



Good News
Bible Reading Program

A free educational service provided by the United Church of God, *an International Association*

— July 2002 —

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1 July	Vengeance on the Midianites	Numbers 31
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Highlights to Think About from This Month's Reading

Vengeance on the Midianites—and on Balaam (Numbers 31)

July 1

As the last task to perform before Moses' death, God commands him to take vengeance on the Midianites because they, with the Moabites, deliberately set out to destroy the Israelites through their idolatrous religious practices. Furthermore, making a stark example of the Midianites in destroying them would serve as a deterrent to future apostasy. Incredibly, not a single Israelite dies in the war, moving their leaders to make a special offering. The officers over thousands, etc., come to Moses to make a voluntary offering to God to cover everything, an atonement offering (verses 48-50). God is with Israel in this righteous battle—signified by the fact that Phinehas also goes to war with the Ark of the Covenant and the two silver trumpets. It is God who gives them the victory.

Interestingly, verse 8 mentions that one of the men who was slain in the war was Zur. This Zur was apparently one of the instigators of the plot to bring false worship to Israel. Indeed, it was his daughter, Cozbi, that Zimri had brazenly paraded before the congregation of Israel before they were both slain by Phinehas (25:14-15). In verse 9, we see the women of Midian taken captive in the wake of the battle. Moses, however, is incensed at this, as these are the same women who led Israel astray with the Moabites—and he commands that all but the virgins among them be put to death (verses 14-18). Besides their idolatrous practices, it is also possible that the promiscuous Midianites had sexually transmissible diseases that God wanted to keep out of Israel as well.

Verse 16 is the verse that actually explains what happened in the incident of Baal Peor. We learn that it was the “counsel of Balaam” that the Midianite women followed when they caused the children of Israel to sin against God, resulting in the plague that cost 24,000 lives. Without this explanation, readers of chapters 22–24 might give Balaam the benefit of the doubt, assuming him to have been a prophet who was following God's will. But note this: Balaam did not “die the death of the righteous,” as he had so eloquently prayed (23:10). Rather, he died by the edge of the sword—being justly put to death along with the Midianites by the Israelites at God's command (verse 8).

So just what lesson can we learn from Balaam? Notice this from the article on him in *The Complete Who's Who in the Bible*: “2 Pet. 2:15, Jude 11 and Rev. 2:14 warn the NT people of God against allowing a smooth-talking pagan to capitalize on his knowledge in the form of religiosity and twist it to his own deadly end. A veneer of piety disguises the shallow convictions which can be bought for a price (Num. 22:17) and superficial repentance (v. 34) which is short-lived. 2 Pet. 2:15-16 views Balaam as a man of prophetic talent but with a desire to use the gifts of God to further his own ends. So, Peter warned of the danger of ‘empty’ words because they act as a cover for evil desires. The Christian must appreciate that such emptiness of heart will be exposed on judgment day (Jude 11). For the apostle John writing to the compromising church in Pergamum the worse sin is not actually that of self-deception, because that in the end will be exposed. Rather, Balaam's leading of Balak [and thus Israel] into further spiritual adultery is far worse. And so, the worst of judgments is saved for those who knowingly deceive others. Like Balaam their sin eventually catches up with them (see Num. 31:8; Josh. 13:22)” (Paul D. Gardner, ed., 1995).

Tribes to Settle East of the Jordan (Numbers 32)

July 2

The tribes of Reuben and Gad had a lot of cattle. The land of the Amorites had just been conquered (Numbers 21). And, with much good pastureland for grazing, these tribes decided that it would be a good place to settle down and make a home. So they let their desire for settlement be known to Moses. But Moses, all too familiar with Israel's past rebellions, was angered—and rightfully so. After all, there were still battles to be fought in the Promised Land, across the Jordan. Moses was concerned that their actions would discourage the other tribes if they bailed out now. And refusal to enter the Promised Land was the very sin for which God had punished Israel with its decades of wandering. Moses brings up the past, in effect asking, “Do you want to go through 40 more years in the wilderness?... Your fathers who spied out the Promised Land came back and discouraged everyone, causing about three million people to die in the wilderness. Do you want to do the same thing?” (compare verses 8, 13). “You are doing the same thing your fathers did, and you too will bring the wrath of God on us,” Moses basically told them (compare verse 14).

The Reubenites and Gadites reassured Moses that they would fight alongside the other tribes to subdue the land of Canaan. But they requested that they be allowed to construct settlements for their

children and cattle on the east side of the Jordan River, explaining that the men of fighting age would then leave them there while they went to help secure the land across the Jordan for all the rest of Israel. They would only return when the Israelite conquest of Canaan was complete and everyone had received his inheritance (verses 18-22). Moses agreed that this would be acceptable as long as they didn't back out of the agreement (verse 23). He wasn't going with them, so he had to pass the decision on to Eleazar and Joshua, who would lead Israel across the Jordan (verse 28).

It isn't until the end of the chapter that we learn that half of the tribe of Manasseh would also have its inheritance east of the Jordan. Yet there were still some Amorites whom the Manassites had to dispossess at this point (verse 39). In the end, as we will later see, about 40,000 men of war from the two and a half eastern tribes do accompany Joshua into the Promised Land (Joshua 4:12, 13).

Israel's Journeys; Instructions for the Conquest of the Land (Numbers 33) July 3

This chapter contains a listing of the travels of the children of Israel, covering their 40 years in the wilderness, starting with the Exodus from Egypt. Some of the sites mentioned here, such as many of those in verses 5-18, are mentioned in Exodus and elsewhere in Numbers. Some are only given here, such as most of those mentioned in verses 19-29. But the list is not meant to be comprehensive, as there were other encampments that are *not* recorded here that *are* mentioned in Exodus and elsewhere in Numbers. God commanded Moses to draw up this account (verse 2). Since these were only temporary encampments for a traveling people, archaeologists have identified only a few of the actual locations with a reasonable degree of success.

After covering their journeys, God tells Moses to say to the children of Israel, "When you cross the Jordan River into the land of Canaan, you must drive out all the people living there. You must destroy all their carved and molten images and demolish all their pagan shrines" (verses 51-52, New Living Translation). The reason is to cleanse the land for the inheritance of the tribes of Israel so that they can worship the true God without interference from pagan influences and practices. God warns them: "If you fail to drive out the people who live in the land, those who remain will be like splinters in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will harass you in the land where you live" (verse 55, NLT). God knows the land of Canaan is full of the symbols and representations of idolatrous worship—pictures, graven images, standing images, stone images, carved images, molten images—and false religious worship practices carried out on altars in groves or high places. These things will pollute those who come into contact with them. Jeremiah will later put it this way: "Learn not the way of the heathen" (Jeremiah 10:2, King James Version). If the children of Israel pollute themselves with the trappings of false worship, God warns that they, too, will be driven out of the Promised Land (Numbers 33:56).

As subsequent events will play out, however, Israel will not completely eradicate the pagan inhabitants of Canaan—and, sadly, will ultimately embrace idolatry, be overthrown, and be removed from the Promised Land just as God now warns them.

Boundaries and Tribal Allotments (Numbers 34) July 4

Eleazar the priest and Joshua are given the responsibility of dividing up the inheritance of the land. Eleazar is chosen because he was the high priest and had the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim. Joshua is selected because he would soon be successor to Moses (verse 17). The boundaries of the entire area are described. East of the Jordan River, Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh have already received their inheritance (verse 14; Numbers 32). The other half of Manasseh will have its inheritance in Canaan. It should be noted that the land is not actually divided up in Numbers 34. That actually occurs in Joshua 14–19, after the land is surveyed.

Some of the more modern names will help in defining the territory described here. The Salt Sea (Numbers 34:3) is, of course, the Dead Sea. The Great Sea (verse 6), from the perspective of the Promised Land, is the Mediterranean. The Sea of Chinnereth (verse 11) is better known by us as the Sea of Galilee. The River or Brook of Egypt (verse 5) is probably the Wadi al-Arish, in the western Sinai Peninsula, not too far from the present Israeli-Egyptian border. Some have argued that no other river than the Nile could properly be called the River of Egypt. However, this cannot be true since the Israelites had to *leave* Egypt and *go* to the Promised Land. If the boundary of the Promised Land were the Nile, then the Israelites would have been in the Promised Land while they were yet in Goshen! Finally, "Mount Hor," located in the north (verse 7), cannot be the same Mount Hor upon which Aaron died in the south. According to the *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown Commentary*: "The Hebrew words...*Hor-ha-hor*, properly signify 'the mountain of the mountain'—'the high double

mountain,' which, from the situation, can mean nothing else than the mountain Amana (Song 4:8), a member of the great Lebanon range" (note on Numbers 34:7-9).

Don't worry if you cannot trace the borders accurately. Some of the names are lost to us today. Notice that the Levites did not receive a land territory for their inheritance as all the other tribes did. Their locations are described in the next chapter.

Cities for the Levites (Numbers 35–36)

July 5

Why are the Levites in a category all to themselves? The answer is that they are not to make their living off the land, but, rather, from their service to God and the rest of the nation. And this requires an element of faith—that God will inspire the other tribes to fulfill their responsibility in supplying the Levites' needs. Each of the tribes of Israel is to provide cities for the Levites' living quarters, as well as surrounding countryside for their animals. The Levites, of whom there were 23,000 males, are assigned to 48 cities, each about the size of a football stadium surrounded by around 750 acres of "common-land." That may sound large by today's standards, but the entire land area for all the Levites amounted to approximately 36,000 acres out of a total of more than five million acres for all Israel.

God instructs Moses to appoint six of the Levite cities to be cities of refuge. When someone is murdered, members of the victimized family may choose an "avenger of blood"—a single individual—from among themselves to execute the murderer. The city of refuge provides asylum for anyone who fears the dead person's relatives will seek revenge before there can be a fair trial—as well as for those cleared of murder in a trial and found guilty of accidental death, or manslaughter. The congregation is to judge between these two situations, whether the crime was strictly accidental or if it was murder (Numbers 35:24). If deemed murder, the offender is put to death. If manslaughter, the killer is delivered to one of the six cities of refuge, there to remain until the death of the high priest—at which time he may leave a free man. But if he leaves the city of refuge before that, the avenger of blood will be allowed to kill him and remain guiltless. It may sound harsh to us today to think that someone who killed another person by accident could himself be legally killed by the victim's relative. Yet in practical fact it demonstrates the high value God places on human life and that God holds everyone responsible for his or her actions. We all have a serious responsibility to be sure that our actions never harm or injure others, because under God's legal system a person's carelessness could bring a severe—and possibly fatal—penalty.

Furthermore, God made some concessions to human weakness in the legal system He gave to the Israelites—realizing that they were a carnally motivated people (compare Matthew 19:8). These, in fact, can serve to demonstrate God's wisdom. Consider the appointment of an avenger of blood. Human nature, God knew quite well, demanded revenge. Without rules governing the exacting of it in situations such as that just described, family or tribal warfare could have broken out like the Hatfields and McCoys of American history, with no end to the bloodshed that defiles the land (Numbers 35:33). God said, "You must not defile the land where you are going to live, for I [will] live there myself. I am the LORD, who lives among the people of Israel" (verse 34, NLT).

