one who had been forgiven all his debt in its entirety, who was free and at liberty to go, but who out of love for his master had chosen to stay with him and serve

²⁵ In Greek, the word for **bondslave** is *doulos*, and "bondslave" of God and/or Jesus Christ was how the apostles referred to themselves (cf. Paul in Rom1:1, Tit1:1; James in Jas1:1; Peter in 2Pet1:1; Jude in Jude1; and John in Rev1:1); *doulos* is also used to describe the Lord Jesus Christ in His humiliation (Phil2:7).

him for the rest of his life. Once made, this decision could not be reversed.

- [17] The bondsman had his "ear" pierced by thrusting an "awl" through it at the "door" of the master's "house", after which he would wear an earring so that all would recognize him as a bondsman (i.e., a position of honor).
- [18] However, if a slave does not choose to bond himself perpetually to the master, he was to be released after "six years" without any resentment from the master. Such a slave would have been much more valuable to the master during this time than a mere "servant", even a servant who was paid a "double" wage, since the slave has served the master with his entire life. Again, Jehovah promises to "bless" the master for doing so, since in many cases the service of such a slave for only a few years would not have repaid his debt; God, in effect, commits to pay the debt of the slave in full.

THE FIRSTBORN IS THE LORD'S PORTION

- [19] All firstborn males from both the "herd" and the "flock" (i.e., cows and sheep) were designated as the LORD's; firstborn bulls were not to be used for labor, a firstborn sheep were not to be sheared for wool.
- [20] Rather, they were to be offered to the LORD in the place He would designate (i.e., the Tabernacle, which would change to the Temple in Jerusalem), where a portion of the offering would be eaten by the one making the offering, his family, and the priest. This was to be done "year by year", meaning once per year—likely at one of the annual festivals with compulsory attendance, probably the Feast of Tabernacles (cf. Deut16:16-17).
- [21] Since only a perfect animal, one that was not "lame", nor "blind", nor without any "blemish", was acceptable as a sacrifice to the LORD, any firstborn bull or sheep that was defective was not to be offered.
- [22] Even a firstborn bull or sheep having such a blemish, however, was still to be eaten; this meal could be prepared at the owner's home, since the LORD would not participate in the meal.
- [23] The prohibition against eating blood still applies. In this case (i.e., a defective animal not acceptable for sacrifice), rather than pouring the blood on the altar it was to be poured "upon the ground as water".

CHAPTER 16

THE REQUIRED FEASTS

It is not immediately obvious why observance of the three required feasts (Unleavened Bread, Weeks, and Tabernacles) is grouped with the economic statutes derived from the 4th Commandment. It may be due to the fact that it was at these festivals in Jerusalem, with mandatory

attendance of all male Israelites, that the tithe and the firstborn offerings (discussed in this section) were delivered (cf. Deut16:16-17).

THE FEAST OF PASSOVER/UNLEAVENED BREAD

[1] The feast of the "**Passover**", the first of seven annual festivals, was to be kept in the month of "Abib" (also Nisan), which is in the March-April timeframe. This was the first month of the Jewish calendar (Exod12:2; 13:4), and the feast was to be held at this time to commemorate the historical event of the Passover in Egypt that immediately preceded the Exodus (Exod12:29-31).

[2] The Passover sacrifice (here unspecified, simply an animal from the "flock" or the "herd") must be offered in "the place which the LORD shall choose to place His name" (i.e., the Tabernacle/Temple); thus, as the nation grew and dispersed, celebration of Passover would come to involve an annual pilgrimage (cf. Deut16:16).

Prophetic Fulfillment. Prophetically, the Feast of Passover was fulfilled with the crucifixion/sacrifice of Christ (Jn1:29; 1Cor5:7).

[3] The seven days immediately following the Passover was the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev23:6-8). During this week, no "leaven" (i.e., yeast) was to be eaten. Historically, this commemorates the haste with which Israel departed Egypt during the Exodus (Exod12:11,39); typologically, this signifies a separation from sin (cf. Matt16:6,11-12; 1Cor5:6).

Note that since Passover (Nisan 14) and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Nisan 15-21) were contiguous, they are often treated as a single feast in Scripture.

[4] Not only could leaven not be eaten, it could not even be found among the Israelites. Furthermore, the Passover sacrifice had to be fully consumed in a single evening; if necessary, small families were to join together in order to fulfill this requirement (Exod12:4).

[5] Though the Egyptian Passover was observed in individual homes, the commemorative Passover was to be celebrated at the central place of worship for the nation (i.e., Tabernacle/Temple).

[6] The Passover sacrifices were to be offered at "evening" (i.e., sunset) of Nisan 14, which in Biblical reckoning is the time at which the 14th day transitions to the 15th; this is yet another reason the Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread become inextricably interconnected.

[7] The entire nation was to come together to eat the Passover in a single location, the place of corporate/national worship of Jehovah. Among other purposes, this requirement would act to keep the nation united, both religiously and geographically.

- [8] The seventh day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was designated as "a solemn assembly" on which no "work" could be performed. That is, regardless of the actual day of the week, the seventh day of the Feast was to be a 'special' Sabbath day; though not mentioned here, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was likewise a 'special' Sabbath day on which no work could be performed (Lev23:7).

The Day of Christ's Crucifixion. Failure to recognize that Nisan 15, regardless of the day of the week on which it occurs, is **always** a Sabbath day (owing to the fact that it is the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread) has caused many Bible interpreters to jump to an unwarranted conclusion that the crucifixion of Christ, which took place on Passover (Nisan 14), occurred on a Friday, since the day following the crucifixion was a "Sabbath" day (Matt28:1; Mk16:1). Wrongly assuming that this Sabbath day was the normal, weekly Sabbath (i.e., Saturday), many conclude that the crucifixion must have occurred on a Friday. However, the day following Christ's crucifixion would have been reckoned as a 'special' Sabbath since it was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread; in fact, John's Gospel makes note of the fact that "that Sabbath day was an high day" (Jn19:31), indicating it was not the weekly Sabbath. In reality, Christ's crucifixion occurred on Thursday, putting two Sabbath days (note that in the Greek text of Matt28:1, Sabbaths occurs in the *plural*) between it and the resurrection, which occurred on the first day of the week (i.e., Sunday).

THE FEAST OF WEEKS

- [9] The exact formula for calculating the time of the Feast of Weeks is given in Leviticus 23:15-16; it is the day following the seventh Sabbath, counted from the Feast of Firstfruits (which takes place on the day following the first normal weekly Sabbath after Passover; i.e., the Sunday after Passover; Lev23:7). In other words, it is the day after a week of weeks (49 days) following the Feast of Firstfruits; this amounts to 50 days after Firstfruits, which is why it was also known as the Feast of Pentecost (lit., *fiftieth* in Greek; Cp., Act2:1). In agricultural terms, Firstfruits celebrated the start of the barley harvest season, and the Feast of Weeks celebrated the conclusion of the barley harvest, as noted here in Deuteronomy; due to its association with the barley harvest (Ruth1:22; 3:2), the Book of Ruth is intimately connected to the Feast of Weeks.

Prophetic Fulfillment. Both the Feasts of Firstfruits and Weeks always occurred on a Sunday, which, since it is the first day of the week, typologically symbolizes something new; prophetically, the Feast of Firstfruits was fulfilled with the resurrection of Christ (Jn20:1; 1Cor15:20-23), and the Feast of Weeks was fulfilled with the giving of the Holy Spirit (Act2:1-4).

- [10] As it celebrated the end of the harvest season, a "freewill offering" was to be given on the Feast of Weeks, but it should be proportionate to the LORD's blessing from the harvest.

- [11] As with the Passover/Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks was to be celebrated corporately "in the place which the LORD thy God hath chosen to place His name" (i.e., Tabernacle/Temple), necessitating an annual pilgrimage for most Israelites.
- [12] The Feast of Weeks was to be a national celebration of free people who were free to enjoy the fruits of their own labors (with the blessing of Jehovah, and shared with Jehovah)—something that was not possible while the Israelites were "slave(s)" in Egypt.

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

- [13] The Feast of Tabernacles was a week-long festival to be observed, in agricultural terms, at the conclusion of the wheat and grape harvest seasons; in Leviticus 23:34 it is specified to be celebrated from the 15th through the 21st days of the seventh month (i.e., Tishri).
- [15] As with Passover and Weeks, the Feast of Tabernacles was to be celebrated corporately "in the place which the LORD thy God shall choose" (i.e., Tabernacle/Temple), necessitating an annual pilgrimage for most Israelites.

Prophetic Fulfillment. Prophetically, the Feast of Tabernacles has yet to be fulfilled. Its fulfillment will likely be associated with the ingathering of all Jews at Second Coming of Christ (Matt24:31) in order to establish the Millennial Kingdom.

ANNUAL PILGRIMAGES

- [16] Celebration of these three festivals (of the seven ordained by the LORD; cf. Lev23), the Feasts of Unleavened Bread (with which Passover is inseparably connected), Weeks, and Tabernacles, "in the place which [Jehovah] shall choose" (i.e., ultimately the Temple in Jerusalem) was mandatory for all Jewish "males". The command that "they shall not appear before the LORD empty" is a reference to the fact that the tithes and firstborn offerings were to be brought to the LORD at these times.

Prophetic Implications. If all Jewish men had obeyed this requirement of the Law, all would have been present in Jerusalem to witness the death and resurrection of Christ (i.e., the Messiah) and Messiah's giving of the Holy Spirit in His new ministry of indwelling every believer!

- [17] The offering of "every man" was to be proportionate to the blessing he had received from the LORD.

CASE LAW RELATING TO THE 5TH COMMANDMENT

The fifth commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother ... that it may go well with thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Deut5:16), designates the home/family as the fundamental training ground for instruction in submission to authority as established by God. All of the regulations related to proper respect and submission

to authority figures within the nation of Israel are grouped with the statutes that are derived from the 5th Commandment.

JUDGES AND OFFICERS

- [18] Every city in Israel was to have "judges and officers". The category noted as "officers" is a Hebrew term that can mean judges, but also can include those who are charged with administering justice. The requirement for judges in Israel was that they "judge ... with just judgment" (Cp., Jn7:24).
- [19] Bribes are forbidden, since they pervert justice. Decisions must be uniform for all people regardless of their status (i.e., the law applies equally to all persons).
- [20] The stability of a nation demands a judicial system that is just and free of corruption. Note that this section of statutes is directly linked to "liv[ing long in] and inherit[ing] the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee", which is also part of the fifth commandment (Deut5:16).

EXAMPLES OF JUST JUDGMENT

As a brief aside, two examples of how just judgment is to be carried out in Israel are given: 1) idolatry, or the worship of a god other than Jehovah (Deut16:20-21), and 2) the worship of Jehovah in an improper manner (Deut17:1); just judgment in these two examples is outlined in Deut17:2-7. These two examples could not be more appropriate, as they strike to the very heart of the covenant relationship between Israel and Jehovah, since they represent violations of the 1st and 2nd Commandments.

- [21] "Groves" of trees were planted and cultivated as places of worship of the Phoenician goddess Astarte (known as Ishtar to the Babylonians, Aphrodite to the Greeks, and Venus to the Romans).
- [22] Other gods were worshiped by means of "image[s]". These two mechanisms encompass the spectrum of pagan idolatry, "which the LORD thy God **hateth**". The worship of other gods is a violation of the First Commandment.

CHAPTER 17

- [1] Jehovah has forbidden that He be worshipped by the "sacrifice" of defective animals on His altar (Deut15:21; cf. Lev22:17-24). Thus, to do so is to worship Jehovah in an improper manner and is a violation of the Second Commandment.
- [2] Anyone found within a city of Israel engaged in either of these practices is said to have "transgress[ed] the covenant".
- [3] The Sinaitic/Mosaic Covenant established Israel as a nation devoted to the exclusive worship of Jehovah, to be a living model and a testimony to all other nations (Deut4:5-8), so such sin

strikes at the very heart of the covenant between Israel and Jehovah.

- [4] Any charge of such a serious sin against an individual is to be investigated "diligently" to determine whether or not the charge is "true". Note that the determination of truth is the ultimate purpose of the investigation.
- [5] If it is established that the charge of such a sin, by either a "man" or a "woman", is true, the penalty for violating the 1st or 2nd Commandment is death by "ston[ing]".

Too Harsh? Although the death penalty may seem harsh for such a 'religious' crime, remember that in Jehovah's covenant with Israel it is this sin above all others that will bring His judgment on the nation, resulting in its destruction (Lev26:1; cf. 2Kgs21:10-15).

- [6] Since the consequences of being convicted of such a sin were so severe (i.e., death), the rules of evidence were to be very strict (**much stricter than ours today**). Namely, a minimum of two eye-witnesses were required, and three were more commonly expected; there could be no conviction on the testimony of a single witness²⁶ (Deut19:15), nor on the basis of circumstantial evidence.
- [7] The sentence of death by stoning was to be carried out with "all the people" participating in the execution, and the very first stones had to be cast by the "witnesses" against the sinner.

Note that the objective in judgment is not to 'rehabilitate' the individual sinner, but to protect society from "evil" that will eventually destroy it if allowed to go unchecked.

OBEDIENCE TO JUDGES

- [8] Disputes were to be handled locally whenever possible; only when "too hard" should a judge be sought at "the place which the LORD thy God shall choose" (i.e., the Tabernacle/Temple, eventually located permanently at Jerusalem).
- [9] The "priests" and "Levites", being experts in the Law, were to "judge" in these appeals, and to "show" the "judgment" (i.e., demonstrate from Scripture the basis for their decision). Scripture was the (only) standard of judgment to be used.
- [10] Obedience to the decision rendered by the judge, which derived its authority from Scripture (i.e., the Word of God), was commanded.
- [11] Note the emphasis on the judge, who is expected to be an expert in Scripture, "teach[ing]" the plaintiff(s) from the "law". Disputes were occasions when the Law and its correct application was explained in detail to the common man, so that he would better understand the requirements of God and his obligations to Him.

²⁶ Recall that the problematic issue for the Sanhedrin in the (so-called) trial of the Lord Jesus was their difficulty in finding two witnesses that agreed in their (false) testimony against Him (Matt26:59-60).

[12] The dispute is assumed to have arisen out of ignorance of the Law. After the plaintiff had been correctly taught the Law by a "priest" or a "judge", to continue in that sin was to do so "presumptuously" (i.e., willful sin). In a religious sense, a sin of ignorance could be covered by the blood of a sacrifice, a sin or a trespass offering (Lev4:2; 5:15), but the Law provided no sacrifice for willful sin (Heb10:26-28). From a civil perspective, to disregard the decision of a judge was 'contempt of court', an intentional rebellion against the authority of the judge and the Word of God (which was the basis for his decision).

Rebellion of this nature carried the death penalty, regardless of the nature of the original dispute. Note that there are no legal sentences in the Law that result in imprisonment. Jehovah performed mighty and supernatural works to free His people from bondage to Egypt, and there is no thought of returning individuals to it. However, it is a privilege to live in a free society, and a free society can only be sustained if its citizens live within it responsibly, which includes submitting to proper authority (which should have been taught in the home); those who will not, for the good and protection of society, must be removed.

[13] The Word of God teaches that the just application of the 'death penalty' will deter crime.

THE KING

Though the nation of Israel began (and existed for several hundred years) without a king, this section of the Law indicates that Jehovah intended from the beginning that Israel should have a king, with its ultimate fulfillment to come in the Person of the Messiah. In verses that follow, note the limitations God placed upon the king. The king was subject to the Law of God (even more so) just as were his subjects.

[14] Jehovah foresees the day when the nation of Israel will desire a king; this eventually happens in the days of Samuel (1Sam8:1-22).

[15] The king of Israel had to be Jewish. Furthermore, the king was to be chosen by God, not the people. The nation's obligation, under the Mosaic Covenant, was to enthrone (i.e., receive and accept) the king God chose for them²⁷.

[16] The king must not be consumed with a lust for power (i.e., military strength), described here as the multiplication of "horses". As Egypt was the great source of fine horses in the Ancient Near East (1Kgs10:28-29), the multiplication of horses on the part of the king would inevitably lead to the temptation to compromise with pagan nations.

[17] Similarly, the king must not be consumed with a lust for wealth (i.e., "gold and silver"). Furthermore, it is forbidden that he

²⁷ The rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ as God's chosen king for Israel was a catastrophic breach of the Mosaic covenant by the nation (Jn19:14-15), necessitating God's most severe judgment upon the nation under that covenant—dispersion into all the world (Lev26:32-39; Deut28:63-66).

"multiply wives"; as given to the king, it is the taking of foreign wives as part of alliances with surrounding nations that is especially in view in this prohibition (e.g., 1Kgs3:1; 11:1-3).

- [18] Upon ascending the throne, a king's first duty was to personally prepare "a copy of this law" (i.e., the Scriptures) for his own use.
- [19] The king was to daily study his copy of the Scriptures, with a view to being intimately familiar with them (Ps1:1-2) so that he might lead the nation in obeying every "law" and "statute" of God (Ps119:11).
- [20] Thus, in Israel the king was under the Law of God (just like his subjects were), not above it. The daily study of Scripture would keep this truth ever before the king.

CHAPTER 18

PRIESTS AND LEVITES

- [1] The entire "tribe of Levi", which includes both the priests and the Levites, received no inheritance of land in Israel, as did all the other tribes (although they were granted 48 cities in which to dwell, scattered throughout the land allotted to all the other tribes).
- [2] Rather, "the LORD [was to be] their inheritance", meaning that they were to be consumed in full-time service for the LORD (Num18:20-21).
- [3] Provision for the "priests" came from sharing certain portions of the offerings that were brought by the people, including meat from the "ox" or "sheep" brought as sacrifices,
- [4] and the firstfruit offerings of "grain", "wine", "oil", and even "fleece". Thus, the priests had an immediate, personal incentive to lead the nation in remaining faithful to the worship of Jehovah, as their very livelihood depended on it.
- [5] The Levitical priesthood was an hereditary office. The LORD chose Aaron as the first priest (Exod28:1), and thereafter only those descended from Aaron were eligible to serve as priests. Thus, priests were a subset of the tribe of Levi (i.e., all priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests).
- [6] Most Levites served as teachers of the Law and judges in the Levitical cities scattered throughout Israel. However, by their own choice, they could move to the site of the Tabernacle/Temple (i.e., eventually Jerusalem) in order to commit to full-time service in the Temple.
- [7] Levites who served at the Temple did not offer sacrifices, as only priests were allowed to do so, but they assisted in preparation of the sacrifices, led music, collected tithes, performed Temple maintenance, etc.

- [8] Such Levites involved in full-time service at the Temple were also to share in the offerings of the people, as did the priests. The "sale of his patrimony" refers to the possibility that the Levite who chose this ministry would likely sell his home in the Levitical city from which he came.

PROPHETS

Unlike the king and the priests, both of which were continual and hereditary offices in Israel, individual prophets were raised up by the LORD only occasionally, according to His will and His timing.

- [9] The prophets of Jehovah would be utterly unlike the prophets of the pagan deities, referred to here as "abominations".
- [10] The process of "divination" (i.e., seeking to know the will of one's god, or ascertaining a knowledge regarding the future) was accomplished in a variety of ways by the pagan prophets, including human sacrifice (demanded by Molech, the god of Ammon; Lev18:21), astrology, charms and incantations,
- [11] channeling mediums, communication with familiar spirits, and communication with the dead. All such techniques are occultic, meaning that what is actually accomplished by those who practice them is an interaction with demons.
- [12] The LORD refers to all such occult practices as an "abomination". Such practices were common and widespread among the Canaanite peoples, but the Israelites were forbidden to engage in such practices.
- [14] Prophets of Jehovah would receive revelation from Him (including knowledge of His will and of future events), but it would not come by means of any of these occult practices.

THE GREAT PROPHET TO COME: PROPHECY OF MESSIAH/CHRIST

- [15] The section on prophets in general begins with a prophecy of the greatest of all prophets who is to come: namely, Messiah. Messiah would be "of thy brethren" (i.e., a Jew), and He would be a "Prophet . . . like unto me [i.e., Moses]". Moses was unique in two respects, which would also be true of Messiah: 1) he was "meek" above all others (Cp., Num12:3; Matt11:29), and 2) he spoke with Jehovah "face-to-face" (Cp., Exod33:11; Jnl:18). The obligation of Israel under the Mosaic covenant relative to this Prophet was "unto Him ye shall hearken" (i.e., receive and obey His message; cf. Matt4:17).

The NT shows that the Jews of the first century were still expecting this Prophet to come, though they apparently (incorrectly) distinguished this prophet from Messiah (cf. Jnl:19-21); however, the Apostle Peter clearly equates Messiah and this Prophet by quoting this very verse in his second sermon (Act3:22).

- [16] This Prophet would also serve as the ultimate Mediator between Israel and Jehovah (1Tim2:5), something the Jews demanded of Moses at "Horeb" (Exod20:18-19).
- [17] Moses has already indicated in Deuteronomy that the LORD was pleased with the nation's request for a Mediator (Deut5:28).
- [18] All that Messiah the "Prophet" will speak will be the very "words" of Jehovah (Cp., Jn8:28; 12:49-50). This would be different from the other Jewish prophets; in their case, it was only the **written** words the Holy Spirit moved them to record that would be inspired (2Pet1:21; 2Tim3:16).
- [19] Verse 15 set forth Israel's national obligation (note the use of the plural pronoun, "ye") to "hearken" to Messiah. Here, the pronoun shifts to the singular "he" and the universal "whosoever", indicating that "it shall come to pass" that hearing and believing the words of Messiah (i.e., Jesus Christ) will become the very basis of personal faith required by God of all men (Matt16:15-18; Jn3:16-18).

THE TEST OF A GENUINE PROPHET

- [20] To speak presumptuously "in the name" of (i.e., asserting authority from) Jehovah carried the death penalty; false prophets were to be executed.
- [21] But how would one ascertain whether one speaking in the name of Jehovah was genuine or false?
- [22] The unique and distinguishing characteristic of a genuine prophet of the LORD would be that all he prophesied would come to pass (i.e., **100%** accuracy; note Jehovah's challenge in Isaiah 41:21-23 to all other "gods" and their so-called prophets to attempt to predict the future, a feat that would 'prove' they were "gods", Isa41:21-23). A **single** error would disqualify one as a prophet of Jehovah and identify him as a false prophet to be stoned. Since many prophecies given by a genuine prophet would not come to pass until long after the prophet's death, prophecies that would be fulfilled within the prophet's lifetime were generally necessary to validate the authority of his message.

CHAPTER 19

CASE LAW RELATING TO THE 6TH COMMANDMENT

The sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill" (Deut5:17), is central in the chiasmic structure of the Ten Commandments, since the primary purpose of human government is the protection of human life (Cp., Gen9:5-6; Rom13:1-4). Since the Hebrew word rendered "kill" in this commandment always has the meaning of intentional homicide (i.e., murder), the statutes/case law supporting the sixth commandment focus on distinguishing between various actions that result in human death, not all of which qualify to be labeled as 'murder'. Consistent with the importance of this central commandment, Deuteronomy (i.e., the LORD

who inspired it) devotes more space to developing case law associated with it than for any of the other nine commandments.

CITIES OF REFUGE

- [1] Note that Israel's obligations under the Mosaic covenant (i.e., the Law of Moses), which is a **national covenant**, can only be properly performed in the context of their being a sovereign nation established in the "land the LORD thy God giveth thee" (i.e., Canaan).
- [2] When Israel crosses over the Jordan river into Canaan, the Promised Land proper, "three cities" are to be designated as so-called 'Cities of Refuge'; note that three had already been established in the land east of the Jordan (Deut4:41-43). Thus, there were to be a total of six such cities.
- [3] Convenient access to these cities by all Israelites was to be maintained at all times.
- [4] The "slayer" is defined as one who has caused the death of another, but it was caused "unintentionally" and without malice. Such action is not a violation of the sixth commandment; even in western jurisprudence, we refer to such an action as 'manslaughter' (both the concept and the term are taken from this section of Deuteronomy), which is distinguished from murder. However, to receive mercy, "that he may live", the slayer had to "flee" to one of these six cities and there make "the case" (i.e., as in a formal hearing) that the death he caused was indeed inadvertent.
- [5] The instance of an axe head flying off its handle and killing someone is given as an example of an inadvertent death.
- [6] These six cities were to provide refuge/protection for the "slayer" from "the avenger of blood". Note that the violation of the sixth commandment required the death penalty (Gen9:6), but the "slayer" is "not worthy of death". That the "slayer" was required to seek such protection in one of these cities necessitated that they be near and easily accessible from anywhere in Israel.

Typology of the Cities of Refuge. There is a rich typology associated with the concept of the Cities of Refuge and showing mercy to the "slayer". Under the Law of Moses, intentional, premeditated murder could not be forgiven and necessitated that the death penalty be executed swiftly without mercy. But the "slayer" could be shown mercy by fleeing to a designated place, although final forgiveness was secured and liberty restored only after the death of the high priest (cf. Num35:25-28). Question: was Israel guilty of murdering their Messiah? God decreed that the nation of Israel's slaying of Jesus the Messiah was done "through ignorance" (cf. Act3:12-17; confirmed also by the Lord's own words from the cross in Luke 23:34), thus establishing that in principle Israel could be shown mercy, if she would flee for "**refuge**" to "Jesus" their "high priest" (Heb6:18-20), whose death would secure ultimate forgiveness for this sin.

- [7] The "three cities" commanded to be "set apart" here are west of the Jordan river, in Canaan; they are in addition to three cities already set apart east of the Jordan (Deut4:41-43), for a total of six Cities of Refuge.
- [9] Furthermore, if Israel is faithful under the Mosaic covenant, and the LORD blesses the nation as a result by "enlarge[ing] thy border", the need will come for even "three cities more than these" to be established. However, this is a hypothetical possibility dependent on Israel's obedience.
- [10] Implied in this verse is that the killing of a manslayer by the avenger of blood, or the community in general, would be a miscarriage of justice within the nation of Israel, for the manslayer is "innocent" of breaking the sixth commandment.
- [11] One who causes the death of another will be judged according to two criteria: 1) did he "hate his neighbor" (i.e., motive fueled by malice), and 2) were his actions that premeditated.
- [12] If the "elders" of the City of Refuge, to which such a man has fled, judge based on the criteria of v. 11 that the man is guilty of murder rather than manslaughter, then they are to deliver the man to "the avenger of death" so that his just execution may be carried out.
- [13] The Law of Moses forbid mercy to be extended to one guilty of premeditated murder. Note the purpose clause, "that it may go well with thee"; that is, Jehovah's blessing on the nation of Israel is in part conditioned on its faithfulness in executing murderers as a just penalty of the Law (cf. Num35:33).
- [14] At first glance, the subject of this verse is not obviously connected to either the discussion of the manslayer that precedes it, or the discussion of witnesses that follows it. However, the issue of "landmark[s]", which were used to delineate the boundaries of personal property, can be volatile indeed. Property disputes have often escalated to violence, even murder.

The manslayer, due to the necessity of his remaining in a City of Refuge, temporarily lost the use of his property, but it was restored upon the death of the high priest (Num35:28). Even property intentionally sold was restored at the Year of Jubilee (Lev27:24). Personal property was a perpetual "inheritance" from the LORD to a family that could never be lost in an ultimate sense. The exception to this was for a "landmark" to be moved, which would represent a theft of land and its permanent loss. For this reason, the moving of a "landmark" in Israel was a particularly heinous sin.

STATUTES CONCERNING WITNESSES

- [15] Because so many sins under the Law of Moses carried serious penalties, often execution, the rules of evidence were to be very strict (**much stricter than ours today**). Specifically, a minimum of two eye-witnesses were required, and three were more commonly

expected. Furthermore, the requirement for testimony of multiple eye-witnesses implies that there could be no conviction on the basis of circumstantial evidence.

- [16] To bear "false witness" in a formal, legal context is what we today call perjury; **perjury** was such a serious sin that it is included as one of the Ten Commandments (Deut5:20)!
- [18] In a "controversy" between two men, where additional eye-witnesses do not exist, the "priests" and "judges" were to carefully consider the accusation of one against the other, and make "diligent inquiry" into the matter. When it is the word of one man against another, one of the two must be lying.
- [19] In the case where the accuser is guilty of falsely accusing another, he is to suffer for his own sin of "bear[ing] false witness" (Deut5:20) the penalty of the sin for which he accused his neighbor (i.e., if he falsely accused his neighbor of murder, his own sin of bearing false witness would bring the death penalty upon himself).
- [20] The LORD asserts that swift justice in legal matters will deter crime (i.e., sin) in the nation of Israel.
- [21] The Law of Moses allowed for no mercy to be extended to those who committed willful sin (cf. Heb10:26-28). The prescribed penalty had to be carried out on the sinner without "pity". That being said, the LORD's justice demanded that the penalty fit the crime (i.e., an "eye for an eye"), whereas in man's judgment often the penalty exceeds that demanded by the crime (Cp., Gen4:23-24).

CHAPTER 20

STATUTES CONCERNING WAR

Deuteronomy 20 contains statutes related to the nation's prosecution of warfare, including but not limited to the imminent conquest of Canaan. This section of Deuteronomy implies that there will be occasions when war is both necessary and just (note this chapter opens with "When", not 'If'); thus, killing in the context of conducting a just war is not necessarily 'murder' and does not necessarily violate the 6th Commandment.

- [1] When Israel goes to war, it is not the numbers of "horses", "chariots", or "people" on either side of the conflict that will determine victory. As part of the Mosaic Covenant, the nation has been promised victory over its enemies as a blessing for faithfulness to Jehovah, as well as defeat as a consequence for unfaithfulness (cf. Deut28). The supreme example is the LORD's victory over Egypt on behalf of the nation.
- [4] Prior to assembling an army that will go to battle, the priest(s) were to address the people of the nation, reminding them of Jehovah's promise to fight on behalf of Israel, and exhorting them not to fear. Obviously, if there was a question regarding the faithfulness of the nation to the LORD, especially with respect to its obligations under the Mosaic Covenant, this would be the

opportunity for the priest(s) to call for repentance. Thus, the spiritual dimension of earthly conflict was to be always kept before the nation.

- [5] After being addressed by the priest(s), the people were to be addressed by the military "officers". Certain Israelite **men**²⁸ should be exempt from the call to assemble an army for battle. Four examples are given in vv5-8. The first example is a man who has just completed the building of his house, but not been able to occupy it; he is to be *allowed* to return home (note the use of "let", which denotes permission, not requirement).
- [6] The second example is a man who has planted a vineyard for the very first time, but never eaten from it.
- [7] The third example is a man who has "betrothed a wife", but not yet consummated the marriage. In these three examples, the motivation behind the exemption is not specifically indicated; is it that Israelite men should not be deprived from such major life achievements, when their fulfillment is imminent, or is it that such circumstances would create a distraction to the individual that would be detrimental to the functioning of the army? The latter is clearly stated to be the reason behind the fourth example.
- [8] The fourth example is the man who is simply too afraid to go into battle (Cp., Judg7:3). It would be better for him to not go into battle than to risk his paralysis or flight during battle, which could negatively affect the morale of his "brethren".
- [9] Once those of vv. 5-8 have been exempted, the "officers" were to organize the remaining men into an army.
- [10] In this chapter of Deuteronomy, no basis for conducting a just war is given. However, it is clear that diplomatic efforts were to be conducted first in an attempt to avoid war.
- [11] If the adversary would submit to Israel's terms, war was to be avoided. The presupposition is that Israel and another people are pit against each other over a moral conflict, for which Israel cannot compromise.
- [12] Only after diplomatic efforts had failed was war to be initiated.
- [13] In conducting war, only the killing of "every male" is to be permitted (i.e., accepted as consistent with the 6th Commandment).
- [14] The killing of enemy women, children, and even livestock during war was forbidden, although the taking of "spoil" was permitted. Note that these stipulations are the general rule for Israel (the conquest of Canaan being a unique exception given by divine command; cf. vv15-18).
- [15] The instructions concerning warfare given so far in this chapter are the general rules that apply to the peoples outside of Canaan.

²⁸ Note that this section of Deuteronomy never views Israelite women as participants in military action.

- [16] The nations dwelling in Canaan, however, are a special case. They are under divine judgment for their wickedness, and the LORD is using Israel as His instrument of judgment upon them; in this unique instance, He decrees that "thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth".
- [17] The LORD is very specific as to the peoples under His judgment, who must be "utterly destroy[ed]", denoting them by name. Note that Israel would not be obedient in destroying these peoples, as the "Jebusites" will occupy Jerusalem, the "place which [Jehovah] shall choose to place His name there" (Deut14:23), until the time of King David four centuries later (2Sam5:6-10).
- [18] The peoples that occupied Canaan were to be justly destroyed for "all their abominations" (i.e., perversions associated with their idolatry), with which the Israelites would be tempted to compromise if they were permitted to remain in the Land and coexist with the nation of Israel.
- [19] The parenthesis concerning the rules of war unique to the occupants of Canaan (vv16-18) being ended, the general rules conclude with instructions concerning the use of trees during war. Fruit-bearing trees that may be eaten are forbidden to be "cut down" and used as implements of war.
- [20] Non-fruit-bearing trees, however, are permitted to be used to construct implements of war.

CHAPTER 21

RITUAL ASSOCIATED WITH AN UNRESOLVED MURDER

- [1] Consider the case where a murder (or at least the slaying of a man) has obviously occurred "in the land" (i.e., Israel), but there were no witnesses to the crime.
- [2] The "elders" and "judges" of the city nearest to where the body of the slain man was found were responsible to perform a ritual necessary to "put away the guilt of innocent blood" (v9) from the nation of Israel in general, and their community in particular.
- [3] The ritual involve the choosing of a "heifer" that had never been used for any work.
- [4] That heifer would be led into a "rough valley" (lit., a wadi bed; i.e., a place where men had never attempted to cultivate the land). Thus, the animal employed is one that would not ordinarily be acceptable for offering as a blood sacrifice to the LORD, and the place is also one that would not ordinarily be acceptable. At such a place the elders of the city are to "strike off" (lit., break) the heifer's neck. Note that the animal is to be killed in a manner that does not shed its blood, as would be the case if it were a normal offering to the LORD.

- [5] Since, in effect, the entire city associated with the unresolved murder is suspect, "priests" will sit in judgment over that community.
- [6] The "elders" representing that city should "wash their hands" in water over the "heifer" whose neck was broken.
- [7] This ritual represented the city (in the persons of its elders) testifying before the priests serving as judges of their innocence in the shedding of the slain man's blood, nor were they witnesses to the crime (in which case it would have been a sin for them to remain silent). Note that this ritual, from this very portion of the Law of Moses, was used by Pilate to proclaim before the Israelites his own innocence in the death of Christ (Matt27:24).
- [8] Based on the testimony symbolized by this ritual, the city could be cleared of guilt in this unresolved murder.
- [9] In this manner atonement (i.e., a covering) for this most heinous sin (i.e., the murder of one made in the image of God) in Israel could be made.

REGULATIONS CONCERNING WIVES AND CHILDREN

- [10] Apparently these statutes fall under the umbrella of the sixth commandment since they pertain to issues that result directly from the conduct of "war". Here, these "enemies" with which Israel would be at war must necessarily be nations far from the Land of Promise, since those nations who resided within Canaan were to be utterly destroyed (Deut7:2), with neither women or children allowed to be taken "captive".
- [11] If an Israelite man desires to take as his wife a foreign woman taken captive during war, certain statutes are to regulate that process. Since it was absolutely forbidden that Israelite men take wives from the nations of Canaan (Deut7:3), this is another indication that the foreign nations in view here are those outside of Canaan. Furthermore, since the LORD never condones polygamous marriage, it is presumed that the Israelite man who desires this foreign woman as a wife is unmarried.
- [13] The ritual to be followed by the foreign woman is one that would express a full and unreserved cutting of all ties with her former life and nation in order to embrace a new life in the nation of Israel. It is hard to imagine that this elaborate procedure could be forced upon an unwilling participant, so it is further presumed that the woman is willing to become the wife of the Israelite; this is not a case of forced concubinage, which is nowhere condoned in the Mosaic Law. After the ritual described in vv12-13 is complete, the marriage may be consummated.
- [14] In many such cases, however, it is inevitable that a man and woman from such disparate cultures will meet with insurmountable difficulties in marriage. If such is the case, the Israelite man could "let her go" (i.e., leave the marriage; Cp., 1Cor7:12-16); he could not treat her as if she were a slave, nor sell her as property, since she had genuinely been his wife. Note that the

allowance of what amounts to divorce in this special case is certainly not a blanket endorsement of divorce in general, which Jehovah testifies that He "hates" (Mal2:16) and Jesus asserts contradicted the will of God "from the beginning of the creation" (Mk10:6-9).