Inheritances to Remain Within Each Tribe (Numbers 35–36)

July 5 Cont'd

The daughters of Zelophehad, himself a grandson of Gilead of the tribe of Manasseh, had made an unusual appeal back in chapter 27—to inherit their father's land since he had left no surviving sons. And God gave Moses the judgment that the daughters were to receive the inheritance. But there was a complicating factor in this matter, which the Gileadite leaders among Manasseh brought before Moses. It had been good that the brotherless daughters of their tribe had been granted an inheritance. But what happens when they marry men from other tribes? Couldn't this gradually drain away the inheritance of Manasseh? And couldn't the same thing happen in other tribes? So God gives Moses another judgment. Women heirs among the ancient Israelites are permitted to marry only within their own tribe. "Thus no inheritance shall change hands from one tribe to another" (Numbers 36:9).

Introduction to Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 1)

July 6

By the time Moses addresses the messages contained in the book of Deuteronomy to the new generation of Israelites, he is 120 years old. The Hebrew name for the book, *Haddebarim*, means "The Words," derived from the first verse, which reads, "These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel..." The Jews have also referred to this book as *Mishneh Hattorah*, "The Repetition of the Law," taken from Deuteronomy 17:18, which uses a phrase that the New King James Version translates as "a copy of this law." The Greek Septuagint translation rendered this as *To*

Deuteronomion Touto, that is, “This Second Law,” from which we have the English title, Deuteronomy.

The book does not, however, set forth a “second” law, but merely repeats and expands on the law that had been given in a codified form more than 40 years earlier in the book of Exodus. In fact, much of God’s law predated even the book of Exodus, as the Ten Commandments, for instance, were already in force since the creation of Adam and Eve (compare Romans 5:12-13). And Abraham, we are told, observed God’s commandments, statutes and laws (Genesis 26:5) long before Moses was born. Therefore, some Bibles, such as most Protestant German Bibles, identify this last book written by Moses simply as “The Fifth Book of Moses.” It should be noted, however, that its last chapter, Moses’ obituary, was probably written by someone else, Joshua being the most likely candidate—especially when we see other obvious additions by others in Moses’ books (e.g., Numbers 12:3). While God *could* have inspired Moses to write this last chapter before his death, that seems unlikely.

The *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* on Deuteronomy states: “Deuteronomy is one of the greatest books of the Old Testament. Its influence on the domestic and personal religion of all ages has not been surpassed by any other book in the Bible. It is quoted over eighty times in the New Testament and thus it belongs to a small group of four Old Testament books to which the early Christians made reference.” The other three books are Genesis, Psalms and Isaiah. *Tyndale* adds, “The book comes even to the modern reader in much the same way as a challenging sermon, for it is directed towards moving the minds and wills of the hearers to decision: choose life, that you and your descendants may live (30:19).”

Israel’s Original Refusal to Enter the Land (Deuteronomy 1)

July 6 Cont’d

In verse 2 we see the mention of Horeb, which is another name for Mount Sinai. With the exception of 33:2, Deuteronomy uses Horeb rather than Sinai. The word Horeb literally means “desolation,” “desert” or “drought.”

At the outset, it is emphasized that Moses is, throughout the book, “explaining” the law (verse 5). This explanation is not based on his own will and ideas, but on “all that the LORD had given him as commandments to them” (verse 3)—reminding us of Jesus Christ, who only spoke what the Father told Him to speak (John 8:26; 15:15). Yet before actually reiterating the law, Moses reviews Israel’s prior opportunity to enter the Promised Land, their refusal and the resulting penalty, and, to bolster their faith, the recent victories that God had given them.

First, Moses reminds his audience how he established an organized administrative legal structure within the nation (Deuteronomy 1:9-18) before Israel was asked to possess the Promised Land (verses 8, 19-21). This shows that an organization, in order to be successful in its dealings with the world, must first be properly set up and smoothly functioning internally. The selection of “heads” (verse 13) or tribal leaders involved a process similar to the selection of the first deacons of the Church in Acts 6. The people were told to give Moses the names of worthy candidates and Moses made the formal appointments (Deuteronomy 1:9-15). In Acts, the apostles appointed men as deacons after asking for congregational input.

Before entering the land of the Amorites, the people requested that spies first be sent into the land (Deuteronomy 1:22). Moses was pleased with this idea (verse 23), and God told him to go ahead with it (compare Numbers 13:1-2). Except for Joshua and Caleb, however, the returning spies discouraged the nation from trying to conquer the land (Deuteronomy 1:28). Although they confirmed God’s word that the land was good (verse 25), they exaggerated physical obstacles as insurmountable and proclaimed that God must have hated them and didn’t really want to give the land to them (verse 27). As a consequence, because of their unbelief (verse 32), in spite of all the visible proofs that God was with them (verses 25, 33), they *rebelled* against Him (verse 26) and refused to enter the land. The New Testament book of Hebrews explains that the Israelites were not allowed to enter the rest of the Promised Land—symbolic of our future rest in the Kingdom of God—because, although they had heard God’s Word and had seen His mighty wonders, they hardened their heart in rebellion and refused to believe and obey Him (3:7-19). Thus, God pronounced His sentence. Later, even Moses was included in the sentence (verses 25-26; 4:21), as he did not follow God’s explicit instructions when he struck the rock at Kadesh (Numbers 20:7-13). As Israel’s human leader and teacher, Moses was under a stricter judgment from God (compare James 3:1) in order to serve as an example to the people (Deuteronomy 1:37).

After they realized their sin and the penalty it had earned them, a contingent of the people decided to go ahead and enter the land in an attempt to conquer it according to God’s original

instructions—but it was now too late. For us, too, there will come a time when it will be too late to enter the “Promised Land” of God’s Kingdom (compare Matthew 25:1-13). Moses told the Israelites not to invade Canaan, as God would not be with them this time. But again, they did not believe and rebelled against God’s Word (Deuteronomy 1:42-43)—and suffered the consequence of bitter defeat (verses 44-45). Then they returned and wept before God (verse 45; compare Matthew 25:30), but He would not hear them.

The throng of people who eventually did enter the Promised Land (who were all age 59 or younger) first had to endure the “great and terrible wilderness” (verse 19). We might consider this a physical type of the trying experiences that Christians sometimes endure in this life prior to entering the Kingdom of God (see Acts 14:22).

God Is in Control (Deuteronomy 2)

July 7

In spite of the fact that the Israelites, because of their sin and subsequent punishment, had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years, unable to enter the Promised Land, they were still being cared for and provided for by God (verse 7). Once “all the men of war had finally perished from among the people” (verse 16), God gave command to the new generation to begin to conquer the land (verse 24). He made clear, however, that it was He who was in ultimate control of events (verse 25), so that no flesh would glory before Him. In fact, God hardened the heart of King Sihon to provoke him into fighting against Israel (verses 30, 32). And God delivered him and his cities, as well as other specifically designated cities, into the hands of Israel (verses 33, 36).

At God’s command, the Israelites “utterly destroyed the men, women, and little ones of every city” (verse 34). Passages like these have led many readers to conclude that the God of the Old Testament was harsh and cruel, in contrast to Jesus Christ, who is thought of as gentle and meek. The fact is, however, that it was the preincarnate Jesus Christ *Himself* who appeared to and gave this command to Moses (see 1 Corinthians 10:4 and our free booklet *Who Is God?*). It was He, the Giver of life who created mankind at the Father’s behest (compare Hebrews 1:1-2; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 3:9), who rightly ordered *taking* the life of certain people. It appears that in God’s infinite wisdom, He decided that, rather than the children of that evil, demon-worshiping society continuing to live in misery and pain, it was better for them to die and later be resurrected to physical life in a better world in which His right way of life would be taught to everyone and enforced throughout the earth (see Revelation 20:5, 11-12; “The Last Great Day: Eternal Life Offered to All,” *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*, 1999, pp. 51-57). Of course, the prerogative to take human life belongs solely to God. Only He has the right to kill a person or command someone else to do so.

Last-Minute Encouragement (Deuteronomy 3)

July 8

Moses reminds the new generation how God gave the Israelites victory over their enemies—“there was not a city which we did not take from them” (verse 4), although all of them “were fortified with high walls, gates and bars” (verse 5). This, says Moses, happened because “the LORD your God has given you this land to possess” (verse 18). This reminder was to inspire confidence in the Israelites at this momentous time—encouraging them to have faith as they crossed into the Promised Land, where they would meet Canaanite resistance. Moses, rather than wallowing in self-pity over the fact that he himself would not enter the land, obeys God’s command to provide this encouragement, particularly to Joshua, the new leader (verses 23-28). They need not fear the enemy since God will fight for Israel (verse 22).

Several commentaries including *Tyndale* and *The Nelson Study Bible* state that the “bedstead” of Og mentioned in verse 11 could also be translated sarcophagus. So the reference may be to the size of his coffin. These dimensions equal about 13 feet by 6 feet.

Moses Exhorts Obedience (Deuteronomy 4:1-43)

July 9

Moses cautions Israel not to “add to” nor “take from” God’s commandments (verse 2), but, rather, to “carefully observe” them and to “act” in accordance with them (verses 2, 14, 5-6). To *know* God’s Word is not enough—indeed, it is quite useless unless one *acts* on it and *does* His will (see Matthew 5:19; 7:24-27; James 1:22-25). If Israel does this, then they will be recognized by others as a great, wise, understanding, righteous and God-fearing nation (verses 6-8). But since such recognition could be a source of pride, Moses warns them to *not forget* God and His wonders (verses 9-10). He reminds them that *God* was the originator of this wise law—that *He* appeared to them on the mountain to proclaim *His* Ten Commandments (verse 10).

At that time, the people did not see a “form” of God (verse 12). He points this out to dissuade the people from crafting any images of Him. However, as a consequence of this statement, some believe that God is formless and shapeless. Yet this is emphatically false, as the fact that God does have form is clearly stated in Numbers 12:6-8. In fact, God created man in His image, in accordance with His likeness (Genesis 1:26), as Adam’s son Seth was in the image and likeness of Adam (5:3). Moreover, God revealed His glorified form to Moses (compare Exodus 33:18-23). Both the Father’s and the Son’s glorified appearance are described in the Bible (compare Daniel 7:9, 13; Ezekiel 1:26-28; Revelation 1:12-16; 4:2-3; 5:1), clearly proving that God has form. Further, although the people as a whole did not see any form when God spoke to them from the mountain, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the 70 elders of Israel clearly did see a form shortly thereafter (Exodus 24:9-11). Nevertheless, in no encounter did *anyone* see the *full* glorified appearance of the Almighty. And not only can no image truly capture God’s glory, but any image would limit Him in people’s minds.

In Deuteronomy 4:13, we read that God “declared...His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.” Some have taken this passage to mean that the Old Covenant was the same as the Ten Commandments, and that when the Old Covenant was abolished, so were the Ten Commandments. This understanding, however, is not correct—since a covenant is a contract or an agreement, which is *based on* law but not *identical to* the law. For instance, we read in Exodus 24:8 that God made a covenant with Israel “according to all these words.” The Revised English Bible renders this, “on the terms of this book.” In Exodus 34:27, it is again explained that a covenant is made based on law, as we read, “Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made [or, better, I will make] a covenant with you and with Israel.” Again, the Revised English Bible states that “the covenant I make with you and with Israel is on those terms.” We have already seen that the Ten Commandments were in force long before Moses lived, so the Old Covenant did not bring them into existence—nor was it identical to them. What the Old Covenant did not bring into force could not be abolished when that covenant ended at the time of Christ’s death. The reason that the Ten Commandments are especially emphasized in Deuteronomy 4:13 is that they are the *heart and core* of the law on which the Old Covenant was based (compare 5:22)—but they are not *all the law* on which the covenant was based (compare 4:14).