- [15] This statute is **not** an endorsement of polygamous marriage. Rather, it speaks to the right of the firstborn son to inherit a double portion from his father.
- [16] While it was apparently possible for a firstborn son to legitimately forfeit his right to inherit the double portion because of sin (cf. 1Chron5:1), it was not permissible for the father to give the double portion to another son simply because of a greater love for his mother.
- [17] Unless forfeited by personal sin, a father's genuine firstborn son was to inherit a "double portion" from him, regardless of whether he was born to the favored wife of his father or not.

A DISOBEDIENT SON UNDER THE LAW

- [18] Whereas vv15-17 laid out legal protection of a son from the capriciousness of a father, vv18-21 protected parents (and society) from a "rebellious son". It was the obligation of a father and mother to "chasten" a rebellious son in order to correct sinful behavior.
- [19] However, if parental chastening was not effective in correcting the behavior, the father and mother were to bring the rebellious son to the "elders" (i.e., judges) at the city "gate" (i.e., the son was to be charged and tried in a formal, legal proceeding).
- [20] The rebellious son's sins were to be enumerated, presumable so that they could be objectively investigated by the "elders". Note that the sins given here as examples (gluttony and drunkenness) are not isolated sins but habitual patterns.
- [21] If the charges of unchecked rebellion were sustained, the rebellious son was to be "stone[d]" by all the men of the city. This statute speaks again to the importance of the 5th commandment; the home was the divinely-ordained training ground for proper submission to authority, and a son who would not submit to the proper authority of his parents while in their home will not submit to the proper authority of the nation (or God) after he leaves the home.

RESPECT FOR LIFE

- [22] Though the Law of Moses provided for the execution of individuals for a variety of crimes (i.e., sins), at the same time it demanded an unparalleled respect for human life.

This verse alludes not to crucifixion per se (though Paul quotes v23 relative to the crucifixion of Christ; Gal3:13), but the practice of hanging the corpse of a justly executed criminal "on a

tree" as a public warning regarding the serious consequences of the crime/sin committed.

- [23] Even in such a case, however, the dead body was to receive a proper burial before the end of "that day" (i.e., the day of the execution); note that this requirement of the Law was unwittingly kept in the case of the crucifixion of Christ (Jn19:31,38-42). The sinner who had been hanged was surely "accursed by God", but for the sinner to hang upon a tree beyond the day of his execution would be a disrespect of life on the part of the nation, which would "defile" the Land.

CHAPTER 22

PREVENTING ACCIDENTAL DEATH

- [1] An "ox" and a "sheep" are domesticated animals that cannot survive long in the wild. One who found his brother's lost "ox" or "sheep" wandering "astray" was obligated to return them to his "brother".
- [2] If the straying animal's owner is not known, he is obligated to care for it at his "own house" until such time as the rightful owner "seek[s] after it".
- [3] This obligation also includes a brother's "ass", another domesticated animal (though in a certain sense less valuable than the ox or sheep of v1, since the "ass" was unclean for the purpose of sacrifice). More than merely returning a stray animal to its rightful owner, the concern appears to be the general respect for life, even going so far as preventing the death of a stray animal; to "withhold thy help" from an animal in such a case is sin. This principle, however, extends to any kind of lost property of another's.
- [4] In a similar vein, one was obligated to assist his brother in recovering his animal that was in distress; again, more than just showing kindness to the brother, respect for the life of the animal appears to be in view.
- [5] This verse prohibits **transvestism** (i.e., cross-dressing). God created a distinction between the sexes, which is to be honored by His creatures; to violate this distinction God considers an "abomination".

Why is this verse here? The command is straight-forward, though it is unclear how the subject matter relates to the subjects within which it is embedded—subjects which follow the general theme of respect for life. Of course, transvestism is frequently associated with homosexual behavior, which carries the death penalty under the Law of Moses (Lev20:13); perhaps the prohibition is meant to deter behavior that will likely degenerate toward further perversion (i.e., homosexuality), necessitating the death of the sinner?

- [6] The theme of respect for animal life, discussed relative to domesticated animals in vv1-4, is extended to the case of

undomesticated "birds". Here an paradox is brought to light. Respect for life in general obviously coexists in tension with the need for man to take life (both for food, as well as in sacrifice for atonement for sin) in order to preserve his own life. The LORD, as illustrated in the Law of Moses, not only recognizes this necessity of taking life, but authorizes it. However, it is to be exercised by man under divine constraints and limits. In the case of a "bird's nest" containing both "dam" (i.e., mother) and "young", "eggs" or the "young" birds could be taken for food, but the "dam" could not also be taken.

- [7] In this instance, if only the "dam" were taken, the "young" would eventually die as well. This would result both in the senseless deaths of the "young" birds as well as cutting off any future production of life by the "dam". However, taking the "young" for food serves a divinely authorized purpose, while preserving the "dam" for further procreation.
- [8] Finally, this section of statutes relating to the 6th Commandment ("thou shalt not kill"), elaborated into a general respect for life, ends with the requirement for home-builders to construct a guard rail around the perimeter of the roof (which in Ancient Near East architecture was designed to be occupied) to prevent accidental falls that could result in injury or even death.

CASE LAW RELATING TO THE 7TH COMMANDMENT

The seventh commandment, "Neither shalt thou commit adultery" (Deut5:18), aimed to protect the integrity of the family, which was/is vital to the health and stability of any society/nation (recall that in the chiasmic structure of the 10 Commandments, it is associated with "honor thy father and thy mother"). The statutes associated with the 7th commandment encompass prohibitions against all sorts of sexual sins, which tend to destabilize the family (and, therefore, the nation). However, statutes related to purity in general are also found in this section. Biblical purity has at its heart the idea of the separation of things that, according to God, should not be mixed. Jesus said, speaking of marriage, "What, therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt19:6). God's principles of purity operate on the other side of this maxim; namely, what God has ordained to be separate, man must never mix.

FORBIDDEN MIXTURES

- [9] In Israel, "vineyard[s]" should not be sown with seeds to produce various other crops in the midst of the vineyard. While there may or may not have been an agricultural purpose in this prohibition, it certainly had a national pedagogical objective. As the vineyard is used as a symbol for Israel throughout Scripture (cf. Ps80:8; Isa5:7; Jer12:10; Matt21:33-41), this prohibition illustrates the principle of separation between Israel and the Gentile nations.
- [10] An "ox" and an "ass" were not to be yoked "together" in labor. This statute prohibiting an unequal yoking was applied by the

Apostle Paul to inappropriate relationships between believers and unbelievers (2Cor6:14).

- [11] Purity/separation was to be maintained even in the fabrics used to make Israelite clothing. The ordinary Israelite had garments made of wool, but the priesthood was commanded to always wear "linen" garments when serving the LORD (cf. Exod28:2-6, 39-43); thus, the priesthood as an office in Israel was always to remain distinct and separate.
- [12] Finally, Israelite clothing was to be clearly distinct from that of the Gentiles. Specifically the "four quarters" (i.e., corners) of "thy vesture" were always to have "fringes" (i.e., tassels), and the hem was always to be blue in color (Num15:37-40). The Lord Jesus, as a Jewish man who kept every detail of the Law of Moses, always wore garments that met this requirement (Cp., Mal4:2; Matt9:20-21; 14:34-36).

PURITY IN MARRIAGE

Marriage is not a cultural convention invented by man. Rather, it is a **divine institution** designed and ordained by God for multiple purposes: 1) for man's good (Gen2:18), 2) to enable man to fulfill the dominion mandate given to him by his Creator (Gen1:26-28), and 3) to be a model/object lesson of the permanent relationship of God with His peoples, namely Israel as the wife of Jehovah (Jer3:14,20; theme of the entire Book of Hosea; Mal2:11) and the Church as the Bride of Christ (2Cor11:2; Eph5:22-33; Rev19:7-9). As God's relationship with His peoples is established and defined by a covenant, which is open to public witness and verification, He has ordained that human marriage be a public and covenantal institution²⁹ (Mal2:14-16).

- [13] For a man to "take a wife", he has entered into a marriage covenant with her that has been defined by God. Obviously, it is God's desire that the man love his wife (Jer31:3; Eph5:25); however, whether he subsequently love her or "hate" her is irrelevant with respect to the covenant.
- [14] The description is of an attempt on the part of the man to defame the character of his wife in order to provide justification for a divorce. Specifically, the charge is that she was not a "maid" (i.e., virgin) when she entered the marriage.
- [15] To guard against such an allegation, the parents of the "damsel" kept the "tokens of the damsel's virginity" (i.e., blood-stained sheets from the wedding night) as evidence that could be displayed for the "elders" of the city who might judge in the matter.

²⁹ The modern trend is to turn the divine institution of marriage on its head. It is alleged that 'true love' doesn't require a covenant, so that the marriage relationship is perverted into a private, contract-less arrangement that views cohabitation at the same level (or even higher) on the moral scale as marriage. Biblically, marriage is as much (or more) about honoring a public commitment as it is about 'love'. As a divine institution, it ought to go without saying that God has defined the parties (i.e., one man, one woman), the duration (i.e., till death), and the parameters (i.e., no divorce) of the marriage covenant; no other relationship (regardless of the label men may give it) is marriage.

- [16] In such a case, it would be shown that it is in fact the "man" who has failed in his covenant obligation (i.e., to love his wife), not the "damsel".
- [18] For his attempt to defame the character of his wife, the man is to be "chastise[d]" by the elders of the city.
- [19] The chastisement comes in the form of a fine to be paid to the parents of "damsel", since the false charge against her would defame not only her but her family as well; the amount of the fine, "an hundred shekels of silver", was enormous, as David purchased the threshing floor of Araunah for only 50 shekels of silver (2Sam24:24). Furthermore, the man cannot "put her away all his days" (i.e., divorce his wife).
- [20] What if, however, the allegation of the man was true, and the damsel had entered into the marriage under the false pretense of "virginity"?
- [21] If true, the men of the city were to "stone her with stones that she die" at the very door of her "father's house", thus punishing the "damsel" as well as bringing shame upon her father (who bore some responsibility for the promiscuity of his daughter). While this seems incredibly harsh to us today, who live in a society in which premarital sex has become both commonplace as well as socially accepted/approved, God here labels it as "evil".
- Note that neither outcome, whether the man "hates" his wife without justification, or she has been promiscuous and unfaithful to him, results in grounds for divorce.
- [22] The sin of adultery, in which an unmarried man has sex with a married woman, is also labeled by God as "evil". In such a case, both parties (the man and the woman) were to "die" (i.e., by stoning).
- [23] Note that a "virgin" who is "betrothed" to a "husband" is considered his "wife" (v24) even before the marriage had been consummated (cf. Matt1:18-20).
- [24] For a man to have sex with such a betrothed damsel, "in the city" (v23; i.e., help was readily available to the damsel should she cry out, assuming this was an instance of rape; thus, the woman's consent is implied), then both the man and the woman were guilty of "evil" and were to be "stone[d]".
- [25] On the other hand, if the woman did not consent to sex with the man, but was "forced" (i.e., raped), then only the man was to "die".
- [26] In the case of rape, the damsel was not guilty of a "sin worthy of death". However, the damsel was not undefiled by the sin; note the comparison to the one who "slayeth" (i.e., inadvertently caused death) his neighbor, which was not a sin that required in the death of the slayer, but it was still a sin that defiled the community and brought consequences upon the offender.

[27] The presumption is that in this case the damsel did not consent to sex with the man, but was forced by him despite her resistance.

[29] If it is discovered that an unmarried man has had sex with a virgin (apparently whether it was consensual or not, v28), who is not betrothed to another (v28), then he is obligated to take the woman as his wife (and can never "put her away") as well as pay a 'fine' to the "damsel's father"; note that the fine of "fifty shekels of silver" was a substantial amount (Cp., 2Sam24:24).

Thus, pre-marital sex between a man and a woman, both of which were totally outside of the marriage relationship, did not result in their deaths; however, the couple had to enter into a permanent, life-long marriage in order to atone for (i.e., cover, not forgive) the offense. Note that if this were not the case, the woman would be forever defiled and subject to the charge of verse 14 if she were to attempt to marry another.

[30] Finally, it was forbidden for a man to marry his "father's wife" (i.e., step-mother, presumably after the father has died), as this was a perversion that would dishonor the father. Under the Law of Moses, violation of this command resulted in the death penalty for both (Lev20:11). An occasion of this sin in the church at Corinth caused the Apostle Paul to order the offending couple be put out of the fellowship (1Cor5:1-5); in fact, the command was to "deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh".

CHAPTER 23

PURITY IN CITIZENSHIP

Since Israel was a model nation, chosen and designed by Jehovah to be a visible witness to all other nations of the righteousness of the LORD (Deut4:5-8), its statutes associated with purity extended to the outward appearance of the nation. Namely, restrictions were placed on those who could enter into the congregation/assembly relative to corporate worship at the Tabernacle/Temple. Many Bible interpreters see the following restrictions as applying only to participation in corporate worship services, allowing for the named individuals to otherwise be citizens of Israel. However, since corporate worship at the Tabernacle/Temple was an integral part of national life, absolutely required by the Law (of Moses) of all those in Israel, these purity statutes effectually place restrictions on citizenship in the nation of Israel.

[1] Emasculation of the male was forbidden in Israel. However, it was widely practiced in the surrounding pagan nations, either as a job requirement (i.e., eunuchs, the keepers of the royal harems) or as a result of pagan religious practices (that often involved mutilation and/or cutting). Whatever the cause, the emasculated man was one who was incapable of 'reproducing after his kind', and thus was unable to participate in the national responsibility to propagate and increase the seed of Abraham (cf. Gen15:1-6). As such, emasculated men were excluded from citizenship in Israel. Note, however, that believing eunuchs will have a place in the future Messianic Kingdom (Isa56:3-5).

- [2] The family descending from a "bastard" (illegitimate son/child; i.e., children born outside the covenant of marriage) was excluded from citizenship in Israel until the "tenth generation". Until fairly recently, these terms (bastard, illegitimate child) were in common usage, but are now generally considered to be derogatory epithets; Biblically speaking, however, to procreate children outside of marriage was/is sin. Furthermore, under the Law of Moses, correctly applied, the birth of such children would have been extremely rare, since the sin of adultery resulted in the swift stoning of the sinners (Cp., Deut22:22ff). Propagation of the Jewish nation was to take place within covenant marriages only (cf. Mal2:14-15).

King David the 10th Generation from Perez. David, of the tribe of Judah, was always God's choice for Israel's king (cf. Gen49:10). The nation, however, cried out for a king one generation before David (2Sam8:5ff), and God relented and allowed Saul (a Benjamite) to be anointed as the first king of Israel. If David was God's choice, why not simply anoint David's father Jesse? This would not have been possible, since the line extending from Judah to David passed through Judah's illegitimate son Perez, born to Tamar the Canaanite (Gen38:1-29). David represented the 10th generation descending from the "bastard" Perez (Ruth4:18-22; 1Chron2:4-15; Matt1:3-6), and for that reason was the first generation eligible for citizenship in Israel.

- [3] Moab and Ammon were nations descended from Lot by means of his incestuous relationships with his two daughters; thus, the lines descended from Lot's "bastard" sons, Moab and Ben-ammi (Gen19:36-38), would have been excluded from Israel until the "tenth generation" under the principle of v2.
- [4] Additionally, however, these nations refused to render assistance to Israel when the nation came out of Egypt (Num21:21-30). Furthermore, the Moabites sought to hire the prophet Balaam to 'curse' Israel (Num22:4-6). These are additional reasons given for excluding the "Ammonite" and the "Moabite" from the nation of Israel.
- [5] Indeed, not only did Moab's attempt to 'curse' Israel fail, in seeking to do so they brought upon themselves the divine curse of Jehovah on any who would seek to curse the seed of Abraham (Gen12:3).
- [6] Being under the divine curse of Jehovah, the nations of Ammon and Moab would forever be the enemies of Israel.
- [7] On the other hand, the "Edomite" was descended from Esau, a legitimate son of Isaac and "brother" of Jacob. The Edomites were not under the curse of Jehovah (at the time the Law was given, though they would be subsequently; Obad10-18). Nor were the Egyptians; and despite the oppression of the Egyptians prior to the Exodus, they had been previously used as an instrument of divine preservation of Jacob and his family (Gen47:23-25). Neither the "Edomite" nor the "Egyptian" were to be "abhorred" (as the "Ammonite" and "Moabite" were; v3).

- [8] Edomites and Egyptians could be incorporated into the nation of Israel (i.e., as proselytes who worshiped Jehovah exclusively) in the "third generation".

PURITY IN THE CAMP

Statutes related to personal hygiene and public sanitation, while certainly wise and beneficial instructions for practical reasons, also portrayed the object lesson that sin tolerated within the camp of Israel was a hindrance to corporate fellowship with Jehovah. Physical cleanliness, as a type of spiritual cleanliness, was a prerequisite for serving the LORD.

- [9] The army of Israel was to maintain purity within the camp when going into battle (Cp., Deut20:1-4). Victory in battle was dependent on Israel's spiritual condition (i.e., obedience to the LORD under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant; Deut28:7).
- [10] A euphemism is employed here for an involuntary nocturnal emission by a man. Even though unintended, it renders the man "unclean". For the sake of purity "within the camp", the man is commanded to separate himself from the camp of Israel.
- [11] The man could return to the camp on the following "evening" after washing himself with water. Two principles are portrayed in this object lesson: 1) sin (typified here by physical uncleanness) on the part of a believer, although it can and will be forgiven when confessed (1Jn1:9), disqualifies an individual from public service for the LORD for a period of time; 2) separation of the sinner from the corporate body of believers (here the camp of Israel) may be necessary for the spiritual health of the body (cf. 1Cor5:6; consider also how the sin of Achan, tolerated within the camp of Israel, brought the disfavor of Jehovah upon the entire camp; Josh7:1-12).
- [12] Whereas the former concerned an involuntary emission, here the voluntary emission of defecation is addressed; to maintain purity in the camp, defecation was only to take place in a designated place "outside the camp".
- [13] The soldier's field equipment was to include a "shovel" to be used to "cover" his excrement. While such a practice is an outstanding public health practice, more importantly it again pictures a necessary separation from that which defiles, both on the part of the individual as well as the corporate body of believers (i.e., the camp).
- [14] The basis of Jehovah's favor on the camp of Israel assembled for battle is individual and corporate conformity to His standard of holiness. The LORD's servants cannot battle evil on His behalf when they are themselves in a state of sin (pictured here as uncleanness).

PURITY RELATED TO PERSONAL FREEDOM

- [15] A slave who escapes his bondage was not to be returned to his oppressor. This cannot be an instance of a Hebrew servant and master, which was an occasion of required servitude to repay a legitimate debt, and which was authorized and regulated under the Law (Deut15:12-15), but must refer to one who escaped illegitimate bondage to a foreign master.
- [16] Israel was not to allow such an escaped slave was not to be extradited and returned to bondage, but he was permitted to dwell in Israel as a place of refuge. The nation of Israel was to illustrate to all other nations that personal freedom was a privilege Jehovah bestowed on all men³⁰.

PURITY IN TEMPLE WORSHIP

- [17] Ritual prostitution (both heterosexual and homosexual) was a common element in most forms of pagan worship, generally performed in their temples; this was nothing more than a perverted way to generate 'offerings' for their pagan 'gods'. Such a practice was not to be tolerated in Israel. The "daughters of Israel" were forbidden to act as a "harlot" (i.e., a heterosexual prostitute), and the "sons of Israel" were forbidden to act as a "sodomite"³¹ (i.e., a homosexual prostitute).
- [18] Even the "hire" (i.e., payment) for such services (were they performed by a non-Israelite) was forbidden to be brought into "the house of the LORD", being designated as an "abomination"³².

CASE LAW RELATING TO THE 8TH COMMANDMENT

The eighth commandment, "Neither shalt thou steal" (Deut5:19), presumes that private ownership of property by individuals is ordained by God as necessary for a healthy, stable, and functional economy (thus, economies in which private ownership of property is diminished or eliminated are not Biblical!). Recall that in the chiasmic structure of the Ten Commandments, the 8th commandment forbidding stealing is in parallel with (and related to) the 4th commandment: "six days thou shalt labor" (Deut5:13). It is God's intention that His people have the freedom to both possess and enjoy the fruits of their own personal labor.

³⁰ America's founding fathers recognized this Biblical principle when they wrote in the *Declaration of Independence*, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

³¹ This label makes clear that the sin of Sodom judged by God was rampant homosexual behavior.

³² Note that there is a parallelism in vv17-18 that equates the "sodomite" (v17) with "a dog" (v18). One of the arguments used in attempts to ethically justify homosexual behavior is that it is observed in the animal world (e.g., common among dogs) and, therefore, is natural/normal behavior. These verses acknowledge that such behavior exists among dogs (in the fallen world), but still labels it an "abomination unto the LORD"; thus, such an attempt at justification must be rejected by Biblical standards.

However, "steal[ing]" under the Mosaic Covenant extended beyond the taking of personal property and included the taking away of any freedom granted to the individual by Jehovah. Thus, the statutes associated with the 8th commandment relate to securing for the individual personal freedoms of all kinds.

THE CHARGING OF INTEREST

- [19] A Jew was not to charge "interest" when lending anything to a "brother" Jew who was **in need** (Deut15:1-8); to do so is seen under the Law as theft. The context here is that of lending for the purpose of charity, not business; Jesus Himself distinguished between lending for charitable vs. business purposes (Matt25:27; Luk6:34-35). Under the Mosaic Covenant, the lender relied on the promised blessing of the LORD when lending to a brother in need, not the prospect of earning interest from the borrower (Deut15:10). This principle from the Law of Moses is repeated in the NT (1Jn3:16-18).
- [20] Not all "usury" is evil or forbidden under the Law. A Jew was permitted to charge "interest" of a "stranger" (i.e., Gentile), as such was almost certainly to be a matter of business, not charity. The intent behind the distinction was not to take advantage of the Gentile, but to be an evangelistic witness to him of the blessing of being in covenant with Jehovah (Deut4:6-8).

THE KEEPING OF VOWS

- [21] Any "vow" made to Jehovah had to be kept; not to do so would be (in effect) stealing from Him. It is impossible that the LORD would ever fail to keep His "vow[s]" (i.e., the covenants into which He has entered), and He demands from His people the same standard of righteousness (Lev19:2; 1Pet1:16).
- [22] The Jew was never required to make a vow or enter into a covenant.
- [23] However, once a vow or covenant had been freely made, the LORD demands that it be kept. As extreme examples of this, consider the covenant Israel made with the Gibeonites (Josh9:1-27), the vow of Jephthah (Judg11:29-40), and even the pledge of Ananias and Sapphira in the NT (Act5:1-11).

The lesson here is of supreme importance! If the LORD demands such exacting compliance with any and every vow (i.e., commitment) made by His people, we can also expect perfect compliance on the part of Jehovah with every "vow" He has made and every covenant into which He has entered.

THE LIMITS OF OWNERSHIP

- [24] Travelers were permitted to eat from a "neighbor's vineyard" to satisfy an immediate need for food (and landowners were expected to comply with this as a matter of charity), but to take an additional portion for a future need would be considered stealing.

This stipulation of the Law illustrates that although the LORD grants the right of ownership to individuals, creature ownership is never absolute. Ultimately it is God who owns all property (Ps24:1-2), and He has the right to regulate its use. The modern trend in which the State assumes the right to regulate the use of private property is not Biblical³³.

- [25] The same principle applied to the neighbor's grain field, exemplified in the Gospels by Jesus and His disciples (Matt12:1; Mk2:23; Luk6:1). In that instance, the Pharisees' objection to this practice was not that it was unlawful in principle, but that it was a violation of the requirement to rest on the Sabbath.

CHAPTER 24

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

The statutes related to divorce and remarriage are associated with the 8th Commandment (forbidding theft) because the LORD views the taking of another man's wife as a form of stealing; it was the taking for oneself something that was rightfully another's.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is a passage that has been understood in many different ways. It is admittedly a difficult passage. Many (probably most) interpreters view this passage as permitting divorce and remarriage, basically as it is practiced today. Indeed, the two major rabbinical schools at the time of Christ agreed that this passage permitted divorce/remarriage, only disagreeing on what the Biblically sanctioned ground for a divorce was as given in this passage (the "uncleanness" of Deut24:1); the School of Hillel asserted that divorce was permissible for virtually any reason (Matt19:3), whereas the School of Shammai understood divorce as sanctioned only on the ground of adultery. However, it must be recognized that the Lord Jesus, in addressing the Pharisees on the issue of divorce from this very passage of Deuteronomy (Matt19:3-10), rejected both of these interpretations, asserting rather that "what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (i.e., for any reason whatsoever, which greatly vexed His own disciples; v10); any interpretation of Deut24:1-4 must be consistent with this clear (albeit difficult) teaching of our Lord (compare also with Math5:31-32)³⁴.

Furthermore, an understanding of this passage in which divorce was sanctioned on the ground of adultery, and the adulteress was permitted to remarry, is clearly inconsistent with Deuteronomy 22:22, where the penalty for adultery was death by stoning (thus rendering moot the possibility of divorce/remarriage).

- [1] Verses 1-3 do not contain any commandments, but rather set forth a hypothetical situation; the commandment that results from this hypothetical situation is given in v4. A man who has married a

³³ Under the Law of Moses, the State owned no property, nor was it the authority that granted the right of individuals to own property.

³⁴ The issue of divorce can actually be understood in a simple and straight-forward way. In marriage, a man and a woman both freely "vow a vow unto the LORD" (Deut23:21), entering into a formal "covenant" (Mal2:14). According to Deut23:23, there is no acceptable ground for forsaking such a vow.

woman divorces her because of some "uncleanness" found in her. There is no commandment for him to do so found in this verse (although the KJV translation "then let" makes it sound as though there is, this is not the case in the Hebrew original), it is a hypothetical situation set forth as having happened. The "uncleanness" is ambiguous here, but clearly parallels the "fornication" (Greek *pornea*) of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 which most often denotes premarital sex³⁵.

- [2] Again, the KJV translation as "may" suggests permission, but this is not the sense of the Hebrew original. This verse simply continues the description of the hypothetical situation, which includes the woman remarrying another following the divorce of v1.
- [3] Finally, the hypothetical situation is concluded with the woman's second husband either dying or divorcing her.
- [4] Here is the commandment. A husband who had divorced his wife, and subsequently marries another (none of which is sanctioned by the Law), cannot remarry his former wife. Since divorce is set forth in the Law as an unbiblical state, it might have been reasoned that a man and a woman who had divorced could (in effect) rectify the wrong by remarrying. This may in fact have been the case, so long as subsequent remarriage(s) had not taken place after the original divorce; however, intervening remarriage(s) rendered the remarriage of the original husband and wife as sinful, even an "abomination before the LORD" which defiles the "land" of Israel.

MISCELLANEOUS STATUTES ELABORATING ON THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF THEFT

- [5] A newly married man was not to be compelled to "go out to war", or any like "business", for "one year". This was to allow him to establish his home and begin producing seed, both of which were fundamental to the stability of the nation under the Mosaic covenant. Failure to honor this statute would be, in effect, a theft from the "new wife" of the home and family promised by her marriage.
- [6] A lender was forbidden to take as collateral against a legitimate debt a man's "millstone", which would take from him the basic and necessary ability to prepare his daily bread.
- [7] Kidnapping, or the "stealing" of "children", whether it be for the purpose of ransoming them or selling them into slavery, deprived them of the freedom Jehovah intended all His children to enjoy. Whereas the consequence associated with most forms of theft under the Mosaic covenant centered around financial restitution for the offended party (cf. Exod22:1-15), kidnapping was a capital offense: "that [kind of] thief shall die".

³⁵ Note that this situation would result in the stoning of the woman according to Deut22:20-21; thus, this passage cannot be condoning divorce as sanctioned for this "uncleanness", since that would be inconsistent with the prior statute, but is merely presenting a hypothetical situation as having occurred.

CASE LAW RELATING TO THE 9TH COMMANDMENT

The ninth commandment, "Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbor" (Deut5:20), prohibits the misrepresentation (especially as in defamation) of another person's character; in the chiasmic structure of the 10 Commandments, it is related to the third commandment that prohibits taking Jehovah's name in vain. The statutes related to the ninth commandment illustrate the various ways of misrepresenting another's character, or, stated in a positive way, respecting the dignity of another. The section appears to address a series of parties owed respect and dignity, progressing from most to least important.

PRIESTS AND LEVITES (LEADERS AND TEACHERS)

- [8] Respect and obedience to the "priests" and "Levites" was commanded, as they had the divinely ordained role to "teach" the Israelites. By application to the NT Church, pastors and teachers deserve our highest respect (1Tim5:17-19; Jas3:1).
- [9] The example offered of one who did not appropriately respect and honor divinely ordained leadership is Miriam, the sister of Moses (a Levite). She (along with Aaron) defamed her brother's character, calling into question the truth of his assertion that he was God's (only) appointed spokesman (Num12:1-2). For her sin the LORD struck her with "leprosy" (Num12:10).

DEBTORS

- [10] When an Israelite had loaned his brother "anything", he was forbidden to enter his house to take that which was "pledge[d]" as repayment for the debt. To do so would suggest that his brother was able, but unwilling, to repay the debt, which (if untrue) would be a defamation of his character.
- [11] Rather, one was to wait outside for the debtor to publicly repay his debt.
- [13] If the debtor was so poor that he had to repay his debt using his sole raiment (e.g., cloak), he was nevertheless to be allowed its use at night for warmth; even the debtor, as a creature made in the image of God, deserved such respect. Failure to show dignity to debtors was "[un]righteousness" in Israel.

LABORERS

- [14] Oppression (i.e., disrespect) of "hired servants" (i.e., laborers) was forbidden, whether they were Israelites or Gentiles. Though all sorts of distinctions existed under the Law between Jews and Gentiles, they remained equal as creatures made in the image of God.
- [15] Labor was greatly valued under the Mosaic covenant. A laborer was owed his wage as soon as his work was completed (i.e., at the end

of the work day). Failure to pay laborer promptly was a sin on the part of the master (Cp., Jas5:4).

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

- [16] No one could be punished for the sin of another, even if the sinner were one's father or child. To do so would be to defame his character, implying he had committed a sin which he had not. It is one thing for a child to endure physical or social suffering as a divine consequence of his father's sin, or the sin of a prior generation (cf. Deut5:9), but it is altogether different for him to be punished by a human authority for a crime he did not commit.

THE POOR/HELPLESS

- [17] As creatures made in the image of God, all men have dignity and deserve respect. Justice was due equally to all people. **No discrimination was allowed** against the "sojourner" (i.e., Gentile), the "fatherless", or the "widow".
- [18] The Israelite was to remember that he suffered such oppression and discrimination at the hand of the Egyptians, from which "the LORD thy God redeemed thee". This was God's demonstration to the whole world that such oppression is unrighteousness, so His people must not practice it.
- [19] To provide for the poor/helpless in Israel, the LORD commanded that any "sheaf" inadvertently falling to the ground during "harvest" be left for the "sojourner", the "fatherless", and the "widow" to glean (cf. Ruth2:2). A similar provision for the poor applied to the "olive" (v20) and "grape" (v21) harvests.
- [22] See comments on v18.

CHAPTER 25

CRIMINALS

- [1] The duty of "judges" was to "justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked". To justify (i.e., declare righteous) the wicked and/or condemn the righteous is a perversion of justice.
- [2] The "wicked man" (i.e., a criminal) should be punished "according to his fault" (i.e., to an extent that fits the crime).
- [3] Corporal punishment (i.e., beating) was used under the Mosaic Law as punishment for various offences. However, a **maximum** of "forty stripes" was permitted; as a guard against accidentally exceeding this limit, the Jews never prescribed more than 39 stripes (cf. 2Cor11:24). To punish with more than 40 stripes would demean the wicked man and even risk death; since beating was prescribed for offences not deserving of death, death as a result of the beating had to be prevented. This was in contrast to scourging under Roman law, which included no limit, and which more often than not resulted in the death of the recipient.

ANIMALS

- [4] As creatures of God (though not made in His image), even animals have dignity and deserve a measure of respect. As an illustration of this, an "ox" being used to tread grain was to be permitted to eat of it as a form of payment for its labor.

CASE LAW RELATING TO THE 10TH COMMANDMENT

Finally, the tenth commandment, "Neither shalt thou desire . . . anything that is thy neighbor's" (Deut5:21), addresses the heart condition of the Israelite; in the chiasitic structure of the 10 Commandments, it is related to the first commandment that demands allegiance to Jehovah as God alone. These two commandments are different than the others, in that neither can be externally confirmed or enforced. The statutes related to the tenth commandment each have to do with the desire or intention of an individual, in contrast to any actions undertaken or deeds performed.

LEVIRATE MARRIAGE

- [5] The land promised in perpetuity to the Israelites under the Abrahamic covenant (Gen13:15) passed from father to son by inheritance under the Mosaic covenant. A family's land could never be permanently lost; even if sold, it reverted to the family at the Year of Jubilee (Lev27:24). Thus, it was critical that an Israelite man have a son to inherit his land (and a special provision in the Law even allowed for the daughters of a man with no sons to inherit the land under certain conditions; Num27:1-11; note conditions in Num36:6-9).

If a man died having no "child" to inherit his land, the expectation was for his (unmarried) "brother" to take his widow to wife and to "perform the duty of a husband's brother unto her", which was to raise up seed in his brother's name.

- [6] The "firstborn" son of this (Levirate) marriage would be the heir of the deceased brother, but all subsequent children would be heirs of the living brother. The sole purpose of Levirate marriage was to produce an heir for a deceased kinsman who had died without children.
- [7] Though Levirate marriage was the "duty" of a brother, it could not be compelled. If a man "desire not" to take his deceased brother's widow to wife, he could "refuse".
- [8] Since such a refusal had far-reaching legal ramifications, it had to be verified/certified by "the elders of his city", thus clearing the way for the inheritance to proceed to other of his kinsmen (cf. Ruth4:1-11).
- [9] For a brother to refuse to perform this duty was disgraceful, and it was demonstrated to be so publicly as prescribed by the ceremony involving the woman spitting in the brother's face and

taking his "shoe" from him. The taking of his shoe symbolically prevented him from walking through his brother's land, which was the biblical picture of possessing it (Cp., Gen13:17).

- [10] The possession of the brother's shoe was legal proof that he had relinquished his right of redemption of his brother's land (Ruth4:7-8).

Primacy of Imputation over Biological Descent. Levirate marriage demonstrates early in Biblical history the primacy of imputation over biological/physical descent in the area of family lineage. The most important application of this principle is the adoption of believers into the family of God (Rom8:14-15; Gal4:5; Eph1:5). Though all men are sinners biologically/physically descended from Adam (Rom5:12), our adoption by God results in the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us (Rom5:17-19) and makes us joint heirs of God with Christ (Rom8:17; Gal4:6-7).

PROTECTION OF THE POWER OF PROCREATION

- [11] The context in which these men "strive together" (i.e., fight) is not given, and apparently it is not important. The important matter is that during the conflict, the wife of one attempts to give her husband an advantage by attacking his adversary in "the secrets" (i.e., genitals).
- [12] Whereas this was an area of male vulnerability emphasized in pagan military training, it was considered off limits by Jehovah. More than merely giving an 'unfair' advantage, such an attack always threatens to terminate the man's power of procreation, which is why it is forbidden. This is the only sin in the Law of Moses penalized by mutilation of the offender, which seems to emphasize the seriousness of the offense.