Moses begins to admonish the Israelites again not to make any carved images, in whatever form, to portray or picture God as an aid to worship (verses 15-18, 23-25). Further, he warns them not to worship anything else in place of the true God (verse 19). Earlier, in Exodus 32, God had condemned Israel for making a golden calf *representing* Him (verse 8). Rather than using physical pictures, portrayals or representations of God in our worship of Him, we are to worship God “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24)—not with idolatrous images and practices adopted from false religions. Moses warns the Israelites that if they would not obey God’s commandments, God would scatter them among the nations so that only few would survive (verses 26-27). The fulfillment of this prophecy lies ahead of us, as it was meant for the end time or the “latter days” (verse 30).

A hint of man’s amazing destiny is given in verse 19, where it says that “the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven” are for “all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage.” Thus, though mankind was only given dominion over the earth in Genesis 2, we are to ultimately inherit the entire universe. This is the same incredible message conveyed in Romans 8:16-25 and Hebrews 2:5-11.

Deuteronomy 4:29 is a wonderful comfort. It assures us that we *will* find God if we search for Him with all our heart and soul (compare Jeremiah 29:13). Indeed, God wants not just *part* of our affections but our *entire being* devoted to Him (compare Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 22:37).

The Decalogue Repeated (Deuteronomy 4:44–5:33)

July 10

Moses repeats the Ten Commandments to the younger generation. Comparing this chapter with Exodus 20, we see that God inspires Moses here to give an additional reason for keeping the Sabbath—“remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; *therefore* the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (5:15). So the Sabbath not only reminds us that God is our *Creator*, but it also points to Him as our *Redeemer*—the One who delivers *us* from *spiritual* Egypt, i.e., the dominion of Satan, society and our own sinful nature. The Sabbath day, then, signifies *freedom* and reminds us that we should share this freedom with everyone who is within our care and under our control (verse 14). Of course, heads of households must exercise great wisdom in this area when it comes to wives and houseguests who do not share the same beliefs.

The Fifth and Tenth Commandments also have wordings slightly different from those in Exodus 20. Notice the words “as the LORD your God has commanded you” in the Fourth and Fifth Commandments. These are not ten suggestions, and it’s interesting that God emphasized this concerning these two commandments when He inspired Moses to restate the Ten.

The fifth commandment is stated very positively, adding not only the same blessing for obedience promised in Exodus 20—“that your days may be long...in the land”—but also the words “that it may be well with you.” Obedience to this commandment is essential to maintain healthy families, which are one of the foundation of a stable society. The lack of proper esteem and respect for parents is one of the reasons that families in Western nations are in sad shape. *World* magazine recently reported, “A respected seminary professor [suggested] that the very concept of fatherhood may ‘now be passe’ for a high proportion of young people” (May 25, 2002).

In the Tenth Commandment, “wife” and “house” are in opposite order in the two versions, and Deuteronomy adds “his field.” The reason for that addition may be that no Israelite had a field of his own for 40 years after the Exodus, but now they were about to gain fields in the Promised Land. Realizing the Tenth Commandment prohibits coveting, it is interesting to consider Colossians 3:5, which tells us that covetousness is idolatry. Thus, the Tenth Commandment links right back up with the First Commandment. In this way, the Ten Commandments make a complete circuit.

“Face to face” in verse 4 does not mean the Israelites actually saw the face of God (see verses 5, 22-23; 4:12, 15). Even Moses did not see His glorious face. The expression implies close proximity—being confronted with God’s obvious presence—and God’s speaking to them on a level they could understand.

People accuse God of hiding from them, but in verses 23-27 we see man’s proclivity to hide—or at least keep his distance—from God. Of course, God mercifully understands (verse 28), and He expresses His longing for the time when they would have “a heart in them” to properly fear and obey Him (verse 29). A heart can be spiritually converted only when God gives the gift of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:5-10; Deuteronomy 29:4).

Supplementary Reading: First question and answer (regarding which commandment is which), “Questions & Answers,” *The Good News*, July–August 2002, p. 31.

God Is One? (Deuteronomy 6)

July 11

For many centuries Deuteronomy 6:4-9 has been known among the Jews as the *Shema*. This Hebrew word, which means “hear,” is the first word of verse 4. Continuing in verse 4, we read in the earlier and New King James Versions that God is “one.” And, indeed, many, including the Jews, have traditionally understood the verse this way. Furthermore, they have concluded from it that God consists of only one Being. We know, however, that God consists of two Beings at present, God and the Word (John 1:1), later called the Father and Jesus Christ (compare verse 14). God said in Genesis 1:26, “Let *Us* make man in *Our* Image,” showing that God consists of more than one personage. The Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*, is plural, and denotes the God *family*. Ephesians 3:14-15 not only confirms that God is a family, but also that He is in the process of *enlarging* His family through converted Christians—His begotten children awaiting glorification into divine spirit beings like Him (1 John 3:1-2). It is interesting how the New International Version translates Hebrews 2:11: “Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are *of the same* family.”

So what is Deuteronomy 6:4 saying? First of all, it should be stated that the word “one” in the sense of singularity is probably not what the original Hebrew here is intending to convey. Indeed, it could be understood as one in priority—meaning God is to be *first*, the highest priority, in our lives. And some Bible versions render the phrase in question as, “The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.” In this sense, the prohibition is against worshiping other gods. Though the LORD normally denoted the One who became Jesus Christ, since He is the one who dealt with Israel (compare 1 Corinthians 10:4), this passage does not deny the existence of the Father. For the name *Yahweh*, having the sense of “Eternal One,” which is rendered “LORD” in the New King James Version, could also refer to God the Father (compare Psalm 110:1). Of course, Israel did not know about the Father. Rather, Christ came to *reveal* Him (Matthew 11:27; John 1:18; 17:25-26).

But Deuteronomy 6:4 *could* be translated as “the LORD is one.” And if *that’s* what is meant, then we must ask *how* is God one? The answer can be found in John 17, where Christ prayed to the Father about His disciples, “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one” (verse 22). So God truly is one—in the unity of mindset and purpose shared by the Father and Christ, which They want us to share with Them. But They obviously do not constitute one being—just as God’s *people* are not to become one being.

Incidentally, Deuteronomy 6:8 should be understood metaphorically—sealing God’s instructions on our hands (i.e., in our actions) and between our eyes (i.e., in our minds). But later Jews attempted to obey this scripture in a literal way by writing down four passages (verses 4-9; 11:13-21; Exodus 13:1-10, 11-16) on tiny scrolls—then placing the scrolls in leather pouches and attaching these to their foreheads and left arms while reciting the Shema. This is the origin of phylacteries (referred to in Matthew 23:5).

Supplementary Reading: “The LORD Our God Is One,” *Who Is God?*, 2001, pp. 20-21.

Obeying God’s Commandments (Deuteronomy 6)

July 11 Cont’d

We are then introduced to one of the two great commandments in the law: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” (Deuteronomy 6:5; compare Matthew 22:36-38). Christ made clear that this is “the first and great commandment,” but that the second (“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”) is “like” it (verse 39, quoting from Leviticus 19:18). He explained that God’s entire law is summarized by these two commandments (see Matthew 22:40). This is understandable, as the first four of the Ten Commandments explain *how* to love God, while the last six tell us *how* to love our neighbor. The statutes and judgments, in turn (compare Deuteronomy 4:13-14), expand on and set forth in more detail the practical application of the Ten Commandments in our daily lives. And Christ’s teachings in the New Testament—a magnification of the law (see Isaiah 42:21)—expand on the Ten Commandments, statutes and judgments even further, by showing us how to live according to their spiritual intent. (For instance, in Matthew 5:21-22 Jesus stated it is not only wrong to actually murder someone, but it is wrong to even hate someone, as uncontrolled hatred can ultimately lead to the physical act of murder.)

Verses 6-9 emphasize the urgent necessity of teaching children the truths of God, giving parents the primary responsibility here. Too often, parents are negligent in this responsibility and children grow up uncertain about what they know. Conveying confidence and certainty in the Word of God is a vital role parents are commanded to fulfill. The laws and ways of God should be taught daily. Regarding “Thou shalt teach them diligently” in verse 7, *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* notes that the Hebrew means “‘to repeat, iterate, or do a thing *again and again*’; hence to whet or sharpen any instrument, which is done by *reiterated* friction or grinding” (emphasis added). This points to the great value of family Bible study and prayer. And biblical principles should be talked about informally as often as opportunities present themselves—whenever there is a way to connect daily living and attitudes with the teachings of the Bible. An opportunity is whenever you are together—sitting, walking, riding in a car, eating together, etc. An opportunity is when a question or problem arises and the parent can point to the Bible for understanding and solutions. And it’s valuable for families to start and end each day talking about and praying to God.

Since Israel was a carnal nation, God commanded that they write the commandments on the doorposts of their houses (Deuteronomy 6:9). Although it would not be wrong for a Christian to do so today, it is not obligatory, as the law of God should be inscribed in a far more important place—on our hearts. God desired this for ancient Israel, too (verse 6), but He knew that this would not be the case without His Spirit within them (compare 31:21, 29; 29:4). Of course, while adults may feel no need for physical reminders and visual aids, as illustrated by verses 8-9, they are often helpful for children.

In verse 15, God describes Himself as a “jealous God,” as in Exodus 34:14. He demands our absolute loyalty and fidelity to Him. But this is not for Himself—because He just soaks up our adoration. Putting other things before the true God in our lives is harmful and destructive to ourselves and others. God knows that all too well. If everyone instead set their affections on Him—the God of love—above all others, there would be perfect peace and happiness throughout the world. So God is jealous not for His own sake—but for ours.

Some today say that all we need is the “righteousness of faith”—that is, as long as we believe in Christ, we are justified or “made right,” regardless of *how* we live. But Moses told Israel something different. In Deuteronomy 6:25, we read, “Then it will be *righteousness* for us, if we are careful to *observe all these commandments* before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us.” Psalm 119, an ode to keeping God’s law, which is traditionally attributed to King David, defines all of God’s commandments as righteousness (verse 172). After all, faith without works is dead (James 2:14, 20). We will be rewarded in accordance with our works, and we are to practice “*obedience to the faith*” (Romans 1:5; 16:26). When we sin, Christ forgives us upon repentance and justifies us or makes us righteous (1 John 1:7-9). But we are told *not* to sin—this must be our foremost goal (Matthew 6:33; Romans 6:15; 1 John 2:1). Since “sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4, KJV), we remain

righteous unless and until we sin. But no one can keep God's law on his own—we need the help of the living Christ in us to conquer sin. That is why we read, "He condemned sin in the flesh that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.... Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.... For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Romans 8:3-4, 9, 14).

Be Separate; Obey and Be Blessed (Deuteronomy 7)

July 12

Israel is not to intermarry with the peoples of Canaan, because, as God tells them, "they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods" (verse 4). Regrettably, the Israelites will not obey this command, and the history of Israel and Judah will reveal the bad results. Indeed, we may think of individual examples in the Old Testament like Solomon, whose many foreign wives induced him to forsake the living God, or the influence of the pagan Queen Jezebel on King Ahab. Yet, even for us today, God says basically the same thing (compare 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). In 1 Corinthians 7:39, Paul makes it clear that a Christian is not to marry a person of a different faith. The Living Bible renders this passage as follows: "The [Christian] wife is part of her husband as long as he lives; if her husband dies, then she may marry again, but only if she marries a Christian." God wants us to be happy, and He knows that an interfaith marriage is not going to be as peaceful, joyful and productive as it otherwise would be. Moreover, God is concerned that His child might be influenced by the unbelieving spouse to forsake Him—which happened time and time again in ancient Israel and Judah. And a believer usually is a more effective instrument in doing God's work when he or she has a believing partner, so they can serve as a team.