DISHONEST BUSINESS PRACTICES

- [13] Vv. 13-16 deal with dishonest business practices. The allusion to "different weights" implies one would use a "great" weight when buying goods, and a "small" weight when selling. It is obvious why such statutes occur in the section dealing with the commandment, "thou shalt not [covet]" (Deut5:21).
- [14] An analogous principle applies to "measures" (Heb., *ephah*, a unit of dry measure analogous to a bushel).
- [15] The Biblical standard is honesty and fairness in business transactions, a refrain often repeated in the OT (Prov11:1; 16:11; 20:10,23). A fair business transaction is one in which all parties benefit equally.
- [16] Jehovah labels unfair business practices as an "abomination", and under the Mosaic covenant it was a sin that could lead to the dispersion of the nation of Israel from the Promised Land.

DESIRE FOR PEACE AT ANY PRICE

- [17] When Israel came out of "Egypt" at the time of the Exodus, they were attacked by "Amalek" (Exod17:8-16), a people descended from Jacob's brother Esau (Gen36:12).
- [18] The descendants of Esau understood that the descendants of Jacob (i.e., Israel) were under the blessing of Jehovah, and in covenant with Him (Gen27:39-41); thus, when the Amalekites attacked their kindred it was because they "feared not God". For this sin, God had commanded that Israel judge the nation of Amalek with total extermination (cf. Num24:20), analogous to the extermination of the Canaanites.
- [19] The statute here is that after Israel has been settled in the Land, and "the LORD thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies" (i.e., the nations dwelling in Canaan), Israel must "remember" to execute the judgment of God on "Amalek" by utterly destroying them as a people. Failure for Israel to remember this obligation would be for them to desire personal/national peace above God's righteous decrees.

The Rest of the Story. . . Unfortunately, Israel did not "remember" to judge the Amalekites when they were settled in the Land (Judg3:13; 5:14), and King Saul eventually lost his dynasty over the nation of Israel for his own refusal to execute Agag the king of Amalek and utterly destroy his people (1Sam15:1-35). Furthermore, Saul's failure at this point also allowed for the eventual rise of Haman, a descendant of Agag, who almost succeeded in a Satanic plot to exterminate the entire Jewish race (Esth3:1)! Ironically, God used Mordecai, a descendent of Saul through Shimei (2Sam16:5; Esth2:5)—a man who King David showed mercy (2Sam16:11-13), to save the Jews.

This ends the section of Deuteronomy (i.e., Deut12:1-26:19) that contains the statutes related to, and elaborating on, the Ten Commandments (Deut5:7-21).

CHAPTER 26

PRESENTATION OF THE FIRSTFRUITS

- [1] The first act of celebration by the nation of Israel, once they had entered the Promised Land, possessed it, and are safely dwelling in it, was to be an offering of first fruits.
- [2] In Biblical (and Hebraic) terms, the first fruits were more than simply that portion that belongs to, or is owed to, God; rather, the first fruits were a representation of the whole. Giving the first fruits to God was an acknowledgement that all one possessed had come from Him.
- [3] In this case, the offering of the first fruits was to include the confession that Jehovah had kept His promise to the "fathers"

(i.e., Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) to give their descendants the Land of Canaan (cf. Gen15:18-21).

- [4] This first fruits offering was the first received from the Promised Land.
- [5] They were to rehearse (i.e., confess) before the LORD their history as a people. The "father" of the nation was Jacob, whom the LORD renamed Israel (Gen32:28), referred to here as "a Syrian" since he spent much of his life dwelling in Padan-aram and took his wives from "Laban the Syrian" (Gen25:20; 28:2-6). Jacob took his family of "a few" (i.e., "seventy souls"; Exod1:5) to dwell in Egypt; the LORD brought them out of Egypt after four generations "a nation, great, mighty, and populous".
- [6] The Israelites for centuries suffered great affliction in "bondage" in Egypt.
- [7] Unable to deliver themselves from their bondage to the Egyptians, the Israelites "cried unto the LORD God" (Exod2:23).
- [8] The LORD heard their cry and "remembered" the covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod2:24), and He delivered Israel from Egypt in the most miraculous of ways. The supernatural manner of the Exodus underscored the power of the Egyptians, the helplessness of the Israelites, and the impossibility of their deliverance apart from intervention by the LORD. This work of grace by Jehovah on behalf of Israel forever indebts the nation to Him for their very existence.
- [9] Beyond merely delivering Israel from bondage in Egypt, the LORD has provided for them by giving them "a land that floweth with milk and honey" (i.e., an abundantly fruitful land) for their very own.
- [10] This ritual of historical confession and giving of first fruits produced by the Promised Land would be a personal and national acknowledgement of both the goodness and faithfulness of Jehovah.
- [11] All within Israel were to participate in the celebration, including even "the Levite, and the stranger [i.e., Gentile] who is among you" (though having no land, they would not be able to bring an offering of first fruits).

REMEMBER THE TITHE OF THE THIRD YEAR

- [12] The "tithe" to be given on "the third year" was one specifically designated to help the poor (i.e., the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, the widow).
- [13] Even as the LORD had not forgotten Israel when she was in her own helpless condition in Egypt, so the Israelite was not to forget to provide for the helpless within Israel by faithfully giving this tithe.
- [14] This appears to be a fleeting allusion to turning from pagan practices to fully obey the LORD's command (regarding the tithe).

- [15] The blessing of Jehovah on the nation of Israel was conditioned (under the Mosaic covenant) on Israel being a blessing to the helpless within the nation.
- [16] Under the Mosaic covenant the nation of Israel was obligated to "keep" all the commandments, statutes, and judgments enumerated in Deuteronomy 5-25. This present chapter, Deuteronomy 26, does not contain any new commands, but is an exhortation concerning the importance of what has already been given.
- [17] Performing the confession and first fruits ritual once settled in the Land would be a part of the process of renewing the Mosaic covenant, one in which the nation will again (Cp., Exod19:8) "vow" to keep the "commandments", "statutes", and "judgments" contained as terms of the covenant. Note that since a "vow" was never mandatory (Deut23:22), the Mosaic covenant, in both its original and renewed forms, was a conditional covenant into which the nation of Israel entered *voluntarily*.
- [18] At this time the LORD would also renew His "vow" that Israel would be "His peculiar people" (Cp., Exod19:5), obligating Himself to keep all of His commitments to the nation enumerated in the covenant.
- [19] The LORD's purpose in the Mosaic covenant is to make Israel the greatest nation, "high above all nations" (cf. Deut28:13), as His witness to all other nations (Deut4:5-8).

CHAPTER 27

RATIFICATION PROCEDURE AND SANCTIONS (Deut27:1-30:20)

A SET OF STONES TO PUBLICLY MEMORIALIZE THE LAW

- [1] "Keep all the commandments" is the standard of obedience expected in the Mosaic covenant; to break a single particular commandment is to fail to meet the Law's standard of absolute perfection (Jas2:10).
- [2] An additional requirement in renewing the covenant was to prepare a set of stones to memorialize the Law; this was to be done upon crossing the "Jordan" river and entering into the Promised Land (proper) for the very first time (Cp., Josh4:1-24).
- [3] On these stones were to be written "all the words of this law" so that the terms of the Mosaic covenant could be publicly read and reviewed by all people at all times; thus, no one in Israel could claim ignorance of their obligation under the Law.
- [4] These "stones" upon which the Law was written were to be on permanent, public display at "Mount Ebal".
- [5] They were also to build an "altar unto the LORD thy God" at this site for the purpose of offering "burnt offerings".

- [6] This altar was to be constructed of "whole (i.e., uncut; v5] stones"; this appears to be essentially a repetition of the ritual performed when Israel first entered into the covenant at Mt. Sinai (Exod20:24-25). The prohibition that forbade constructing the altar using cut or hewn stones seems to distinguish this altar to Jehovah from Canaanite altars to pagan gods, while at the same time testifying to the revelation that Jehovah cannot be adequately worshiped by the work of man's hands (nor will He receive such worship).
- [7] On this altar were also to be offered "peace offerings", which were in effect meals shared by Jehovah and His people (Cp., Exod24:11) and which pictured both relationship and fellowship.
- [8] The text inscribed on these stones, described as "all the words of this law", was probably that of the Ten Commandments (Deut5:6-21), since this is what the LORD Himself inscribed on the original stone tables; Deut10:1-4). The emphasis here is on the words of the Law written "very plainly" so that all could read and understand their obligation under the covenant made with Jehovah.

RENEWAL CEREMONY AT MT. EBAL AND MT. GERIZIM

- [9] Teaching and making plain the requirement of the Law was the duty of "Moses", "the priests", and "the Levites". In the covenant renewal ceremony, this generation of Israel would become "the people of [Jehovah]" by voluntarily taking on themselves the responsibilities and privileges of the Mosaic covenant; the previous generation had done so at Mt. Sinai, but this generation would do so at Mts. Ebal and Gerizim (vv12-13). The designation "this day" refers to the day on which the renewal ceremony takes place, which is recorded in Joshua 8:30-35).
- [10] The obligation being assumed by the nation of Israel under the renewed covenant was to "obey" all the "commandments" and "statutes" enumerated in the Law.
- [11] To signify formal (and voluntary) acceptance of the terms of the renewed covenant on the part of the nation of Israel, Moses prescribed the national ceremony given in vv12-26.
- [12] Half of the nation was to stand upon Mt. Gerizim and "bless the people" (i.e., recite the blessings of the covenant; Deut28:1-14). The tribes designated to stand on Mt. Gerizim were all sons of Jacob's wives Leah and Rachel; they are listed from eldest to youngest.
- [13] Half of the nation was to stand upon Mt. Ebal and "curse" (i.e., recite the cursings of the covenant; Deut27:15-26; 28:15-68). The tribes designated to stand on Mt. Ebal were the sons of Jacob's handmaids, plus Leah's sons Reuben (Jacob's firstborn, though forfeited the right of the firstborn because of his sin; 1Chron5:1) and Zebulun (Leah's youngest); they are not listed in chronological order. All the tribes of Israel were to be included in this renewal ceremony, none are omitted.

Geographical and Historical Notes. Shechem, in the central region of Canaan, was in effect the 'hometown' of Jacob (Gen33:18-19). Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal lay to the south and north, respectively, of Shechem. Thus, standing in Shechem and facing east (i.e., toward the 'Orient', the geographical reference direction at this time), Mt. Gerizim would be on the right hand (the traditional place of blessing; cf. Gen48:13-14) and Mt. Ebal would be on the left hand. In the days of the divided kingdom, after the northern House of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians and the imported peoples gave rise to the Samaritans, the Samaritans identified themselves particularly with Jacob (rather than Abraham) and Shechem, and Mt. Gerizim became their place of worship (cf. Jn4:5-6,20).

- [14] The Levites were to pronounce twelve specific curses for specific sins (vv. 15-26); after being interrupted by one section on general blessings (Deut28:1-14), a section on general curses followed (Deut28:15-68).

SPECIFIC CURSES OF THE COVENANT

- [15] The very first curse specified was for idolatry. The greatest sin was the sin of idolatry, or the worship of "gods" other than Jehovah; its prohibition is the very **first** of the Ten Commandments (Deut5:7-8). Thus, national idolatry was uniquely indicative of Israel's failure to keep its commitments under the Sinaitic covenant.

In each case, the Levites were to recite the cursing, and "all the people shall answer and say, Amen". "Amen" is the Hebrew word meaning 'truth'; to say "Amen" after an assertion is to affirm the 'truth' of it.

- [16] This curse was for failure to honor father and mother, one of the Ten Commandments (Deut5:16). The family was (is) the God-ordained place of training in righteousness. A child is taught to honor and obey authority (which will ultimately by to God and nation) in the family, and any child not learning this vital less was to be executed (Deut21:18-21).

- [17] This curse was for moving landmarks. God apportioned the Promised Land to particular families of Israel **in perpetuity**, and no one ever had the right to alter His assignments; the Law of Moses ensured that a family could never ultimately lose their land inheritance from Jehovah. This truth continues to the present day and beyond. According to the Prophet Joel, the "nations" (i.e., Gentiles) will be judged at the Second Coming of Christ because "they have . . . parted my [i.e., Jehovah's] land" (Joel3:2; see also Dan11:39). This is not a trivial matter in the eyes of Jehovah, and contemporary efforts to broker a Middle East peace treaty by offering to give the so-called 'Palestinians' (i.e., Arabs, descendants of Ishmael and Esau) portions of land Jehovah forever gave to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, will be judged by Him!

- [19] The curses of vv18-19 were for failure to ensure "justice" for the helpless in society, the "blind", the "sojourner" (i.e., Gentile),

the "fatherless", and the "widow" (cf. Deut26:13). Jehovah showed Israel grace when she was helpless in Egypt, and He established Israel as a nation to be a testimony to His grace to all the world (Deut4:5-8); for Israel to fail to do so is for Israel to fail in the purpose for which she was established.

- [20] The next four curses (vv20-23) all had to do with sexual sins. Sexual sins in particular threaten to weaken, if not destroy, the family, which is why the commandment prohibiting adultery is related to the commandment to honor father and mother in the chiasmic structure of the Ten Commandments. Thus, 5 of these 12 specific curses (essentially half) relate to sins that are an attack upon the sanctity and stability of the family.

This curse related to a son dishonoring his father by taking his widow (i.e., step-mother) to wife, presumably after the father's death. This was the final statute given in the section of statutes relating to purity in marriage (Deut22:30).

- [21] This curse was for the sin of bestiality, not mentioned in Deuteronomy but prohibited in Leviticus (Lev18:23). This curse is important in that it establishes the principle that statutes set previously forth in revelation recorded in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers as part of the original Sinaitic covenant, but not necessarily repeated in Deuteronomy, are nevertheless encompassed by the covenant renewal ceremony.

- [22] This curse related to the prohibition against the marriage of brothers and sisters (Lev18:9). The marriage of brothers/sisters was not prohibited before the Mosaic covenant, and indeed took place with the blessing of God before that time; from the time of Moses onward, however, it has been prohibited. This prohibition may have as much to do with the increasingly deteriorating genetic structure of fallen man, amplified in procreation by closely-related persons, as it does with inherent immorality; the continuing health/strength of the Hebrew race propagating into future generations was vital to the covenant, so it is specifically mentioned here.

- [23] This curse related to the prohibition of marrying one's mother-in-law, presumably for reasons akin to those of v20.

- [24] This curse related to a sin against one's neighbor that was committed "secretly", which presumably never became public knowledge and for that reason never received a public judgment (e.g., Exod21:12). Nevertheless, this curse asserts that such secret sin does not escape the notice of Jehovah, and the nation will be held accountable under the covenant for the secret sins of its citizens.

- [25] This curse related to the most central commandment of all, "Thou shalt not kill [i.e., murder]" (Deut5:17). All of the Law of Moses was built upon the principle that human life was to be respected and preserved, which is really just an amplification of the primary provision of the Noahic covenant previously established with all of creation (Gen9:5-6). Thus, even to accept a bribe to slay an "innocent person" (note, one condemned by the

Law and worthy of execution was excluded), whether the crime was successfully committed or not, was a heinous sin.

- [26] This final curse establishes the principle that the obligation under the covenant is to obey "all the words of this law to do them" (Cp., Jas2:10). The standard of obedience was perfection, and the Apostle Paul quotes this very verse in asserting that all men who attempt to live under the Law are condemned by it (Gal3:10-12).

CHAPTER 28

Deuteronomy 28 enumerates the "blessings" and "cursings" of the Mosaic covenant; a parallel (although briefer) account is given in Leviticus 26. Of particular note, the "blessings" Jehovah promised for obedience to His commandments (Deut28:1-14) were all material, earthly, temporal, and national, not spiritual, heavenly, eternal, and individual; eternal life is never promised to individuals for keeping the Law of Moses. Likewise, the "cursings" threatened for failing to keep His commandments (Deut28:15-68) are similarly material, earthly, temporal, and national; eternal damnation is never threatened to individuals for failure to keep the Law of Moses. Obedience to the Law of Moses had nothing to do with personal salvation/damnation.

GENERAL BLESSINGS PROMISED FOR OBEDIENCE UNDER THE COVENANT

- [1] The Mosaic covenant was a conditional, national covenant. Its purpose was to set forth Jehovah's standard for national righteousness and provide for the blessing of the nation of Israel in general, not individual Israelites in particular. "If" Israel had been faithful to the covenant (i.e., kept all of its commandments), Jehovah would have been blessed Israel "above all nations **of the earth**". Note that the ultimate blessing of the covenant was one to be enjoyed on the earth (not in heaven).
- [2] The conditional nature of the "blessings" is reiterated; they could be expected only "if" Israel's covenant commitments are kept.
- [3] The synecdoche of "city" and "field" is used to communicate that Jehovah's blessing would include every part of the nation.
- [4] Jehovah's blessing included fruitfulness in human reproduction for the Israelites, also to extend to fruitfulness in reproduction for their livestock.
- [5] Jehovah's blessing included fruitfulness in agricultural production.
- [6] Another synecdoche is used, "when thou comest in" and "when thou goest out", to communicate that Jehovah's blessing would be present at all times.
- [7] Jehovah's blessing included victory over "enemies". Note, however, that Israel's enemies are portrayed as the aggressors.

This blessing did not sanction militaristic imperialism on the part of Israel.