In this same chapter of Deuteronomy, God promises the nation that if they will obey Him, they will be blessed in their possessions, and He will "take away from [them] all sickness" (7:15; compare Exodus 23:25). But neither the ancient nor the modern Israelites have lived a lifestyle pleasing to God. And, as a consequence, they were, are, and will be plagued with sicknesses and terrible diseases (compare Leviticus 26:16, 21, 25). Although an individual's sickness can be caused by his own sin, such as by smoking, this does not have to be the case. Polluted air, for example, can cause sickness. In this case, the person breathing the air did not sin, but those responsible for polluting the air because of greed—abandoning the responsibility God gave man of caring for the environment—did sin. Indeed, the fact that there is sickness in the world at all is ultimately a result of the general state of mankind being cut off from God due to the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Deuteronomy 7:20 explains that when the Israelites enter the Promised Land, God will fight *for* them to hand it over to them. We read, "Moreover the Lord your God will send the *hornet* among them until those who are left, who hide themselves from you, are destroyed." He had similarly told Israel in Exodus 23:27-28: "I will send My fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. And I will send *hornets* before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite from before you." We will later see that God *does* send hornets. Indeed, even though Israel fights, their sword does *not* bring them victory—rather, God does. Moses states: "Therefore understand today that the LORD your God is He who goes over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and bring them down before you; so you shall drive them out and destroy them quickly as the LORD has said to you" (9:3). So God gives them their part to play—but they are not truly responsible for their victory. Following the conquest, He explains, "I sent the *hornet* before you which drove them out from before you, also the two kings of the Amorites, but *not* with your sword or with your bow" (Joshua 24:12). Sadly, Israel's future disobedience will show just how true this is. For as part of the penalty for forsaking God, Israel will suffer ignominious defeat at the hands of their enemies. "The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them.... You shall be only oppressed and plundered continually, and no one shall save you" (Deuteronomy 28:25, 29). Thus, trusting in their weapons of war will be utterly useless. True security lies only in God's protection and deliverance.

Today, converted Christians are instructed by God not to fight in war at all (compare Matthew 5:44; 26:52; Romans 12:20; 2 Corinthians 10:3-4; James 4:1-2; 1 John 3:15). And in the wonderful world to come, when God's Kingdom rules the earth, mankind as a whole will not learn the way of war anymore (Isaiah 2:4).

"Beware That You Do Not Forget the LORD Your God" (Deuteronomy 8)

July 13

Moses reminds Israel of God's mighty power with which He kept them alive in the wilderness for 40 years, and He warns them not to forget God when they enter the Promised Land and become

prosperous, seeming to have everything they need. It is easier to remember God when we see we are in desperate need for His help than when we think we can make it on our own. In a materialistic society, when many have money in the bank and food in their refrigerators and cupboards, they can easily neglect to sincerely pray “give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). God allowed Israel to hunger in the wilderness to test them and to find out what was in their heart (Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 16). He gave them manna to teach them that man does not live by bread alone. Rather, man *lives* by carefully observing God’s Word (verse 3). As long as we seek first the Kingdom of God and God’s righteousness, all our *physical* needs will be provided for (Matthew 6:33). When tempted by the devil, who told Him to make bread out of stone to satisfy His hunger, Jesus Christ quoted this very passage of Deuteronomy 8:3, showing that He understood the importance of truly *living* by God’s Word at all times (Matthew 4:2-4). After the devil ceased from tempting Him until another opportune time (see Luke 4:13), God’s angels ministered to the hungry Jesus by bringing Him the *physical* things He had need of (Matthew 4:11).

Continuing on, Moses impresses on the new generation of Israelites how vital it is that they remember their total dependence on God. Moses knows human nature. When people are full with blessings and no longer conscious of need, they are susceptible to concluding not only that they can get along without a Provider, but that they themselves had somehow gained their abundance through their own power and strength (Deuteronomy 8:11-17). So Moses admonishes the people, “You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is *He* who gives you power to get wealth” (verse 18). Tragically, the ancient Israelites *would* forget God—and so will their descendants, the nations of the *modern*-day Israelites.

In the midst of the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation remarking that this very thing had happened among the American people. He eloquently stated: “We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of [God’s] redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us! It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness” (April 30, 1863, Proclamation for a National Day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer). If only today’s national leaders would see it the same way.

Review of Israel’s Rebellions (Deuteronomy 9)

July 14

Moses continues explaining that Israel is *not* going to inherit the Promised Land because of their righteousness, but because of the foreign people’s wickedness, and because of the unconditional promise God had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to bring their descendants into the land (verses 4-6). To drive the point home even more, Moses reminds them of the episode with the golden calf, along with some of their other rebellions, and how they, being a stiff-necked people, provoked God so much that He was willing to totally destroy them had it not been for Moses’ intervention (verses 14, 18-20). To introduce this section, God inspired Moses in verse 7 to use the strong statement, “Remember! Do not forget....” This double imperative provides emphasis and adds weight to the sober reminders that follow.

We too, if we are blessed today with physical possessions or status, might think that we obtained these because of our own righteousness. But God may have given us blessings for quite a different reason. It *is* possible to deceive ourselves, thinking that God is adding physical things to us because we are seeking Him first, when, in reality, we are doing nothing of the kind. Perhaps the blessings are even a test to see where our loyalties lie.

Verses 9 and 19 show Moses as a beloved servant of God because of His love for the *people* of God. He stood in the gap as Jesus did for us all—and reflected the true character of God in his attitude. Verses 25-29 demonstrate that it pleases God when we remind Him of His steadfast character and the promises He has made. Of course, He doesn’t need reminding—rather, it shows Him that *we* remember who He is and what He has done for us and for others.

Becoming More Like God (Deuteronomy 10)

July 15

Since Moses had broken the tablets of the Ten Commandments in anger over the sinfulness of the people, God told him to make two *new* tablets of stone and to appear before Him again, while

fasting for a second span of 40 days and 40 nights. God then wrote the Ten Commandments on the newly hewn tablets of stone. They were placed *inside* the Ark of the Covenant (verses 1-5). Moses impresses on Israel that God requires of them to “fear the LORD your God, to walk in *all* His ways, and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes...*for your good*” (verses 12-13).

Some think of God’s commandments as harsh and burdensome. But His Word tells us that “His commandments are *not* burdensome” (1 John 5:3). And, as stated here, the things God commands us are *for our own good*. Today, the “ancient” standard given here is as modern and relevant as ever. But people can only live by it if they “circumcise the foreskins of [their] heart, and be stiff-necked no longer” (Deuteronomy 10:16)—or, in other words, if they become converted and receive God’s Spirit, which will enable them to become more and more like God in their thinking and way of life. And God tells us here a little bit about His way of life—such as the fact that He “shows no partiality nor takes a bribe,” and “administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing” (verses 17-18). Since we are to become perfect as God is (Matthew 5:48), we too are to “love the stranger” (Deuteronomy 10:19) and help the fatherless and the widow, without showing partiality (Psalm 82:3-4; Leviticus 19:15; James 3:17).

A Choice to Make (Deuteronomy 11)

July 16

Moses continues impressing on the children of Israel the absolute necessity of *obeying* each and every one of God’s commandments (verse 8) for God to bless them (verses 13-15, 23-25). If they love God with all their heart and soul, then they will carefully keep His commandments and walk in His ways, holding fast to Him (verses 1, 13, 22). After all, this *is* the love of God—“poured out in our hearts” (Romans 5:5)—“that we keep His commandments” (1 John 5:3; compare 2 John 6). However, we have a choice of whether to follow or to reject God, just as ancient Israel did. God set before them “a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 11:26-28).

God wants man to choose His way, which produces blessings (30:19), but He does not *force* man to do so. God created man for the purpose of developing godly character—outflowing, loving concern for others—which, by necessity, involves the voluntary decision of the individual to choose, and then act in accordance with, that right way. Otherwise, man would be nothing but a robot that does the right thing automatically without mind and conscience. But God, who is in the process of adding many children to His family, wants His future immortal sons and daughters to think and act like He does—and from eternity God has chosen to never veer from His loving nature. God expects all of us to choose His way of life too—and ultimately, once we are resurrected to incorruptible spirit with perfect godly character ourselves, we will maintain that right choice for eternity to come.

Verses 10-12 describe some agricultural practices of Egypt and Canaan, contrasting the way crops received necessary moisture. All crops in Egypt were supported by irrigation waters from the Nile. The expression relating to Egypt that the people “watered it by foot” refers to the opening or closing of water outlets that regulated flow in the canals that serviced the fields. Canaan, however, was a country without a single major river. The crops received water from the rain and the dew. God placed His people in a land in which the weather patterns were supposed to turn their minds and eyes to heaven, so they would recognize their dependence upon Him.

Indeed, God paints a refreshing picture here and on through verse 14. The Israelites were headed for a land “which drinks water from the rain of heaven...a land for which the LORD your God cares; the eyes of the LORD your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year.... I will give you rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain....” It should be noted that the land of Israel is not the same today as it was in the time of Moses. A rich land of milk and honey, the Holy Land was then lush and green—more heavily forested with large areas of good pasturage and fertile soil for crops. Of course, the Promised Land was a physical type of the wonderful blessings of the coming Kingdom of God, which will be established over all nations.

No Pagan Customs in the Worship of God (Deuteronomy 12)

July 17

Moses announces to the Israelites that when they have entered the Promised Land, there will have to be one specific place to bring their sacrifices, lest they be tempted to adopt the worship customs of the pagans, who sacrifice to their gods in every place they choose (verses 2-8, 13-14, 18). God is very concerned that Israel’s worship practices not incorporate pagan elements in any way. He specifically warns them to “take heed to yourself that you...do not inquire after their gods,

saying, *'How did these nations serve THEIR gods? I will also do likewise.'* You shall not worship the LORD your God *in that way*; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods.... Whatever *I* command you, be careful to observe *it*; you shall not *add to it* nor *take away from it*" (verses 30-32).

Today, the nominal Christian world celebrates religious holidays whose origin and customs are steeped in paganism, while refusing to keep God's weekly seventh-day Sabbath or His annual Holy Days. For example, Sunday, the first day of the week, was the day on which pagans worshiped the sun god since ancient times. "Easter" was a feast of the fertility goddess Astarte or Ashtoreth, also called Ishtar, Ostara or Eostre—which helps explain why the holiday bears that unusual name and is celebrated with such fertility symbols as bunny rabbits and eggs. And "Christmas" was originally the holy day of Mithras, Attis and other pagan gods. It is also remarkable that many such pagan "saviors" were supposedly born on December 25, killed on a Friday and "resurrected" on a Sunday during the "Easter" season—while the Scriptures show that the true Christ was neither born in December nor killed on a Friday nor resurrected on a Sunday.

Evergreen trees were employed as idols of Ashtoreth—such trees being referred to as *asherah* in the Hebrew Bible. God forbade them from being placed near His altar, as if to honor Him, as He did not want His worship system corrupted by them (Deuteronomy 16:21). Setting them up and decorating them as part of a religious observance is clearly condemned in Jeremiah 10:1-4—showing what God thinks of Christmas trees, which are in part derived from this ancient custom. Easter cakes (cakes to the "queen of heaven") and sunrise services (in honor of Tammuz) are clearly condemned in the Bible (compare Jeremiah 7:18; 44:17-27; Ezekiel 8:13-17). According to the *Ryrie Study Bible*, the "queen of heaven" is a reference to "the Assyro-Babylonian goddess Ishtar"—i.e., Easter. And in regard to "Tammuz," the same source identifies him as "a Babylonian deity, husband of Ishtar, who *after his death* supposedly became god of the underworld. Some have understood him as a vegetation-deity, dying in the heat of the summer and *rising in the spring.*"

It is no secret that the early Roman church absorbed pagan elements into its worship to accommodate new converts and make the new faith attractive to the pagan world, attaching "Christian" significance to these elements. Thus, many customs of traditional Christianity, following ancient Israel's bad example, clearly violate God's commands to avoid heathen practices in worshiping the true God. And not only have they *added* pagan elements to the worship of God—they have *deleted* godly elements that *should be* observed today. (To learn more, request or download our free booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?*)

In verse 31, Moses warned Israel to avoid one of the most hideous worship rites practiced by the Canaanites, that of infant sacrifice. Archaeologists have discovered in a number of locations the grisly remains of burned infant skeletons buried in large jars. Sadly, however, Israel did descend to this despicable practice too (2 Kings 21:1-9; 2 Chronicles 28:1-4).

A Dreamer of Dreams (Deuteronomy 13)

July 18

Moses continues warning against the danger of pagan worship. God commanded that everyone who would try to introduce Israel to the worship of other gods had to be killed—including one's brother, son, daughter, wife or close friend—"so all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you" (Deuteronomy 13:6-11). Today, the death penalty is not being carried out, of course, by spiritual Israel—the Church. Nevertheless, the principle of spiritual and, if need be, physical separation from wrong influences still applies. Christ clearly told His disciples: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37-38). Christ expects His disciples to choose between Him and their relatives when it comes to conflict in worship and true Christian living. We are to leave every form of paganism, and we are not to allow *anyone* to entice us to return to it.

In addition, Israel was admonished to not be deceived even by a prophet or a dreamer whose prophecies or dreams came true—if his goal was to influence others to worship pagan gods (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). Rather, such a prophet was to be killed too. Isaiah later gives us the way to discern a false prophet or teacher: "To the law and to the testimony [i.e., Holy Scripture]! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). Sometimes false prophets will arise, prophesying events that *do* come to pass so as to "test" us in order to "know" whether we really love God with all our heart and soul (Deuteronomy 13:3). In fact, in a few years from now, a powerful religious figure will appear on the world scene, called the "lawless one" or "false prophet," who will perform "signs and lying wonders" (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Satan will give him the power to do so; and by those signs he will deceive the multitudes (Revelation 19:20; see our

free booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*). Also, at that time, “false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24). Therefore, signs and wonders are *no* proof that the person performing them is from God. Yet, unless we have received the “love of the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:10) and are seriously committed to God’s way of life, we too can become deceived by those mighty signs, believing that, because of them, the religious *message* of the “prophet” or “dreamer” must be believed—and followed.

Laws Still in Force (Deuteronomy 14)

July 19

In this chapter, Moses reminds the Israelites about proper and improper mourning for the dead, about the consumption of clean versus unclean animals, and about tithing. *All* the laws discussed in this chapter are still valid for us today, with *two* exceptions.

When a close friend or relative dies, we are not to follow the ways of the heathen by “cutting” ourselves in mourning and despair, as ancient pagans and certain American Indian tribes did, nor by shaving the front of our head (verse 1). The reason is given in verse 2: We are a holy people to God, and as such we are to abstain from all religious practices dedicated to pagan gods or the dead, who were believed to live on in another life.

Further, we are to abstain from eating any unclean animal (verses 3-21), which is a “detestable” or “abominable thing” when used as food. Though the only land animals specifically identified in this chapter as unclean for food are the camel, the rabbit, the rock hyrax and the pig, the general description of unclean land animals is given as all that fail to meet the criteria of both chewing the cud *and* having cloven hooves (verses 7-8). Thus, all reptiles and amphibians are unclean, as are worms, spiders and most insects. So too are most mammals, the only ones acceptable for food being most of the ruminants, such as bovines, antelope, deer, sheep, goats and, though not always thought of, giraffe. In addition, only those water creatures “that have fins and scales” may be eaten (verses 9-10), thus ruling out things like eels, sharks, catfish, clams, squid, lobster, crab, shrimp and all other shellfish.

Clean birds may be eaten (verses 11, 20)—but these are only indirectly defined by listing *unclean* birds that must *not* be eaten (verses 12-18). From this list, we can see which birds are clean by noticing the characteristics of the birds which are unclean: (1) a clean bird has a crop; (2) a clean bird has a gizzard with a double lining which can be easily separated; (3) a clean bird is not a bird of prey; (4) a clean bird does not devour food while flying; (5) a clean bird’s hind toe and middle front toe are both elongated; (6) when a clean bird stands on a perch, it spreads its toes so that three front ones are on one side of the perch and the hind toe on the opposite side. All unclean birds lack at least one of these six characteristics. This means that the following birds are clean among others: chicken, turkey, duck, goose, swan, pheasant, quail, partridge, dove (pigeon), and all songbirds. While the King James Version says the “swan” is unclean in Deuteronomy 14:16 and Leviticus 11:18, the New King James and other modern versions correctly translate the word here as referring to a kind of owl. Birds like owls, hawks and ostriches are *unclean*—and so are their eggs.

Verse 19 tells us that all creeping or swarming things are unclean. Yet Leviticus 11, the parallel passage to this one, clarifies that certain kinds of flying insects with jointed legs above the feet for leaping may be eaten, e.g., locusts, grasshoppers and crickets (verses 21-22). It is believed that in the ancient Middle East, these insects were ground into a fine meal and baked into cakes—perhaps explaining the later description of John the Baptist’s eating locusts with honey (Matthew 3:4).

In verse 21 of Deuteronomy 14, the Israelites were permitted to give aliens the meat of animals that died of themselves. However, there is no indication that unclean animals were allowed to be eaten by *anyone*. Therefore, the prohibition for Israelites in verse 21 to eat meat of animals that died of themselves and the permission to give it to foreigners for consumption deals with only *clean* animals. This was, therefore, a *ritual* law—a point made even clearer by the fact that an Israelite who *did* inadvertently eat of an animal that had died of itself became *ritually clean* again in the evening after washing himself with water (Leviticus 17:15; compare 11:39-40). We do *not* read anywhere, however, that the eating of an *unclean* animal brought only ritual uncleanness that ended in the evening after washing. Also, this *ritual* law against eating animals that have died of themselves is not to be confused with another law that is still very much in effect—God’s prohibition against eating the blood of any animal (Deuteronomy 12:16, 23-25), which outlaws “strangled” clean animals from being eaten (Acts 15:29; 21:25).

Another *ritual* law mentioned in Deuteronomy 14:8 prohibits the touching of a dead pig’s carcass. Leviticus 11 explains that touching the carcass of any unclean animal made a person *ritually* unclean, but only “until evening” (verses 8, 11, 24, 26, 27, 31). Indeed, the same was true for

touching a dead *clean* animal (verse 39). The fact that a person became *ritually* clean again by evening, after washing himself, shows the *ritualistic* character of this provision. (This is not to say, however, that there were not health benefits to following even these ritual laws. For instance, an animal that died of itself may have fallen victim to a disease, thus making it potentially harmful to eat. And it remains a good practice to wash our hands after we have touched a dead animal of any kind to prevent the possible transmission of harmful pathogens. This is especially apparent when reading about how various pots and utensils were made unclean by the carcasses of dead animals in Leviticus 11.)

(To learn more about the dietary laws God gave, download or send for our free booklet *What Does the Bible Teach About Clean and Unclean Meats?*)

Finally, Deuteronomy 14:22-29 discusses some tithing principles that are still valid today. This passage does *not* address the *first* tithe, which was to be given to the Levites for their work (compare Numbers 18:21). Some have argued that the tithe mentioned in Deuteronomy 14:22 is the first tithe. Yet, if that were the case, it would be the only tithe mentioned here without an explanation for its use. It makes more sense that the use of the tithe mentioned in verse 22 is spelled out in the verses that follow (verses 23-26)—and these verses clearly refer to a *second* tithe, which is to be used by the tithe-payer for himself and his family in the observance of God’s feasts. Then follows a brief mention of a *third* tithe, saved only every third year out of a seven-year sabbatical cycle (verses 28-29; compare 26:12; Leviticus 25:2-4) to be given to the poor— i.e., the Levite (who was not allowed to own any land), the stranger, the fatherless and the widow. All three tithes are attested to by the well-known first-century Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus (compare *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 4, chap. 4, secs. 3-4; chap. 8, secs. 8, 22).

(For more information on tithing and our responsibility in the matter, download or send for our free booklet *What Does the Bible Teach About Tithing?*)

Statutes of Liberty (Deuteronomy 15)

July 20

The New King James Version does not provide the best translation of verse 4, as it could be read to say that the law regarding the year of release would sometimes not be in effect because of periods when no one was poor. Perhaps it should read, “...that there be no poor among you,” meaning this law would help prevent extreme poverty by preventing debts being exacted from those unable to fully repay them. The Living Bible translates the verse as, “No one will become poor because of this”—indicating that the year of release would not impoverish lenders. And the Revised Standard Version renders verses 4-5 this way: “But there will be no poor among you...if only you will obey the voice of the LORD your God....”

Although there should have been no poverty within the nation of Israel, since God promised to bless everyone among His people (Deuteronomy 15:4)—which will be the case throughout the whole world during the future millennial reign of Christ (Micah 4:4)—God’s promise to the Israelites was conditional upon their obedience (Deuteronomy 15:5). And since He knew the kind of people they would be (compare 5:29), He also knew that there would be poverty (15:11; compare Matthew 26:11). Therefore, He devised a system to deal with the poor in a merciful and compassionate way unlike any social system known in this world today.

At the end of every seven years, a total release of all debts had to be granted (Deuteronomy 15:1). If there is any modern parallel at all, it is that of declaring bankruptcy—except that, in ancient Israel, the seven-year release was mandatory, and it did not matter whether creditor or debtor wanted such a release or not. Further, this procedure also required that a poor Hebrew person, who had “sold” himself to his creditor to pay off his debts, had to be released as well. But more than that, since the poor Hebrew servant had diligently worked for his master, he was to be given a generous bonus on his departure (verses 12-15, 18) to enable him to make a new start. The servant was permitted, however, to continue working for his master if he so wished (verses 16-17), yet *without* being subject to a continued obligation for repayment of prior debts. In all of this, especially in recalling Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, God stresses that His way is the way of liberation and freedom.

Three Times a Year (Deuteronomy 16:1-17)

July 21

Here, some of God’s seven annual festivals are listed and reviewed. The sacrifices that God later *added* to accompany these feasts are no longer in effect. The festivals themselves, however, are still to be observed.

Following the Passover, God commanded that the Israelites were not to eat leavened bread for seven days, but were to instead eat unleavened bread during that time (verses 3, 8). No leaven was to be seen among them in all their territory for those seven days (verse 4)—the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Seven weeks later, the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, was to be kept (verse 9). Next would be the Feast of Trumpets followed by the Day of Atonement, but neither are mentioned here—nor is the Last Great Day. However, the Feast of Tabernacles is specifically reviewed (verses 13-15). This does not mean that Trumpets, Atonement and the Last Great Day are no longer holy. Rather, God is listing here only the three *seasons* of His annual festivals, as can be seen in verse 16. The first season, early spring, includes Passover and Unleavened Bread; the next season, late spring approaching summer, refers to Pentecost, and the third season, late summer and fall, includes Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles and the Last Great Day (these feasts are all to be kept within a period of less than a month).