- [8] Jehovah's blessing extended to "all that thou settest thine hand unto" (consistent with the righteous standards set forth in the covenant commandments, statutes, and judgments). Note, however, that Jehovah's blessing of the nation was inextricably linked to her being "**in the land**" (i.e., Canaan).
- [9] The LORD's desire/purpose in entering into this covenant with the nation was to "establish" Israel as "a holy people".
- [10] God's 'missionary' program in the present age is for the Church to "go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk16:15; cf. Matt28:19-20; Act1:8). But this was not Jehovah's command to Israel during the previous age. Rather, Israel was to live as a nation under Jehovah's righteous standards as expressed in the Mosaic covenant, enjoying His blessing for obedience and suffering His chastisement for disobedience, thereby providing both a revelation and an object lesson of His righteousness to all other nations (cf. Deut4:5-8).
- [11] Jehovah's blessing was to include prosperity in every area of life, including descendants, livestock, and agriculture. But again it is reiterated that this blessing was to occur "**in the land**" which the LORD had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give to their descendants (Gen15:18-21; 26:3-4; 35:12).
- [12] Some of Jehovah's promised blessings to Israel would be provided *providentially*, as in the giving of "rain . . . in its season" (thus, when rain did not come "in its season" it was to be understood as a chastisement from Jehovah). All of Israel's needs were to be supplied by Jehovah, so there would be no need to "borrow" anything from other nations; in contrast, Jehovah's abundant blessing of Israel would allow her to "lend" to "many nations", thereby witnessing to them of the blessing and provision of Jehovah the God of Israel (in contrast to the pagan gods they worshipped).
- [13] Jehovah's purpose in establishing this covenant with Israel was to exalt her to be the "head" of all nations in order to provoke them (i.e., the Gentiles) to jealousy, just as God's blessing of the Church in the present age is intended to provoke unbelieving Israel to jealousy (Rom11:11).
- [14] A final reiteration is given that Jehovah's blessings under the covenant are contingent on full and unqualified obedience to all of His commandments. Idolatry is mentioned as the preeminent sign of covenant unfaithfulness on the part of Israel (Cp., Deut5:7).

GENERAL CURSINGS THREATENED FOR DISOBEDIENCE UNDER THE COVENANT

- [15] As the specific blessings promised to Israel for faithfulness under the covenant were enumerated in vv1-14, so the specific "curses" (i.e., consequences) for unfaithfulness are enumerated in vv15-68.

- [16] Parallel to the blessing of v3, the same synecdoche of is used to communicate that Jehovah's cursing would include every part of the nation.
- [17] Parallel to the blessing of v5, Jehovah's cursing included fruitlessness in agricultural production.
- [18] Parallel to the blessing of v4, Jehovah's cursing included fruitlessness in human reproduction for the Israelites, also to extend to fruitlessness in reproduction for their livestock.
- [19] Parallel to the blessing of v6, the same synecdoche is used to communicate that Jehovah's cursing would be present at all times.
- [20] Parallel to the blessing of v8, Jehovah's cursing extended to "all that thou settest thine hand to do".
- [21] As some of Jehovah's blessings were administered *providentially*, so also for some of His cursings. Jehovah's cursing included "pestilence" (i.e., disease) which would threaten to consume Israel from "off the land" (i.e., the place of Jehovah's blessing).
- [22] Jehovah's cursings were to include manifold diseases, both human sickness/suffering as well as "blight" and "mildew" to attack crops.
- [24] These figures of vv23-24 communicate that the "heaven" would not give rain in its season (Cp., v12), and as a consequence the "earth" will not produce crops. Thus, famine in Israel living under the Mosaic covenant (i.e., the O.T.) always indicates the nation is under divine judgment.
- [25] Parallel to the blessing of v7, Jehovah's cursing would include Israel's defeat by their "enemies", up to and including their physical "remove[al] into all the kingdoms of the earth" (i.e., removal from the Promised Land, the place of Jehovah's blessing).
- [26] Jehovah's cursing included disgraceful, physical death (but not necessarily eternal damnation).
- [27] Jehovah's cursing included all the incurable diseases of Egypt (Exod15:26; Deut7:15).
- [29] Jehovah's cursing also included various other physical maladies.
- [30] Jehovah's cursings included the taking of one's "wife" by another (i.e., destruction of the family) and the frustration of not personally benefiting from one's own labor (such frustrations are today consequences of the economic systems of socialism/communism).
- [31] Jehovah's cursings included the seizure of one's property (which is the ultimate consequence of a tax on property; the Law of Moses never taxed property, only income).
- [32] Jehovah's cursings included the seizure of one's children to be raised by others.

- [33] Jehovah's cursings included not only seizure of property, but also national and personal oppression at the hands of other nations.
- [34] Such seizure and oppression result in personal frustration. Why labor if the results of that labor only benefit others? This is a legitimate biblical criticism of the economic systems of socialism/communism. The LORD says that such frustration will drive men "mad".
- [35] Similar to v29.
- [36] Notice that in this verse the LORD anticipates the day when Israel will have a king (note that the Law provided for eventuality; Deut16:14-20). Nonetheless, Jehovah's cursings included captivity to, and exile in, another nation (i.e., Babylon; 2Kgs25:21), there being required to serve pagan gods (Dan3).
- [37] This verse prophesies that the 'wandering Jew', exiled from the Promised Land and scattered throughout the world, would become a well-known phenomena in "all nations".
- [39] Jehovah's cursings included plagues of "locusts" and "worms" to destroy crops (also v42; cf. Joell:4).
- [40] Jehovah's cursings included failure of "olive trees" to produce their "fruit".
- [41] Jehovah's cursings included fathers and mothers witnessing their children being taken into "captivity" as slaves in foreign lands (cf. Dan1:3).
- [43] Jehovah's design was for the nation of Israel to be a place where the Jew was given first place, and the "stranger" (i.e., Gentile) living within the Land, although treated with dignity and respect and always afforded justice, was to occupy a secondary position; after all, Jehovah had given the Gentiles preeminence in 70 nations of their own (Gen10:32; Deut32:8).
- [44] Jehovah's cursings included a reversal of this intended hierarchy within Israel.
- [45] An interruption in the enumeration of "curses" is taken to reiterate that these are sure consequences if Israel does not "keep [the LORD's] commandments and statutes" as they have voluntarily vowed to do on entering into the covenant with Jehovah (Deut26:17).
- [46] These curses are to be a "sign" and a "wonder" (i.e., an object lesson relative to the goodness of Jehovah for obedience to Him and the severity of Jehovah for disobedience to Him), not just to the nation of Israel, but to all nations (Deut4:5-8).
- [48] Jehovah had promised to abundantly provide for all of Israel's needs as a free and sovereign nation in return for her faithfulness to Him under the terms of the covenant. If unfaithful, Israel would find herself in want in all areas of life (e.g., hungry, thirsty, naked), compelled to serve other nations.

FOREIGN INVASION

- [49] Jehovah's cursings included the invasion of Israel by a foreign "nation" (i.e., Babylon).
- [50] In the prophetic vision received by Daniel, the king of "fierce countenance" would seem to be the Antichrist who emerges from the revived Roman empire during the Tribulation period (Dan8:23). Taken together, vv49-50 are probably a generic way of referring to "the times of the Gentiles" (Luk21:24), which began when Babylon conquered Judah in 605 BC and during which Israel will remain under Gentile domination through the Medo-Persian empire, the Greek empire, and the Roman empire (in both its original and revived forms).
- [51] While under Gentile domination, Israel will be compelled to pay tribute to foreign nations, or else have her national resources seized.
- [52] Israel's walled cities will be destroyed, including Jerusalem (by the Babylonians in 586 BC, and by the Romans in 70 AD).
- [57] The lengthy sieges of Jerusalem, prior to its fall, resulted in severe famine for the Jews trapped inside, such that parents were driven to eat their own children out of hunger and desperation (Cp., Lam4:10).
- [58] Again the enumerated curses are said to result from Israel's failure "to do all the words of this law".
- [59] Jehovah's cursings include great "plagues . . . of long continuance".
- [60] These plagues will include all the terrible and incurable "diseases" the Israelites witnessed and feared while in "Egypt".
- [61] The plagues will also include sicknesses never before seen by the Israelites (i.e., all existing diseases on earth). The purpose of such extreme "cursings" from Jehovah is that Israel "be destroyed" (as a nation).
- [62] Though the cursings of Jehovah may result in the destruction of Israel as a nation, it will never result in the extinction of the Jewish race; extinction cannot happen, though Jews as individuals may at times "be left few in number".

WORLD-WIDE DISPERSION

- [63] The ultimate curse of the Mosaic covenant was exile of the nation (i.e., removal of the nation from the Promised Land).
- [64] In 605 BC, the nation of Judah was taken captive to Babylon; they returned 70 years later when the nation repented under the ministries of Ezekiel and Daniel (cf. Dan9:3-19). In 70 AD, the nation of Israel was scattered by the Romans into all the nations

of the world, where individuals Jews have wandered for the better part of two millennia.

[65] Whereas the Promised Land was to be the place of blessing for the Jews, they have been incessantly persecuted while dwelling in the nations of the Gentiles.

[66] The very survival of the Jewish race has hung in the balance while dispersed among the Gentile nations, as Satanic plots to destroy the Jews have repeatedly sought their total extermination (i.e., under Haman in the Persian Empire, under Hitler in Nazi Germany).

[67] Life for the Jewish people living under the chastisement of Jehovah among the Gentile nations would be for them one of perpetual fear.

[68] The ultimate curse of national dispersion would return Israel to her condition prior to entering into the Sinaitic covenant with Jehovah; that is, Israel would again be "slaves" among Gentile nations as she had been in "Egypt".

CHAPTER 29

The threat of the ultimate curse of the Mosaic covenant for national unfaithfulness, that of removal of the nation of Israel from the Land of Promise (Deut28:63-68), created a paradox that necessitated resolution (really clarification). A tension existed between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. The Abrahamic covenant, given four centuries before the Mosaic covenant, had promised Abraham that his descendants would be given the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession (Gen12:1,7; 13:14-17; 15:18-21); since the Abrahamic covenant is an unconditional covenant, no conditions are attached to this promise, and it cannot be forfeited by disobedience on the part of Abraham's descendants (i.e., Israel). The Apostle Paul makes clear that the subsequent giving of the Mosaic covenant in no way annulled any part of the Abrahamic covenant (Gal3:17-18).

The LORD resolved this tension by introducing another covenant. This covenant is not named in Scripture, but theologians have long referred to it as the 'Palestinian covenant' since it has to do with the land of Palestine (a name given to the land of Israel by the Romans in the 2nd century AD); however, since Palestine is not the name for the Land used in Scripture, and since this name has come to be used in modern times by the enemies of Israel as part of their anti-biblical agenda, many sound Bible teachers now refer to this covenant simply as the **Land Covenant**. The Land covenant is not really a new covenant, but is better thought of as an elaboration or amplification of one aspect of the Abrahamic covenant. The Abrahamic covenant embodies 3 broad promises to Abraham and his descendants: 1) their own land, 2) a perpetual seed, and 3) blessing to come to the entire world through them. God, in the process of time, introduced 3 additional covenants to amplify each of the 3 broad promises of the Abrahamic covenant; namely, the Land covenant amplifies the land promise, the Davidic covenant amplifies the seed promise, and the New covenant amplifies the promise of world-wide blessing (see attached chart). Since the Abrahamic covenant is an unconditional covenant, each of the 3 covenants which amplify its promises are likewise unconditional.

THE LAND COVENANT

- [1] To resolve the tension created by the final and ultimate curse of the Mosaic covenant (Deut28:63-68), that of dispersion of the nation from the Promised Land, the LORD "commanded Moses" to make another "**covenant**" with "the children of Israel". It is made explicit that this covenant, which is being made with Israel as they are encamped in the land of "Moab", is "beside" (i.e., in addition to) the covenant made in "Horeb" (i.e., Sinai, a reference to the Sinaitic/Mosaic covenant).
- [2] As background to the (Land) covenant, the nation was called to remember their history that had brought them to this place, a history that for the nation began when Jehovah supernaturally delivered it from slavery to "Pharaoh" in "Egypt".
- [3] At this time there were still those living among them who had "seen" the "great miracles" Jehovah performed in Egypt on behalf of the nation with their own eyes (e.g., Moses, Joshua, Caleb).
- [4] Nonetheless, the first generation of the nation of Israel refused to believe the promise of Jehovah to give them the land of Canaan for their possession.
- [5] That failure to believe was disobedience and rebellion, which resulted in a judgment from Jehovah that the nation would wander "forty years in the wilderness". And yet, that judgment of Jehovah on that generation of Israel did not mean that the nation had been rejected by Him. As evidence of that truth, He supernaturally preserved the nation in the wilderness.
- [6] For forty years, Israel ate manna that came down from heaven nightly and drank water that Moses called from a rock. Were it not for Jehovah's daily supernatural provision, the nation would have perished in the wilderness.
- [7] Jehovah gave Israel victory over "Sihon" and "Og", both demonic kings, whose people occupied "Bashan", the portion of the Promised Land lying east of the Jordan River.
- [8] Thus, even at this time, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh had already received "their land".
- [9] This historical remembrance is meant to illustrate the principle that Jehovah will bring blessing for obedience, just as He has promised.
- [11] Verses 10-11 call detailed attention to those with which the LORD is going to enter into a new (Land) covenant; it is with the nation of Israel, but that nation includes every individual then present among them.
- [12] The nation of Israel entered into the (Land) "covenant" with "the LORD" on "this day" in the plains of Moab (v1). Note that there have been no conditions enumerated, which Israel is obligated to

keep as a part of this covenant, but that this covenant will be on an "oath" (an unconditional and unilateral commitment) of Jehovah.

- [13] Here it is made clear that this Land covenant was made by the LORD with Israel so that He can keep the promise He made "to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (i.e., the Abrahamic covenant).
- [14] The Land covenant (i.e., the "oath" of Jehovah) was made in particular with the generation of Israel present in Moab.
- [15] However, being an unconditional (and therefore eternal) covenant, it is also made with the whole nation of Israel in general, all the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to come who are corporately party to the Abrahamic covenant.
- [16] Another call to historical remembrance is made.
- [17] Israel had seen the "abominations" and "idol[atry]" which permeated the (Gentile) "nations" through which she has passed.
- [19] Failure on the part of Israel to keep (above all others) the first commandment of the Mosaic covenant, "Thou shalt have no other gods before [Jehovah]" (Deut5:7), and to go after "the gods of these nations", will bring the "curse" of that covenant. As surely as obedience would bring blessing, disobedience would bring judgment.
- [21] The precise and literal "curses" that will come for disobedience, especially idolatry, under the Mosaic "covenant" were enumerated in Deuteronomy 28:15-68.
- [22] The literal "plagues" and "sicknesses" that would come upon Israel would be a witness, both to future generations of the nation of Israel as well as the "stranger . . . from a far land" (i.e., the Gentiles), that disobedience to Jehovah brings judgment.
- [23] Just as surely as Jehovah "overthrew" the Gentiles for their rebellion (i.e., the cities of the plain given over to homosexual sin which were destroyed in the days of Abraham, including "Sodom" and "Gomorrhah"; Gen14:2; 19:22-29), so He will overthrow Israel for her rebellion. The judgment of Israel will include a devastation of "the whole land", since it is the Promised Land that Jehovah uses as His instrument to bless the nation.
- [24] Note that the judgment of the nation of Israel, including the Land of Israel, has a world-wide missiological purpose (cf. Deut4:5-8).
- [25] The missiological purpose of God's (Sinaitic/Mosaic) "covenant" made with the nation of Israel is to teach all nations that disobedience to Jehovah brings judgment (cf. Act17:30).
- [26] The Mosaic covenant requires exclusive worship of Jehovah (Deut5:7), and the "worship" of any other "gods" by Israel is the preeminent sign of covenant unfaithfulness.
- [27] The "curses" of the Mosaic covenant (Deut28:15-68) are directed toward the nation of Israel in general, but they are directed at the "land" of Israel in particular.

- [28] This brings attention back to the ultimate "curse" of the Mosaic covenant, which was exile of the nation of Israel from the Land of Promise "into another land".
- [29] This almost proverbial verse, given in this context, is somewhat enigmatic. Specifically, what are those "secret things" and "those things which are revealed"? Again, Deuteronomy 29-30 are revelation from the LORD that resolve the paradox (i.e., and apparent contradiction) that comes from the tension between the Abrahamic and Sinaitic/Mosaic covenants relative to the unconditional promise that Israel will inherit the Promised Land forever, yet can be dispersed from it for disobedience. Further clarification comes in Chapter 30.

CHAPTER 30

THE LAND COVENANT CONT'D: REPENTANCE WILL BRING RESTORATION

- [1] Deuteronomy 28 laid out in detail the "blessing" and "cursing" to be expected by Israel for faithfulness/unfaithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant, culminating in exile from the land of promise and dispersion of the Jews into all nations as the ultimate judgment (Deut28:63-68). The omniscient Jehovah foresees that the unfaithfulness of Israel will result in this "curse" being visited on the nation. It happened in a limited sense with the Babylonian captivity of Judah (605 BC) for 70 years, and it happened in its fullest sense when the Romans drove the Jews out of Israel (70-135 AD) for the better part of two millennia (which endures to the present day).
- [2] Whereas the Mosaic covenant pronounces national judgment on Israel for disobedience, the Abrahamic covenant (clarified here in the context of the Land covenant; Deut29:1) ensures that restoration of Israel to the land promised forever to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (and their descendants) will result when the Jews "return unto the LORD" (i.e., repent).
- [3] National repentance is not viewed as contingent or conditional, but inevitable. In vv1-2, "when" (not 'if') the nation repents, and in v3 "then" Jehovah will terminate their "captivity" and "return and gather" the Jews "from all the nations" into which He has scattered them.
- [4] In view is a captivity/dispersion of the Jews that is global in nature, which is why the Babylonian captivity of Judah (and return 70 years later) was not the fulfillment of this covenant.
- [5] It is a regathering of all Jews from the world-wide dispersion of the past two millennia, which will not occur until the return of Christ (Matt24:30-31; Mk13:26-27), that is in view; when this takes place, the Land covenant (i.e., the promise of a land set forth in the Abrahamic covenant) will be fulfilled, and the nation will "possess" their land from that point forward, forever.
- [6] A permanent restoration of the nation of Israel to the Promised Land necessitates national regeneration (i.e., the salvation of

member of the Jewish nation), which is ensured by the New covenant (Jer31:31-34; Ezek36:24-28; Rom11:26-27).

- [7] When Israel as a nation is fully regenerated (i.e., all Jews are genuine believers) and in possession of the Promised Land, then Israel will be the "head" of all nations of the earth (Deut28:13). At that time, all [Gentile] nations which have persecuted the Jews will be judged (Joel3:1-2,12-14; Matt25:31-46).
- [8] Fulfillment of the New covenant will result in a wholly regenerated and Spirit-filled/led nation of Israel which will have the ability to fully obey and remain forever faithful to the LORD. This is in contrast to Israel under the Mosaic covenant, which demanded obedience but gave the Jewish believer no power to obey (cf. Heb8:6-13).
- [9] Though no longer under the Mosaic covenant, nonetheless a regenerated nation of Israel restored to the Promised Land will enjoy all its promised blessings (and much more; Amos9:13-15).