As part of the instructions for keeping His festivals, God also commanded that we come before Him with an offering during each of the three festival seasons (verse 16). Generally, the Israelites made three trips in order to worship together in the three festival seasons. Many of the offerings were produce or animals, so it may have been practical for families to turn over their offerings as soon as they arrived at the place of worship. However, since offerings today are usually in the form of money (checks, cash, etc.), and since God does command that we are not to “appear before Him” empty-handed, the Church of God in modern times has instituted a tradition of taking up offerings on each Holy Day, the days on which God specifically commands us to appear before Him in assembly for worship services.

Why did God specify only the males? It was assumed that each family was headed by a man, and the man presented the family’s offering. Even today, there is often just one offering from each family—though many parents encourage their children to each give a small amount in order to teach them the habit of giving to God.

Finally, it should be mentioned that God does not set any amount for us to give except that it be “according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you” (verse 17). Of course, this cannot mean that we are to put a “price tag” on all that God has given us and try to pay Him that—for we could never in a million lifetimes pay that much. Rather, it must refer to the clause in the first part of the same verse, that we are to give as we are able—or, more to the point, as *God* has enabled us.

And Justice for All (Deuteronomy 16:18–17:20)

July 22

In this section of Deuteronomy, Moses explains how justice is to be administered—and who is to do so. He begins by explaining that judges and officers are to be appointed in every city. If a matter proved too difficult at this level, it was to be taken to the place of God’s tabernacle, to “the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days”—who, together, constituted a sort of “supreme court,” whose decisions were binding (17:9-11). However, it was not, like the U.S. Supreme Court, a court of appeals wherein either side in a dispute could ask that the matter be judged again—for only the judges at the lower level could determine whether the case needed to come before the higher authorities. Later, the chief seat of judgment on the human level will be occupied by a king. None of these judges are to pervert justice by accepting bribes or showing partiality to anyone (16:18-20).

Moses continues by stating the criminality of idolatry and describing right and just proceedings regarding the execution of its perpetrators—through stoning (verse 21-17:7). To ensure that an allegation of idolatry could be substantiated, the matter had to be diligently looked into, and two or three witnesses had to be found confirming the sin. If only one person saw and reported the transgression, the perpetrator could not be killed. Furthermore, the witnesses who reported the transgression had to be the first to cast the stones (verses 1-7). This procedure for a carnal nation was to ensure that the stoned person was in fact guilty of the alleged crime, and that such evil conduct would not be repeated. Indeed, the same principles had to be applied for *any* capital offense (compare Numbers 35:30). Moreover, no conviction of *any* crime, whether worthy of death or not, could be established without the testimony of at least two witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15).

After explaining the role of the appointed judges and the people’s responsibility to heed them, God moves on to the matter of human kingship. At this time, God was Israel’s King (Exodus 15:18; Numbers 23:21). But knowing human nature, He already foresaw and knew that Israel would eventually ask for a human king as in other nations, although this request would constitute a rejection of God’s direct rule and therefore be sinful (1 Samuel 8:7; 12:19). Nevertheless, God would give them

a human king, as He had earlier prophesied that He would (compare Genesis 17:16; 49:10). But Israel's future king was not to be just like other rulers of the day. For, in placing certain restrictions and requirements on Israel's king, God essentially decreed that the nation would be a limited constitutional monarchy under His own supreme theocracy. "These regulations limited the power and splendor of the future king. He would not be dependent on military power and riches. He was exhorted not to entangle the nation in political alliances that would expose Israel to pagan worship. Instead, he was exhorted to guide the nation into obedience to God's laws" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 17:15-17). In requiring the king to read and govern according to God's law, "the true king of Israel would be bound to God's instructions. He would not be a tyrant, but a king who ruled in accordance with God's revealed will" (note on 17:18). Sadly, few Israelite kings would fulfill their responsibilities in these regards.

But the instructions here can serve as a lesson for us. True Christians, the saints of God serving in His spiritual administration of life, do not administer civil judgment over the governments of this world (see 2 Corinthians 3:6-7). But they *are* to eventually serve as kings in the coming Kingdom of God, which will soon reign over the entire earth (Revelation 5:10; 20:4, 6; 2:26-28). Daniel 7:18 says that "the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever." And verse 22 reveals, "Judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom" (KJV). Psalm 149 elaborates: "Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud on their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute on them the written judgment—this honor have all His saints" (verses 5-9). So even though Christians are not to judge in the governments of the world today, they will, when glorified as immortal kings, both judge and carry out judgment on the nations according to the "written judgment." Therefore, if the kings of Israel had a responsibility to read and meditate upon the Book of the Law, Christians, as future kings in God's Kingdom, have an even greater responsibility to do so—yet by studying not only the civil law of Israel, but the full exposition of God's judgments as found throughout the entire Bible. Glorified Christians will, of course, rule with great mercy—just as God's great mercy has been shown to *them* throughout *their* human lives.

The Prophet and False Prophets (Deuteronomy 18)

July 23

Israel is again cautioned against learning "to follow the abominations" of the people living in the land, including the practices of witchcraft, sorcery or divination (verses 9-14). In contrast to pagan soothsayers, Moses prophesies that God would eventually raise up a Prophet like himself, referring to the coming of Jesus Christ (verses 15-19; see John 1:45; Acts 3:22-23). He makes clear that just as the words from God that he proclaimed were to be obeyed, so it would be with this future Prophet. And indeed, like Moses, Jesus came as an Announcer of God's law and as a Mediator of a covenant based on that law. In short, Christ's words were to be followed—whereas others who would falsely *claim* to be prophets would have to be rejected (Deuteronomy 18:20).

Christ would later confirm that many *false* prophets would come to *deceive* the many (compare Matthew 24:4-5, 11). Sadly, this problem has always persisted among God's people (2 Peter 2:1-3). Moses gives a clue as to how to determine whether a person is a prophet of God or not: "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously" (Deuteronomy 18:22). But one word of caution here: Sometimes, false prophets will foretell the future accurately (see 13:1-5)—and God Himself may even be behind it (see Numbers 22:20, 38; 23:12). Yet even if someone relays many correct prophecies, the verse quoted above basically tells us that if there is just one instance where he claims that God has, apart from Scripture, specially and directly communicated to his mind regarding some event that will happen and the event does not come to pass as he proclaimed it would, that alone would make him a false prophet—that is, unless the proclamation is a warning of divine punishment and those to whom it is directed repent, as all such prophecies are contingent upon whether the recipients repent or not (compare Jeremiah 18:6-8; Jonah 3). And, of course, as explained in the highlights for Deuteronomy 13, someone's fulfilled prophecies are to be measured against his teachings and deeds. We are never to follow anyone's anti-biblical teachings or evil practices.

Cities of Refuge, Manslaughter and Deterrence (Deuteronomy 19)**July 24**

Moses commands Israel to set aside three cities of refuge in the land west of the Jordan just as three cities had already been set aside in the land east of the Jordan for any manslayer—one who killed another person accidentally (see Numbers 35:9-29; Deuteronomy 4:41-43). Such a person could flee to any of these cities to escape a possible execution by an avenger of blood (a close relative of the victim), but he had to stay there until the high priest died (19:1-13; Numbers 35:25). Further, as Numbers 35:12 shows, the cities of refuge were established so that the manslayer could flee there in order to be tried fairly.

Several points should be considered here:

The perpetrator was only saved from death if he was a “manslayer,” that is, if the death of the victim was caused accidentally (compare Numbers 35:15). Several examples are given throughout scripture to illustrate accidental conduct (which might not be the same as man’s understanding of an “accident.”) This would include unintentional or ignorant or unknowing conduct (Deuteronomy 19:4; compare margin in King James Version)—for example, the perpetrator kills a person by throwing a stone without *knowing* that the victim is there (compare Numbers 35:23). It would also include unintentional conduct—the perpetrator kills a person without *wanting* to do it (compare Deuteronomy 19:5; Numbers 35:22). On the other hand, if the perpetrator *hated* the victim in the past, he had to be executed (Deuteronomy 19:4, 6, 11; Numbers 35:20-21). Also, if he struck the victim *intentionally* with a stone, an iron implement, or a wooden hand weapon, even though he might *not* have *hated* the victim (Numbers 35:16-18), he was still considered deserving of death.

In addition, the accidental manslayer was not considered innocent, as his conduct, albeit unintentional or unknowing, led to the death of a person. The real sin here appears to be negligence because, with proper precautions, it would seem that such a death could have been avoided. The manslayer still had to flee to a city of refuge and stay there until the high priest died. If he left the city before the death of the high priest, the avenger of blood was permitted to kill him. Thus, the awareness that careless actions could lead to an extended period of confinement within a city would tend to make people more careful.

A manslayer would undoubtedly have been given refuge in any of the cities of refuge. However, he would most likely flee to the respective city assigned to the territory in which he happened to be, since it would almost always be the closest one and the most accessible. This is because each city of refuge was located in the center of its respective territory—and, within that territory, roads (with bridges and signs) were built that led to that city (Deuteronomy 19:2-4).

Moses next cautions the people not to remove their neighbor’s landmarks (Deuteronomy 19:14). This was not a simple matter of moving a rock. Landmarks were stones that marked property boundaries. This law prohibited manipulating boundaries so as to rob someone of part of his property—his rightful inheritance. Moses next warned against testifying as a false witness (verses 16-17). If a witness was found to have brought up a false accusation, “then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother...life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (verses 18-21)—that is, punishment to fit the *intended* harm. Moreover, the purpose for severe penalties is also given here—to serve as a deterrent to others against committing similar crimes (verse 20). And when rightly administered, such laws do act as a deterrent.

Under the New Testament dispensation, a Christian is not to kill or harm anyone (Romans 13:9-10) or seek vengeance in any manner (Matthew 5:38-39; Romans 12:19). This does not mean we must desist from righting a wrong, such as taking disciplinary action or requiring restitution.

Laws of Warfare (Deuteronomy 20)**July 25**

Moses now discusses the principles governing warfare. These principles show that, despite the use of physical armaments, Israel was still to look to God for victory (Deuteronomy 20:1-9). One of the threats that Israel would face in war mentioned in verse 1 is “horses and chariots.” Armies equipped in this manner were particularly intimidating to foot soldiers. The commandment was given in Deuteronomy 17:16 that Israel’s kings not “multiply horses.” And there is no evidence that Israel utilized horses for war before Solomon’s time (1 Kings 4:26; 10:26). If this is the case, it is particularly fitting that Moses assured Israel they need not fear even when armies came against them with chariots.

With Almighty God as commander, there was no room for fear in the ranks—and those who were fearful were to be excused (verse 8). Others excused from warfare—at least on a temporary basis—included a person who had just built a new house, one who had planted a new vineyard, and one who was betrothed to a woman to marry her (verses 5-7). Deuteronomy 24:5 adds the further

exception of a man who had just gotten married—he was permitted to stay with his wife for one year without having to go out to war. One of the reasons for these excuses from participation in battle seems to be that persons in such conditions would likely be thinking about what they were leaving behind rather than concentrating on the battle. No doubt, God’s mercy and compassion are also shown in these regulations. Furthermore, in these “excused absences,” God was showing that it is not necessary to rely on numbers. With God fighting for His people (verse 4), very few people could easily overcome a force of many times their number (see Leviticus 26:8), as often happened during the Israelites’ history when they were obedient to God.

Before the Israelites attacked a city “very far” from them (20:15), they had to offer peace to it (verses 10-11). It is interesting that the offer was of peace—not enslavement. Such cities were to pay tribute, essentially a tax, and “serve” Israel—not in slavery but to remain in peace and harmony with Israel, thus promoting the safety, security and well-being of God’s people. Moreover, in agreeing to keep Israel’s laws and way of life, such cities would in fact enter into a much better way of life than they had ever known. If a city refused the offer and chose war instead, Israel was to “strike every male in it with the edge of the sword” (verses 12-13), while leaving the women and children alive (verse 14). In regard to the cities that were located within the Promised Land, however, Israel was to “let nothing that breathes remain alive” (verse 16), so that the evil inhabitants could not influence Israel with “their abominations...and you sin against the LORD your God” (verse 18).

Finally, God told Israel not to cut down fruit trees in a siege against a city. They were only allowed to destroy those trees that were not “trees for food” (verses 19-20). This would especially make sense in a longer siege where food supplies could become an issue.

Family and Societal Laws (Deuteronomy 21:1-21)

July 26

In cases where a murder was committed that could not be solved, it was first necessary to determine which town’s jurisdiction the crime fell in—as it would be that town’s responsibility to do all it could to investigate the matter. Yet upon finding no answer, there still had to be some type of atonement to avoid defilement of the land (compare Numbers 35:33). Thus, in lieu of executing the perpetrator, the elders of the closest city had to take a heifer that had not yet been used for work down to a running stream and break its neck—though a few translations say it was beheaded. The elders then had to wash their hands over the heifer’s neck, thereby indicating their innocence and obtaining atonement (verses 1-9). Another specific type of heifer, i.e., a red heifer, was also used for certain purifications (compare Numbers 19:2). And demonstrating how pervasive in the ancient world was the public washing of one’s hands to indicate innocence, Pontius Pilate would later wash his hands to declare himself innocent of the murder of Jesus (Matthew 27:24). The running stream may also symbolize the defilement of the land being carried away.

Deuteronomy 21:10-14 allows for an Israelite to marry a foreign woman among the war prisoners. Note the requirement that she “shave her head and trim her nails.” According to *The Nelson Study Bible*: “this ritual was intended to give the woman time to adjust to the new culture and to mourn over the forceful separation from her family. It was also a symbol of cleansing. She was preparing to become part of a new community” (note on 21:12). Inasmuch as God clearly prohibited an Israelite from marrying pagans who engaged in idol worship, this woman had to have accepted the true God of Israel (as verses 12-13 somewhat imply, showing that the woman had come under the authority of the husband).

Verses 15-18 discuss the undesired situation in which a husband had two wives, the one loved more than the other, and the consequences for the firstborn son of the unloved wife. God still required that the firstborn son was to receive the double portion of his father’s inheritance allotted to him. People have wondered why men were permitted to marry more than one wife in ancient times. The answer is that this was *not* God’s original intent. Jesus said that in the beginning, when He created Adam and Eve, “the two” were to become “one flesh,” and “the two” were not to be divorced. Because of the hardness of man’s heart, God allowed men to have more than one wife, as He also allowed men to divorce their wives (compare Matthew 19:1-9). The biblical record shows, however, that having more than one wife brought about many problems for the family. The difficulties, in this respect, of Abraham, Jacob and Solomon are telling examples.

Verses 18-21 dealt with a rebellious son given over to drunkenness and gluttony, who stubbornly refused to obey his parents—obviously referring to an older adolescent son and not a young child. Yet this was not just “typical” adolescent rebelliousness. Rather, it denoted one who had established a reputation as a “good for nothing” over a lengthy period. To prevent others from emulating the son’s abominable lifestyle—and to prevent the son’s flagrant disregard of parental authority from

growing into disregard for all authority, including God's, to the point of him eventually posing a danger to society—his parents had to report him to the elders, and he had to be executed.

Such a punishment may sound harsh to our ears today. But keep in mind that God's laws were designed to create a peaceful, productive, safe society for all people. This particular punishment, though severe, was designed to safeguard others. Knowing human nature, God realized that when a young man showed a rebellious, stubborn attitude over an extended period of time, if he dishonored and rejected the authority of his parents and others, if he showed little or no self-control or willingness to take responsibility for his actions, it would be only a matter of time before his defiant attitude would lead him to injure or even kill someone else. So if over time he showed no inclination to change, the problem was taken care of before he had the opportunity to hurt or kill others. This punishment would “put away the evil from among” Israel and cause others to “hear and fear” (verse 21).

How different would our societies be today if young men knew they were subject to such a penalty at a relatively early age if they chose to reject all authority and decent standards of behavior? Many problems that plague our societies, such as career criminals, gangs and teenage mass murderers, would be snuffed out before they had a chance to get started. All of society would be much safer and better off, and innocent people would not have to live in fear of criminal thugs. Keep in mind, too, that this wasn't the absolute end for such people. God knew that he would ultimately resurrect them in a future world in which they will be able to better understand the consequences of their behavior and repent (see Revelation 20:5, 11-12; Ezekiel 37:1-14; “The Last Great Day: Eternal Life Offered to All,” *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*, 1999, pp. 51-57). God truly is a god of justice, mercy and loving concern for the well-being of all.

Justice, Caring and Holiness Precepts (Deuteronomy 21:22–22:30)

July 27

This section begins with instructions on hanging someone. Notice that the criminal was put to death and then hanged (verse 22). “The guilty person was not hanged by the neck; this form of execution was not practiced in ancient Israel. The hanging was actually the impaling [or tying up] of the corpse for public viewing after death by stoning. Everyone would know that individual had brought guilt on the community. The exposure of the corpse was limited to one day. For that day, it reminded people of God's judgment on the sinner” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 21:22-23). Thus, a criminal so hanged had to be buried before sunset (verses 22-23; compare Joshua 8:29). The hanging on a tree of the condemned person's corpse was considered a “curse” (Deuteronomy 21:23). That is part of why Joseph of Arimathea was anxious to take Jesus from the cross and bury Him before the new day, a Holy Day, began (Matthew 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-54; John 19:38-42). Jesus, when being nailed on the cross, became “accursed” for us—He, being innocent of any crime or sin, took away the curse for the violation of the law (that is, the death penalty) that we, through our sinful conduct, had brought upon ourselves (compare Galatians 3:13; Romans 6:23).

Deuteronomy 22:1-4 gives practical examples on how to love our neighbor: If we find something that belongs to our neighbor, we are to return it to him. We are to take care of the found item until it can be returned (verses 1-3). We are also to assist our neighbor when he needs help (verse 4). And we are not to hide ourselves from helping (compare Isaiah 58:6-7). Rather we are to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2).

Deuteronomy 22:5 prohibits cross-dressing. A man is not to wear women's clothes and vice versa, according to the cultural norms of the day. This deals with transvestitism or with conduct that could even give the appearance that one is engaged in such a practice. The command does not forbid unisex fashions—that is, attire that is culturally acceptable for both men *and* women to wear. It should also be noted here that “in the ancient Middle East, dressing in the clothing of the opposite sex was a magical practice intended to bring harm to people. For example, a transvestite male would predict that the soldiers of another army would be as weak as females” (*Nelson*, note on 22:5).

Verses 6-7 are concerned with the preservation of the environment and wildlife—one is not to take the mother bird and the young birds at the same time, but let the mother go free so that she can continue producing offspring, thus perpetuating the species. If the opposite were done, taking the mother and leaving the young, the young would, of course, die, leaving none of the birds alive.

Verse 8 is another law showing concern for neighbor. In ancient houses, roofs, which were flat, were often used like other rooms, especially during hot weather. Thus, there was a real danger of someone accidentally stepping or falling off the edge of the roof. Therefore, this law was to protect others by requiring that a house have a parapet or railing around the roof's edge to prevent accidental injury. While we do not normally put railings around our roofs today unless it is common for people

to walk on them, we would certainly do so around a balcony or very high deck. Indeed, the principle here is simply that we try to anticipate dangers in anything we plan or build and do what we can to protect others from those dangers. This law was simply a practical way to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39)—to take reasonable steps to protect others from injury.

Verse 12 repeats the command from Numbers 15:37-41 that tassels be added to the four corners of one’s clothing. One source comments: “To understand the significance of the tassel, we must first understand the significance of the hem. The hem of an ancient Near-Eastern garment was not simply a fold sewed to prevent the threads of the cloth from unraveling. The hem of the outer garment or robe made an important social statement. It was usually the most ornate part of the garment. And the more important the individual, the more elaborate and the more ornate was the embroidery on the hem of his or her outer robe. The tassel must be understood as an extension of such a hem.... Thus, the significance of the tassel (as well as the elaborate hem) is this: It was worn by those who counted; it was the ‘I.D.’ of nobility. The requirement of a blue cord in the tassels [see Numbers 15:38] lends further support to the notion that the tassels signified nobility because the blue dye used to color the threads was extraordinarily expensive” (Jacob Milgrom, “Of Hems and Tassels,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, May–June 1983, pp. 61-62).

This supports the common Jewish understanding: “In ancient times non-Jewish royalty wore fringes on the hems of their clothes to indicate their high position. The Torah instructs all Jews to remember that they are a nation of priests with God as their ruler” (Malka Drucker, *Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*, 1982, p. 48). However, the explicitly stated scriptural reason for tassels is found in Numbers 15:39-40: “that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord to do them...and so be holy to the LORD.” Perhaps, in reminding the Israelites that they were a royal priesthood, the tassels also reminded them that this responsibility required them to obey Him and remain holy. It may even be that the tassels reminded them that God had taken them from slavery and made them a wealthy, blessed people—and that He would continue to bless them as long as they remained faithful to Him.

Today it is the Holy Spirit that reminds us of God’s law (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit was not given, or even promised, to ancient Israel at large, so they needed such physical reminders (compare Deuteronomy 5:29). Under the terms of the New Covenant, those physical reminders should not be necessary, as the law of God is being written on our hearts and minds (Jeremiah 31:33). It is true that Christ wore tassels (see Matthew 9:20, the word translated “hem” here and “borders” in 23:5 referring to an ancient hem with tassels as described above), but He lived His human life under Old Testament rules, including its sacrifices and offerings and its physical reminders.

Deuteronomy 22:13-30 discusses laws of sexual morality. If it was discovered that a newly married bride had engaged in sexual immorality or fornication prior to marriage, she was to be stoned (verses 20-21). If the husband’s accusation of fornication prior to marriage was proved wrong, the husband had to pay a fine to his wife’s family and was not allowed to ever divorce her (verse 19). This was done to protect the wife, as the husband had to continue to provide for her.

When two unmarried people engaged in fornication and were discovered, the perpetrators had to marry each other (verse 28) unless the father of the girl refused to consent to the marriage. In that case, the man who had enticed the virgin still had to pay “money according to the bride-price of virgins” (Exodus 22:16-17). If two people engaged in adultery, that is, where at least one of them was married to someone else, then both perpetrators were to be stoned (verse 23). The concept of adultery even included a “betrothed,” though not yet married, woman, as she was already considered to be the “wife” of the new husband (verses 23-24). Then there was the matter of rape. If a sexual relationship involving a betrothed woman occurred in the city where other people were nearby, but the woman did not cry out for help, this was considered adultery and not rape, since the woman could have been heard if she had cried out, thereby demonstrating her disagreement with the sexual encounter. On the other hand, if a rape of a betrothed woman occurred in the isolation of the countryside, where her cries for help would have been to no avail, then the matter was *declared* a rape and only the rapist had to die (verses 25-27).