ISRAEL UNDER THE MOSAIC COVENANT

- [10] The focus returns from the eschatological fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant to the present reality of Israel under the Mosaic covenant, in which the nation of Israel has been commanded to "keep [Jehovah's] commandments and statutes which are written in this book of the law".
- [13] Verses 11-13, using figurative language, communicate the important truth that in the Mosaic covenant (in particular, and in Scripture in general), Jehovah God has revealed His will and His standards in clear and plain language that is accessible to all of His creatures (cf. Psalm 19).
- [14] God's revelation is **verbal** and **comprehensible**. It is not a subjective, mystical feeling, nor is it too difficult or unclear to be understood by man. Addressing unbelieving Israel in Romans 10, the Apostle Paul alludes to these very verses (Deut30:12-14; Rom10:6-8) in asserting that Israel's rejection of Christ as Lord was not ignorance, but rebellion.
- [15] It is because His revelation is clear that He can demand perfect obedience on the part of Israel.
- [16] This verse is not promising 'eternal life' in heaven for keeping God's commandments (which would be salvation by works), but it is promising Israel long [earthly] life "in the land" as a temporal blessing for covenant faithfulness.
- [17] Unfaithfulness to the Mosaic covenant will manifest itself most clearly by idolatry, a violation of the 1st and 2nd Commandments (Deut5:7-10).
- [18] Covenant unfaithfulness will result in the nation "perish[ing]", which is **not** extinction, but defined by this verse as "ye shall not prolong your days upon the land" (i.e., national possession of the Promised Land).

- [19] Jehovah calls upon "heaven and earth" (i.e., all of creation; Cp., Deut32:1; Isal:2-4; Jer2:9-13; Mic6:1-2) to act as witnesses to this covenant He is making with the nation of Israel (Deut4:26); this reiterates the point that Israel's covenant relationship with Jehovah is intended to be a revelation of the one true God, and His character, to all nations (Deut4:6-8).

Jehovah's desire is that Israel "choose life" and enjoy His "blessing"; however, the nation is free to choose "life" or "death".

- [20] Jehovah is "life", even as the Lord Jesus Christ is "the resurrection and the life" (Jn11:25). The greatest 'commandment' is to "love the LORD" (Deut6:5; Matt22:36-38; Mk28-30; Luk10:25-27); obeying Jehovah, by keeping the specific commandments of the Mosaic covenant, was the way in which Israel was to express their love for Him, which would result in the blessings promised in the covenant.

CHAPTER 31

PROVISION FOR SUCCESSION (Deut31:1-34:12)

- [1] Moses is now bringing his discourse to a conclusion and an end.
- [2] Moses calls attention to the fact that he will not be entering the Promised Land with Israel for two reasons: 1) at 120 he is too old to lead the nation into war, and 2) as a consequence of his personal disobedience at Meribah (Num20:1-13), the LORD has disciplined Moses by consigning him to die in the wilderness along with the rebellious generation (Num27:12-14).
- [3] Moses has led the children of Israel for 40 years, and his death will be a traumatic event for the nation. To arrest any possible discouragement this event may have on the nation, Moses directs their attention to the LORD; it was **Jehovah** that truly led Israel for the past 40 years, and it will be **Jehovah** that will go before Israel into Canaan and "destroy the nations" dwelling there. As for a human leader to succeed Moses, "Joshua", one of the two faithful men from the previous generation (Num14:30), has been selected by the LORD (cf. Num27:18).
- [4] Note how the LORD, through Moses, consistently calls Israel to remember her history. The LORD is not asking Israel to exercise so-called 'blind faith' in His promise to give Israel victory over the nations dwelling in Canaan. Rather, He is calling on the nation to trust Him, a God who has proven Himself to be worthy of their trust; He has already given them victory over "Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites" (who, incidentally, were literal giants descended from Anak; Deut3:11).
- [5] The LORD has commanded Israel to utterly destroy all the nations dwelling in Canaan (Deut7:2; 20:17), and He will deliver them into Israel's hand so that they can accomplish "all the commandments" which He has commanded.

- [6] Because the LORD "doth go with thee", and "will not fail thee, nor forsake thee", He can exhort Israel to "Be strong and of good courage, fear not" (Cp., Heb13:5 is a similar promise to the Christian that the Lord Jesus will "never leave thee, nor forsake thee").
- [7] Moses, "in the sight of all Israel", anoints Joshua as the leader over Israel to succeed him; Joshua was not democratically elected, nor was he selected by Moses, but he was chosen by the LORD (Num27:18).
- [8] As with Moses (vv2-3), it should not be Joshua no whom the people depend for victory, but the LORD.
- [9] "Moses wrote this law", which should be understood to be (at least) the Book of Deuteronomy (if not the entire Pentateuch), and delivered it to "the priests [and] the sons of Levi" who had been charged not only with preserving it, but with teaching it to the nation.
- [11] Since it was not possible at this time in history for every individual (or family) to have a personal copy of Scripture, the LORD commanded that the entire "law" be read in the hearing of all the nation every 7 years at the "feast of tabernacles", attendance at which was mandatory (Deut16:16).
- [12] The LORD wanted His word to be "heard" and "learned" by all in Israel, which included "men", "women", "children", and even the "stranger" (i.e., Gentile).
- [13] The LORD is concerned that His law (i.e., His revelation) is learned and understood not only by this generation, but that it is passed on to the next generation (Cp., 2Tim2:2).
- [14] This is an example of why Moses was unlike every other 'prophet'. Only Moses, on frequent occasions, met with the LORD "face to face" (Deut34:10); in this case he was to be accompanied by Joshua.
- [15] The "pillar of cloud" was a physical manifestation of the glory of the LORD; Moses and Joshua are in the very presence of God.
- [16] The LORD shares with Moses and Joshua that Israel will "break" the "covenant" they have made with Him and "go a whoring after the gods of" the Canaanites. It is not that Jehovah has ordained this, but that the omniscient Lord GOD has foreseen it.
- [17] In His anger over Israel's unfaithfulness, Jehovah will "forsake" Israel, not in an ultimate sense (Cp., Rom11:1-2), but in the sense that the curses of this [Mosaic] covenant (i.e., Deut28:15-68) will be executed upon the nation.
- [18] The priestly (so-called Aaronic) blessing to be pronounced on the nation (Num6:22-27) included that Jehovah "make His face shine upon thee", and "lift up His countenance upon thee"; the opposite of this would be for Jehovah to "surely hide [His] face" from Israel (i.e., withhold His blessing).

- [19] The LORD commands that the song (of Deuteronomy 32) be written as a testimony, both of Jehovah's historical faithfulness to the nation of Israel as well as a prophecy of Israel's coming unfaithfulness to Him.
- [21] The "song" will stand as a testimony to the utter unreasonableness of Israel's forsaking the LORD after all He has done for them.
- [22] Moses "wrote this song" (i.e., the so-called Song of Moses; Deut32:1-43) on this very day, and "taught it to the children of Israel". Thus, even without a personal copy of Scripture, every member of the nation of Israel would have been able to remember and recite the history (both past and future) of Jehovah's work on behalf of His people Israel.
- [23] The LORD, meeting with Joshua 'face to face' in the tabernacle, gave him the assurance that He would be with him in taking the Israelites into the Promised Land.
- [24] The revelation of God to Israel was not merely a tradition passed down by word of mouth for centuries before being committed to writing (in the days of Ezra, as asserted by unbelieving liberal 'scholars'), but was from the very time it was given to Moses written "in a book".
- [26] This original writing³⁶ of the Book of Deuteronomy (perhaps the entire Torah) was to be kept "in the side" (i.e., along side) the "ark of the covenant". Since the very Presence of Jehovah was associated with the ark of the covenant (Exod25:22), especially when it was located inside the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle/Temple, the written record of the [Mosaic] covenant would be always present with the LORD. Thus, the stone tables upon which the LORD Himself inscribed the Ten Commandments were kept inside the ark, and the original Book of the Law which Moses penned was kept along side the ark.
- [27] Moses has known the unrelenting tendency of Israel to rebel against the LORD all his life, even while he has been present to check this tendency, and he can imagine that they will quickly rebel after his death.
- [28] Again, "heaven and earth" (i.e., all of creation; cf. Deut4:26; 30:19) is designated as the witnesses to this covenant between Jehovah and the nation of Israel. It is for this reason that it is of vital importance that even we today, Christians living in the Church Age, at a time when this covenant is passed away, must diligently study this portion of Scripture—for the LORD has much He would have us to learn about Him, His immutable Character, and His works in history, in our role as witnesses to this covenant.
- [29] Moses knows, from the sure testimony of the Word of God, that Israel will fail to keep its national commitments under this [Mosaic] covenant.
- [30] The words of the "song" of Moses are recorded as Deuteronomy 32:1-43.

³⁶ The original writing down of a portion of Scripture is called the *autographa*.

CHAPTER 32

THE SONG OF MOSES: ISRAEL'S NATIONAL ANTHEM

Most modern nations, including America, have a national anthem. National anthems are written to provoke devotion and patriotism in citizens, and usually include key historical information concerning the nation. For many western nations having had a Christian base for society in recent centuries, the God of the Bible is frequently acknowledged in their anthems.

National Anthem of the U.S.A. The lyrics for the song we know today as our National Anthem were originally composed as a poem by American ambassador Francis Scott Key while being held on board a British warship during the War of 1812. From the enemy warship HMS *Surprise*, Key witnessed the naval bombardment of Ft. McHenry from Baltimore Harbor. It was later set to music, renamed "The Star-Spangled Banner", and made our National Anthem by congressional resolution on March 3, 1931. Generally, only the first of the four verses of the Anthem are sung. The fourth verse includes this stanza:

*Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the Heav'n rescued land
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust".*

Hardwired into our own National Anthem is an acknowledgment that America as a nation owes its origin and preservation to the One True God! "In God We Trust", taken from the fourth verse of The Star-Spangled Banner, was adopted as our National Motto in 1956.

The nation of Israel also had a national anthem. Their national anthem not only acknowledges the LORD, it was written by Him! Deuteronomy 32:1-43, often labeled the "Song of Moses" by commentators, is indeed a "song" (Deut31:31; 32:44) inspired by God to recount the Sinaitic Covenant (as renewed in the Book of Deuteronomy) and the key historical events that led up to the covenant, upon which the nation of Israel was founded. Furthermore, Israel's future history (i.e., prophetic future) is also included in the song. Since the ordinary citizen of Israel would generally not possess a personal copy of Scripture, God commanded that this "song" be learned by every Israelite, and that it be taught to all subsequent generations (Deut31:19; 32:46).

INVOCATION OF WITNESSES TO THE SINIATIC COVENANT

- [1] The words of this song are the words of Jehovah, the Great King (i.e., Suzerain) who is sovereign over the vassal nation Israel. A key element of the Hittite Suzerain-vassal treaty form is the designation of witnesses to the covenant, to which formal appeal will be made if one of the parties is alleged to have failed to keep covenant commitments; in this instance, the two witnesses are "heavens" and the "earth" (cf. Isal:2; Jer6:19; 22:29; Mic1:2), which is really the Hebrew way of saying 'all of creation'.

- [2] The "doctrine" (i.e., statutes, teaching) that the LORD has given to Israel is likened to "rain", "dew" and "showers", meaning it is that which will nourish, sustain, and grow the nation.
- [3] In this verse, Moses assumes his place as a witness to the "name of the LORD" (i.e., His character) and His "greatness"; so would each individual Jew as he participated in the regular singing of this anthem.
- [4] The nature of the LORD who gave the covenant is exalted. All His work is "perfect" (Cp., Gen1:31). He is said to be "justice" and "truth" (not merely just and true), meaning that it is the very nature and character of Jehovah that defines both "justice" and "truth". His revelation is the standard against which every cause or truth-claim must be evaluated (Isa8:20); He is never compared to any standard outside of Himself. By definition, His ways and His works are **always** "just" and "right".

Furthermore, "the Rock" is a common appellative of Jehovah throughout the Old Testament to denote His steadfastness, reliability and immutability (Ps102:27; Mal3:6; Jas1:17); He does not change, so what is just and true in the past is just and true today and will always be just and true in the future! The stability of a nation depends upon the immutability of its standard of "justice" and "truth", which can only be found in the nature and character of God, and which God has revealed to men in Scripture; all humanistic standards for justice and truth invariably change with time, undergo certain decay, and lead to an eventual chaos that destroys the nation.

INDICTMENT OF ISRAEL BY JEHOVAH

- [5] The history of Israel, as well as their prophesied future, is one of rebellion against Jehovah, the gracious God who is the source of all their blessings. They "corrupt themselves" by worshipping other gods (Ex32:1-6; Isal:2-4; Hos1:2), so much so that if only the Sinaitic covenant governed their relationship with Jehovah, Israel would render herself "not ... His children" (cf. Ex 32:9-10; Hos1:9) by failure to keep her covenant commitments. (Jehovah's relationship with Israel is governed not by the conditional Sinaitic covenant alone, but also by the unconditional Abrahamic covenant.)
- [6] Israel's rebellion is utterly "foolish" and "unwise". They rebel against the gracious God who "made" and "established" them as a people/nation, and who "bought" (i.e., redeemed) them out of bondage to the Egyptians (and who in the future will redeem them out of bondage to sin by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ).

REVIEW OF PAST BLESSINGS OF JEHOVAH ON ISRAEL

- [7] "Remember" (i.e., do not forget) is a recurring exhortation in Deuteronomy. The nation must work to remember Jehovah's past acts of grace and blessing on Israel. It will be the duty of the "father" within each family and the "elders" of the nation to instruct future generations in this history.

- [8] Israel as a nation is unique. The desire of "the Most High" God is that she would sit as "head" of all the nations (Deut28:13). The very architecture of the world's nations was designed by God with this predetermined end in mind. When God divided the world into 70 nations at Babel (Gen10-11), with their assigned geographical allotments, he did so knowing He would call out from them the new nation of Israel founded on the family of Jacob who numbered 70 individuals (Gen46:27; Act17:26).
- [9] "Jacob", or the nation of Israel, the LORD calls "His inheritance". Israel is special to God (Ex19:5; Deut7:6), and she has been/will be unique recipient of His grace and mercy.
- [10] Though Jehovah's special relationship with the Jewish people starts with Abraham, the historical record of Israel as a nation begins with the post-exodus covenant at Mt. Sinai followed immediately by the wilderness wanderings. The LORD supernaturally preserved the nation in the wilderness, for she is "the apple of His eye" (Zech2:8). The Hebrew word rendered "apple" means the pupil of the eye, or very "center" of vision. God's purpose for Israel as a nation is central to His plan for all of creation (Rom11:15)!
- [11] Since Israel as a nation is central to the LORD's plan for all of creation, He devoted Himself to her care, protection and nourishment even as a mother "eagle" does so "over her young". Incidentally, when the Lord Jesus takes this metaphor and places Himself in the role of the mother (Matt23:37), He was implicitly declaring Himself to be Jehovah!
- [12] Israel owes her origin and preservation to "Jehovah alone".
- [14] Vv13-14 are poetic expressions of the abundant blessing the LORD bestowed on His special people Israel, especially in His gift of the Land of Canaan (Num13:20-27) to them as an everlasting possession (Gen13:15).

ISRAEL'S REBELLION

- [15] "Jeshurun" means 'the upright one' and is a poetic expression used for Israel (as she was ideally meant to be; cf. Deut33:5,26; Isa44:2). Israel's departure from the LORD, both past and future, would not occur during times of national want or suffering, but when she was "fat" (i.e., prosperous because of blessing from God), which makes her rebellion the ultimate ingratitude (Rom1:21) and particularly heinous.
- [16] The greatest sin is the sin of idolatry, or the worship of "gods" other than Jehovah. It is the ascribing of the glory rightly due to the LORD to another (and since the LORD alone is God, it is the ascribing of His glory to a creature—this is blasphemy). Its prohibition is the very **first** of the ten commandments (Deut5:7). Thus, national idolatry is uniquely indicative of Israel's failure to keep its commitments under the Sinaitic covenant.

- [17] These other "gods" are not gods at all, but "demons" (1Cor10:20), and demons are creatures (Cp., Rom1:25).
- [18] This covenant failure by Israel occurred/would occur because the nation had "forgotten" God and His past acts on behalf of His people, making the repeated exhortation to "remember" (v7) all the more urgent.

JEHOVAH'S PROMISE OF JUDGMENT

- [19] The occasion of such rebellion by the nation in the past was the worship of the golden calf at Sinai (Ex32:1-6); on this occasion, the LORD threatened to "consume them" in judgment, indicating that their idolatry was a catastrophic breach of the Sinaitic covenant on the part of Israel.
- [20] The people ascribed the supernatural work of their deliverance from Egypt, the work of Jehovah alone, to the golden calf (Ex32:4,8). God calls this "vanity" (Hebrew, *habel*) which justifiably provokes Him to "anger".
- [21] Idolatry "moves" Jehovah to "jealousy", as promised in the **second** of the ten commandments (Deut5:9). Here the LORD makes use of irony in His judgment of Israel. Since Israel has moved Him to jealousy by bestowing worship due to God alone on that which is "not ... God" (v17), He will move them to jealousy by bestowing blessing that should be theirs as His peculiar people and treasured nation on those who are "not a people" and a "foolish nation". The Apostle Paul clarifies that this instrument of jealousy to provoke Israel, which will lead to her national repentance, is the [largely] Gentile Church (Rom9:24-30; 10:19-11:15), which is not a people (but includes individuals from all peoples) and is not a nation (but is comprised of individuals distributed in every nation).
- [22] Disloyalty to the Sinaitic covenant would bring divine judgment. The judgments enumerated in vv. 24-25 are representative of the promised "curses" built into the covenant for disobedience on the part of Israel.
- [24] The curses include "hunger" (Lev26:29; Deut28:48), "beasts" (Lev26:22),
- [25] "the sword without" (Deut28:49-57), and "terror within" (Deut28:65-66). The judgment of God will extend to all, male and female, young and old—none will escape.

THE POWERLESSNESS OF OTHER GODS

- [26] The ultimate curse of the Sinaitic covenant is dispersion from the Promised Land of Canaan into all the world (Lev26:32-39; Deut28:63-68).
- [27] In disciplining Israel for disobedience to their covenant with Him, the LORD will stop short of annihilating Israel as a people. This will be for two reasons: 1) His prior, unconditional

covenant with Abraham will not allow it (Gen12:1-3; 13:15); and 2) He fears that such an action would be misinterpreted by the Gentiles, who might believe that they in their own power had triumphed over Israel, rather than recognizing Israel's defeat as Jehovah's judgment on her for her sin. Moses had previously used this same line of reasoning with the LORD (Ex32:11-14).

- [28] The LORD had not given special revelation to any nation other than Israel (Rom3:1-2), therefore the Gentiles are "void of counsel" and without "understanding" concerning the one true God. The nation of Israel is God's object lesson to them to teach them of His character and righteousness (Deut4:5-8).
- [29] God's desire is that the Gentiles learn the lesson He wishes to teach them through Israel, for their "latter end" (i.e., their ultimate destiny) is inextricably linked to the nation of Israel and their relationship to her (Gen12:2-3; Joel3:2-17; Matt25:31-46).
- [30] When Israel is defeated in battle by an obviously inferior force (Cp., Num14:39-45; Josh7:1-6), it should be clear to all that she is being judged by her God for covenant disobedience.
- [31] As history unfolds, the Gentile nations who witness Jehovah's dealings with Israel will have to admit that their "rock" (i.e., their pagan god/gods) is nothing like the "Rock", the God of Israel.
- [32] The "vine" (i.e., fruit) that comes from the Gentile worship of pagan gods is perversion, as in "Sodom" and "Gomorrhah".
- [35] The perversions of the Gentile nations will lead to their eventual judgment by the one true God (v35).
- [36] The LORD's desire is for the Gentiles to learn of His righteousness for their own nations by observing the nation of Israel (Deut4:5-8). This is why God takes Israel's covenant disobedience so seriously—it not only affects Israel, but confuses His intended witness to the Gentile nations through her. Israel's national obedience/disobedience affects the whole world!
- Nevertheless, the LORD will "repent" (i.e., stop short) of destroying the nation of Israel because of His unconditional covenant with Abraham.
- [37] In showing mercy to the nation of Israel, the LORD further instructs the Gentiles regarding His character, for none of the pagan "gods" are known for being merciful.
- [38] The ultimate demonstration will be when the one true God, Jehovah, visits the Gentile nations in judgment. Their pagan gods to whom they have offered untold "sacrifices" will not be able to save them.

THE VINDICATION OF JEHOVAH

- [39] The LORD's ultimate objective is to show all the world that He alone is God—and there is no other! Jehovah is absolutely sovereign over both Israel and the Gentile nations.
- [40] The LORD, in effect, takes an oath before all of creation and asserts that "I live forever". Jehovah is asserting the most fundamental attributes of Deity, those of eternality (Ps90:2) and aseity (Ex3:14).
- [41] Jehovah asserts His attributes of justice and omnipotence. He has the power to "render vengeance" on "them who hate" Him, and His justice demands that He do so.
- [43] In conclusion, both the Gentile "nations" and "His people" Israel are exhorted to "rejoice" at having been instructed in the righteousness and justice of Jehovah. The moral and ethical inequalities that occur in history will be set right in the time appointed by the one true God. Ultimately, in His mercy, Jehovah will restore "His people" Israel to the "land" He has promised them forever under the Abrahamic covenant (Gen13:15; Amos9:14-15).

This ends the Song of Moses, the national anthem of Israel.

MOSES COMMANDED TO ASCEND MT. NEBO

- [44] "Hoshea" is Joshua (Num13:16).
- [46] Moses commanded all Israel to **learn this song** (Deut31:19), which encapsulates Jehovah's historical work on behalf of the nation of Israel, and to "observe to do, all the words of this law".
- [47] Israel's continuation in the Promised Land under Jehovah's hand of blessing is dependent on the nation keeping its commitments under the Mosaic covenant. It is not long life promised to individual Jews that is promised here, but "prolong[ed]" existence of the nation of Israel "in the land".
- [49] Moses' ministry to the nation is now complete. The "very same day" that he completed this discourse regarding the law, the LORD commanded Moses to ascend Mt. Nebo, a high peak located in Moab directly across the Jordan river from Jericho; Moses will not be allowed to enter the Promised Land, but immediately before his death he is allowed to view it from this mountaintop.
- [50] Moses dies atop Mt. Nebo in Moab.
- [51] Moses' death at this time was a judgment for his sin against the LORD at "Meribah" (Num20:1-13). This is an example of "a sin unto death" (1Jn5:16).
- [52] Even in executing judgment on Moses for his prior sin, the LORD shows grace in letting him see "the land which I give the children of Israel".

CHAPTER 33

MOSES BLESSES THE TRIBES OF ISRAEL

Deuteronomy 33 records the blessing of Moses on the individual tribes of Israel (although one will be omitted). While superficially similar to the blessing of Jacob on his twelve sons just prior to his own death (Gen49:1-28), the purpose of the two "blessings" are different. Though Jacob's action is described at its conclusion as a "blessing" (Gen49:28), at its opening it announced that its purpose was primarily prophetic; "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days" (Gen49:1). Moses' action here conforms more to that of a traditional, patriarchal "blessing" (Deut33:1) in which he expresses his hopes/desires for each tribe, almost in the form of an intercessory prayer, rather than merely a prediction of their future courses. These "blessings" may, in fact, have been unique blessings available to each tribe in particular for tribal faithfulness under the Mosaic covenant, complementing the national blessings promised to Israel as a whole (Deut28:1-14). Thus, even during times of national apostasy in general, individual tribes had the opportunity to receive a limited blessing for remaining faithful to the LORD.

- [1] Moses offers a patriarchal "blessing" on "the children of Israel", apparently just prior to ascending Mt. Nebo to die. Moses is referred to as "the man of God" (Cp., Psalm 90, same title used in inscription of the only psalm attributed to Moses).

HISTORICAL REVIEW IN POETIC FORM

As has occurred often in the Book of Deuteronomy (cf. Deut1:6-4:40; 9:7-10:10; 26:5-9; 29:2-8; 32:7-43), a parenthesis is inserted for an historical review of Jehovah's relationship with, and past work on behalf of, Israel. This occurs again in vv2-5, although in this instance it is presented using poetic and highly figurative language.

- [2] Jehovah is portrayed as a military leader who heads an army of "ten thousands of saints", literally 'holy ones', which are the angelic host of heaven (Cp., Ps68:17). In His hand is a "fiery law" which He revealed at "Sinai".
- [3] The fiery law was His "word", which was received by "the people", also called "His saints", whom He "loved"; these "saints" are the children of Israel.
- [4] Jehovah's giving of the "law" to Israel was mediated through the man "Moses". This law of Moses was the unique "inheritance of the congregation of Jacob"; it was not given to any other people, but to Israel only, the peculiar treasure of Jehovah above all people (Exod19:5).
- [5] Jehovah is referred to as "king" over "Jeshurun" (lit., 'upright one', His pet name for Israel). It was as Israel's "king" that He was authorized to summon the "heads" and "tribes" of Israel to meet with Him at Sinai (Exod19:9-11), and it is as "king" that He pronounces the blessings on the tribes (through Moses as mediator) in the remainder of this chapter.

REUBEN

- [6] Jacob had prophesied that the tribe of Reuben would not excel because of Reuben's sin (Gen49:3-4; cf. Gen35:22), for which he also forfeited the rights of the firstborn (1Chron5:1-2). Indeed, no prophet, judge, or king is recorded in Scripture as coming from the tribe of Reuben. Nevertheless, Moses' blessing that Reuben "live, and not die; and let not his men be few" offers the opportunity for tribal prosperity and growth for covenant faithfulness.

JUDAH

- [7] Moses' blessing on the tribe of Judah is a petition for power to unite "his people" and divine deliverance over "enemies". This blessing anticipates Judah as the royal tribe which will produce the kings of Israel, culminating in King Messiah (Gen49:10; Rev5:5).

LEVI

- [8] The "Thummim" and "Urim" were precious stones incorporated into the high priest's breastplate (Exod28:30) that somehow functioned as supernatural lots allowing him to discern the will of the LORD in important matters (Cp., Num27:21). The "holy one" would seem to be the high priest, which was Aaron in the allusions to receiving divine guidance at "Massah" and "Meribah" (Exod17:1-7). This petition would seem to that the high priest would always be able to discern the perfect will of the LORD.
- [9] Here is a reference to a time when the Levites were especially zealous for the LORD and the "covenant" He had made with Israel. On the occasion of the nation's apostasy with the golden calf at Sinai, the Levites were those who stood with Moses on the side of the LORD, and they did not hesitate to slay even members of their own families who had participated in the rebellion (Exod32:26-29).
- [10] The Levites were given the privilege of "teach[ing]" the "judgments" and the "law" to the nation. Furthermore, from the tribe of Levi came the priests, who were given the privilege of offering "sacrifice[s]" and "incense" before the LORD on the brazen and golden altars.
- [11] Moses' "bless[ing]" and petition for Levi is that their special work on behalf of the nation, especially in representing the nation before Jehovah as priests offering sacrifices, would be "accept[ed]" by Him.

BENJAMIN

- [12] The "beloved of the LORD" is David³⁷. The tribe of Benjamin would be the one tribe, after David's own tribe of Judah, that would consistently rally in support of King David and his dynasty of

³⁷ In Hebrew, the name David means 'beloved'.

kings, especially after the division of kingdom (1Kgs12:19-24). Furthermore, Jerusalem (David's capital) would lie on the border between the tribal areas of Judah and Benjamin.

JOSEPH

- [13] The tribe of Joseph is to be especially "blessed", which includes both Ephraim and Manasseh (v17). The land given to these two tribes would be the choicest within Israel, both agriculturally (v14) as well as "precious things" located in the "deep that stretcheth out beneath [the surface of the land?]" (Cp., Gen49:22,25). Modern students of Bible prophecy have frequently speculated that this might refer to abundant oil/gas reserves lying beneath the tribal area of Joseph; coming as it does after a reference to "dew", it may simply refer to subterranean water resources.
- [15] The mountainous areas of Joseph would also be capable of producing "chief things" and "precious things", likely a reference to important mineral reserves such as iron and copper (Cp., Deut8:9).
- [16] The tribe of Joseph has the potential of becoming the preeminent tribe among all those of Israel, as foreseen in Joseph's dreams (Gen37:5-10) and also prophesied by Jacob (Gen49:26).
- [17] Joseph's "glory is like the firstling", a reference to the fact that he received the double portion of inheritance from Jacob, which was forfeited by Reuben (1Chron5:1-2).

ZEBULUN AND ISSACHAR

- [18] Zebulun and Issachar were both blessed in all they were to do, seen under the merism of "in thy going out" and "in thy tents". It is interesting to note that 11 of the 12 disciples/apostles of Christ were Galilean (exception was Judas, who was Judean), coming in part from the tribal area of Zebulun (Cp., Isa9:1-2).
- [19] Specifically, however, Zebulun (located on the Mediterranean coast) would be blessed by "the abundance of the seas"³⁸ and Issachar by "treasures hidden in the sand".

GAD

- [20] The blessing for Gad, both here and in Jacob's prophecy (Gen49:19), centers upon military strength.
- [21] Gad (with Reuben and half of Manasseh) claimed the luscious Transjordan portion of the Promised Land for himself "first", approved by Moses the "lawgiver", but the tribe was faithful in entering Canaan with the rest of the nation and using its military strength to drive out the Canaanites (Num32:20-32; Josh4:12).

³⁸ Though no record of fulfillment of this prophesied link of Zebulun to maritime industry exists in Scripture, Israel's major sea port today is Haifa, located in the ancient tribal territory of Zebulun.

DAN

- [22] Although Dan's original tribal allotment of land was in the south (Josh19:40-48), it eventually was established in Bashan to the extreme north³⁹.

NAPHTALI

- [23] Naphtali, located on "the west and the south" coastline of the Sea of Galilee, included the city of Nazareth (Josh19:35; 21:32). With Zebulun (v18), Naphtali would include the hometowns of Jesus and most of His disciples (Cp., Isa9:1-2).

ASHER

- [24] Asher was indeed "blessed with children", increasing in population during the wilderness wandering more than any other tribe (Cp., Num1:41; 26:47), and in time it became renown for its production of olives (the source of the "oil").
- [25] The mountains of Asher also produced "iron" and "bronze" (i.e., copper; cf. Deut8:9); the reference to "iron" and "bronze" also likely alludes to military strength, which was needed to Asher to defend Israel's northern border.

No Blessing for Simeon? When Jacob prophesied over his sons at the end of his life, all twelve were included and were addressed in chronological order from eldest to youngest (Gen49:1-28). In Moses' blessing of the tribes at the end of his life, they were addressed in a seemingly random order. More interesting, however, is the fact that only eleven of the tribes received a blessing; Simeon was omitted. No reason for their omission is given. Both Levi and Simeon failed to inherit their own portion of the Promised Land due to their sin of slaughtering the men of Shechem (Gen34:25-26; 49:5-7); rather, Levi received 48 cities scattered throughout all Israel, and Simeon received 17 cities scattered within the land assigned to Judah (Josh19:1-9). Furthermore, the tribe of Simeon seems to have played a major role in the harlotry with the daughters of Moab, and the associated idolatry at Baal-peor (Num25:1-14), which resulted in a plague of judgment that killed 24,000 (immediately after this, a new census revealed that Simeon's population had dropped by over 37,000 since Sinai, a far greater reduction than any other tribe; cf. Num1:23; 26:14). Simeon's lack of a tribal blessing may be related to these instances of serious sin. This does not mean that Simeon had no opportunity for blessing. Simeon could receive all the abundant blessings promised to the nation in general (Deut28:1-14), but it did not receive a unique tribal blessing.

³⁹ Bashan was in the tribal allotment originally assigned to Manasseh (Josh22:7).

GENERAL PRAISE AND BLESSING FOR ISRAEL

- [26] With the individual tribal blessings completed, Moses returns to the poetic imagery of vv2-5 in which Jehovah is presented as a conquering King leading His host from heaven.
- [27] Jehovah is referred to as "the eternal God" having "everlasting arms" fully capable of "thrust[ing] out" and "destroy[ing]" every "enemy", and for this reason He and He alone should be Israel's "refuge".
- [28] If Israel will trust in Jehovah "alone", He will plant them "in safety" in the abundant land He has promised to give to them.
- [29] The concluding blessing, "Happy art thou, O Israel!", sees the nation as led by King Jehovah triumphant over all "enemies". The final figure views Israel as a conqueror who puts his foot upon a fallen and vanquished foe as a picture of absolute dominion, which is the ultimate blessing promised in the Mosaic covenant (Deut28:13).

CHAPTER 34

THE DEATH OF MOSES

The death/burial of Moses and his succession by Joshua are recorded in the final 8 verses of the Book of Deuteronomy (Deut34:5-12). Liberal critics regularly use this fact to argue against Mosaic authorship of the book (see AUTHORSHIP AND DATE OF WRITING in Introduction to Notes). Either the Holy Spirit led Moses to prophetically record his own death beforehand, or these verses were appended to the book by Joshua after the fact; in neither case is any doubt cast on the full Mosaic authorship of the remainder.

- [1] Mount "Nebo" (or "Pisgah") in the land of Moab (modern day Jordan) rises 2,680-ft above sea level and overlooks the Dead Sea at 1,388-ft below sea level.



Mount Nebo in modern Jordan (from east).

- [3] From the summit of Mount Nebo one does indeed get a panoramic view of the entire land of Israel, from the "Negev" in the extreme south to "Dan" in the extreme north, and extending to the "utmost sea" (i.e., the Mediterranean Sea) to the far west.
- [4] Though the LORD forbid Moses to enter Canaan as a consequence of his sin at Meribah (Num20:1-13; 27:12-14), He graciously allows him to view it just before his death; the LORD is showing Moses that the promise He made to "Abraham" 400 years before (Gen15:14,18-21) is on the verge of fulfillment.
- [5] Moses died in Moab, having never personally entered the Promised Land (cf. Heb11:23-30).
- [6] Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all buried in Hebron, in the Promised Land (along with their wives, Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah⁴⁰; cf. Gen23:19; 49:31; 50:7-13), and even the bones of Joseph were carried into the Promised Land and buried in Shechem (Gen50:25; Exod13:19; Josh24:32); their "sepulcher[s]" are well known sites in Israel today. Moses, however, was buried in an unknown location "in the land of Moab". His burial was attended to by Jehovah Himself (unique in human history), apparently through the agency of the archangel Michael, and it was for an unrevealed reason opposed by Satan (cf. Jude9).
- [7] Moses died at 120 years old, but it was not a 'natural' death due to 'old age'. He was taken by the LORD in judgment for sin (1Jn5:16).
- [8] The effect on the Israelites of the death of Moses must have been enormous, despite Moses' own attempts to prepare the nation for it (Deut31:1-8). Aaron had also been mourned for 30 days (Num20:29), though mourning normally lasted one week (as in the case of Jacob; Gen50:10).
- [9] Moses' laying on of hands on Joshua before all the nation was a visible sign of God's choice for a new leader; the real, but unseen sign, was Joshua's "[filling] of the Spirit".
- [10] There has never since been a prophet who enjoyed the kind of intimate relationship with the LORD that Moses did (Num12:6-8), excepting only the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb3:1-6).
- [11] Furthermore, there has never since been a prophet who performed the number and magnitude of "signs" and "wonders" as Moses did in "Egypt".
- [12] The great works performed by Jehovah through Moses were not only a testimony of His power and sovereignty to Pharaoh, Egypt, and the entire pagan world (cf. Josh2:9-11), but also a testimony of His love for "Israel".

--- S.D.G. ---

⁴⁰ Rachel was buried in Bethlehem (Gen35:19).

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