Don’t Get Mixed Up (Deuteronomy 21:22–22:30)

July 27 Cont’d

Deuteronomy 22:9 forbids sowing a vineyard with different *kinds* of seed. Verse 10 prohibits plowing with an ox and a donkey together. And verse 11 prohibits wearing garments of different material. Let’s examine these three prohibitions in more detail.

The prohibition against wearing certain clothes is actually quite specific. Note that the words “such as” have been added to verse 11. It should actually read, “You shall not wear a garment of

different sorts, wool and linen mixed together.” That the mixing of wool and linen is really the issue here may also be seen in Leviticus 19:19, which clearly states, “Nor shall a garment of mixed wool and linen come upon you.” Wool is an animal product, while linen is a plant product. Such should not be combined, as they produce clothes of lesser quality. Further, the *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown Commentary (JFB)* notes that research has determined that wool blended with linen may sometimes increase static electricity to the point of causing heat rashes in hot climates (note on Lev. 19:19). Thus, with the prohibition being so specific, *synthetic* fabric does not even appear to be an issue here, or fabric that is part synthetic and part wool or that is part synthetic and part linen. It should also be noted that the prohibition is against a particular fabric being an improper *blend*. It apparently does not prohibit wearing wool and linen at the same time or even as different parts of the same garment.

The purpose of the prohibition against sowing different kinds of seed may have been twofold. First, it may have been “directed against an idolatrous practice, viz., that of the ancient Zabians, or fire-worshippers, who sowed different seeds, accompanying the act with magical rites and invocations” (*JFB*, note on Leviticus 19:19). But this law was evidently also given to prevent the intentional or unintentional cross-pollinating of different kinds of plants, as this would produce substandard hybrids. The same commentary notes that “those who have studied the diseases of land and vegetables tell us that the practice of mingling seeds is injurious both to flowers and to grains. ‘If the various genera of the natural order Gramineae, which includes the grains and the grasses, should be sown in the same field, and flower at the same time, so that the pollen of the two flowers mix, a spurious seed will be the consequence, called by the farmers ches. It is always inferior and unlike either of the two grains that produced it, in size, flavor, and nutritious principles. Independent of contributing to disease the soil, they never fail to produce the same [result] in animals and men that feed on them’” (note on Leviticus 19:19). For other examples, cucumbers should not be planted near watermelons because they will cross and produce a perversion. Likewise, the various members of the muskmelon and cantaloupe family should not be planted near pumpkins or certain types of squash, as they will mix. On the other hand, there is nothing wrong with planting peas or beans among corn, or planting two pasture grasses together. In that case, there is no problem as each seed continues to reproduce only after its own kind.

With today’s scientific knowledge, there is much planned hybridization. However, much of it is controversial because, generally speaking, with most “improvements” or advantages come corresponding disadvantages or weaknesses. Hybrid plants grown for human food have often proven less healthful.

Several reasons have been offered for the prohibition against yoking an ox and a donkey together for plowing. One explanation is that an ox is a clean animal, while a donkey is unclean. Also, it has been shown that the ox cannot tolerate the smell of a donkey, so that both animals don’t really work together harmoniously. They pull unequally and, sometimes, even against each other. *The Soncino Commentary* suggests that the “underlying principle is prevention of cruelty, since the ass which is weaker than the ox would suffer in such a combination.” The *JFB Commentary* expresses *all* of these thoughts, stating: “An ox and ass, being of different species and of very different characters, cannot associate comfortably, nor unite cheerfully in drawing a plow or wagon. The ass being much smaller and his step shorter, there would be an unequal and irregular draft. Besides, the ass, from feeding on coarse and poisonous weeds, has a fetid breath, which its yoke-fellow seeks to avoid, not only as poisonous and offensive, but producing leanness, or, if long continued, death; and hence, it has been observed always to hold away its head from the ass and to pull only with one shoulder” (note on 22:10). All of this certainly serves to illustrate a spiritual principle the apostle Paul brought out in the New Testament. In light of everything that was just pointed out, we can perhaps better understand Paul’s point in 2 Corinthians 6:14, where he says, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” Indeed, this lesson may be found not only in the rule about plowing, but also the ones concerning seeds and fabrics. For while these precepts have value in the physical realm, they illustrate a spiritual reality: Don’t get mixed up with this world.

Acceptance into the Congregation (Deuteronomy 23)

July 28

Verses 1-8 of this chapter deal with laws pertaining to the ancient physical nation of Israel—they are not applicable to the Church of God today. For example, verse 6 states that Israel was not to seek the peace of the Ammonite or the Moabite “nor their prosperity all your days forever.” Christ, on the other hand, tells His disciples to love their enemies, to bless them who curse them, and to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9, 43-45). The word “forever” in Deuteronomy 23 must be

understood in context. Often this word means forever *as long as certain conditions apply* (e.g., compare Exodus 21:5-6).

Deuteronomy 23:1 prohibits eunuchs from entering the assembly of the Lord—that is, from receiving Israelite citizenship, which would have entitled them to full participation in Israelite society and the rights of being an Israelite. Thus, having the status of a “stranger,” they could have joined in festival worship and many other aspects of Israelite life but were still forbidden from certain things, such as partaking of the Passover. And they did not have all the protections under the law that Israelites did, such as having to be released from slavery in the year of release. Also, according to verses 2-3, descendants of illegitimate unions, as well as of Ammonites or Moabites, were denied Israelite citizenship until the family had dwelt among God’s people for 10 generations. Again, this is said to be the rule forever. But for those in Christ, such distinctions are eliminated and cannot apply in the way described here. True Christians may be from any nation and can suffer from any physical debility. As recipients of the Holy Spirit, they are spiritual Israelites, who may immediately worship God in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24). As Paul tells converted gentiles, “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19).

Deuteronomy 23:9-11 states that an individual who contracts some ceremonial defilement during the night does not become ritually clean again until the next sunset. This is, of course, a ritual law that is no longer in effect. Still, as mentioned before, there were undoubtedly health benefits to such laws. And thus, the underlying *principle* of physical cleanliness is still very much applicable today. Verses 12-13 concern sanitation laws about dealing with human waste. Remember from the highlight on Leviticus 13–15 that dung was a major ingredient in the “healing” ointments of ancient Egypt. Of course, such products would have done nothing but worsen the condition of ailing patients. Only the revealed knowledge of the all-knowing God saved the Israelites from the same harmful practices. The next verse, Deuteronomy 23:14, it should be noted, can also be applied in a spiritual way—God may turn away from *us* if He sees something *spiritually* unclean in *our* lives that we do not want to get rid of.

The proscription against returning a slave in verses 15-16 is not talking about indentured servants within Israel. The *Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown Commentary* states in its note on these verses: “Evidently a servant [slave] of the Canaanites or some of the neighboring people, who was driven by tyrannical oppression, or induced, with a view of embracing the true religion, to take refuge in Israel. Such a one was not to be surrendered by the inhabitants of the place whither he had fled for protection.”

No Selling Dogs and No Banking? (Deuteronomy 23)

July 28 Cont’d

In verse 18, the principle is expressed that ill-gotten gain cannot become “holy” by giving a portion of it to God. The word “dog” here, it should be pointed out, is not a reference to an actual canine animal. Rather, as the previous verse makes mention of two related professions—that of a ritual harlot and that of a “perverted one,” i.e., a male prostitute—so the same two should be understood in verse 18. Thus, a harlot and a dog refer to a harlot and a male prostitute. Actual dogs in the ancient Middle East were often looked upon as worthless scavengers and so became metaphoric for unsavory or immoral people. Indeed, the word “dogs” is often used metaphorically in the Bible (compare Psalm 22:16, 20; Matthew 7:6; 15:26-27; Philippians 3:2; Revelation 22:15). Therefore, if someone runs a pet store or raises animals and sells dogs, it is perfectly acceptable to offer a portion of the profit to God. The verse in question has nothing to do with that.

Verses 19-20 forbid charging interest of a *poor* brother, but permit charging reasonable interest of a foreigner, as loaning money to foreigners was usually done in a business context (compare *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary*, note on 23:19-20; “Usury,” *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*; *New Bible Dictionary*; *Hasting’s Dictionary of the Bible*). In fact, the Church of God in modern times has long understood that an Israelite *was* permitted to charge reasonable interest of even another Israelite if the purpose of the loan was not to help a poor and needy brother, but as a business transaction in a commercial context. Indeed, Christ cast banking (in which interest is charged of some so interest can be paid to others) in a positive light in some of His parables (compare Matthew 25:27; Luke 19:23). The same principles, then, apply today regarding Church members. Judging from the spirit of the law, it would be inappropriate for a converted Christian to charge a poor and needy person interest, whether or not the poor person is in the Church (compare Galatians 6:10). On the other hand, it would not be wrong for a converted Christian to charge another person, even one in the Church, interest on a loan given strictly in a business context.

Divorce; Concern for Others Mandated (Deuteronomy 24:1–25:4)**July 29**

Moses, because of the hardness of the hearts of the people, allowed for divorce—although Christ later explained that “from the beginning” it was not so. For converted Christians, only a few valid reasons for divorce exist—such as fraud before marriage, sexual immorality while married and desertion by an unconverted mate (compare Matthew 19:3-9; 1 Corinthians 7:12-15)—and it is wise to seek counsel from God’s ministry regarding specific situations.

Indeed, in Matthew 19, Christ was apparently explaining that people had been applying even the words of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 far too liberally, taking the word “uncleanness” to mean anything the husband didn’t like and allowing him to divorce his wife for virtually any reason at all. In fact, in Christ’s day it was not even necessary to *state* a reason. A husband had only to tell his wife, “I divorce you” before witnesses. The same liberty was, in this corrupt tradition, not extended to wives. With this understanding, we can perhaps see how the certificate of divorce, while a concession to human weakness, could actually prove helpful to a wife whose husband wrongfully divorced her, allowing her to remarry and still be provided for (compare verse 2). Yet, if her next marriage ended in divorce or widowhood, the first husband was not permitted to take her back after she had become the wife of another man in the intervening time—as this would seem to make the intermediate marriage a legalized adultery by means of God’s law, which was unacceptable. This principle is still applicable today in cases of legitimate divorce. (Again, it is wise to seek counsel in any matters of divorce and remarriage.)

Verses 6 and 10-13 demand mercy and compassion for a poor person who had to give a pledge or security for a debt. The creditor was not allowed to accept certain necessities as a pledge (verses 6, 17), and he was, in any event, to return whatever he had received from a *poor* person as a pledge before sunset (verses 12-13). Further, he was not given the right to go into the poor person’s house without permission to get the pledge (verse 10), thus preserving personal privacy and dignity. Although a poor person might find himself in a temporary financial predicament, he was still made in the image of God as a potential member of His very family, and thus was to be treated with respect.

In the same context, an employer was to pay his employee his wages on time. In ancient times, employees or hired servants were paid daily, and God declares it to be “sin” not to do so—regardless of whether the employee was an Israelite or a foreigner (verses 14-15). The principle is that employees be paid at mutually agreeable intervals.

Verse 16 sets forth an important principle: “Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their fathers; *a person shall be put to death for his own sin.*” We are all individually responsible for what we do. Parents must teach their children, but the children must choose. Even converted children can teach their unconverted parents God’s way of life through example—but it is again the parent’s responsibility to accept or reject the truth.

Verses 19-22 address compassionate conduct again—this time of landowners towards the poor. Rather than greedily harvesting every last sheaf in the field, or every last grape or olive, God commanded generosity. Thus, some of the harvest was to be left for the stranger, the fatherless or the widow, i.e., the poor in the land, “that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.” He reminds Israel that they, too, had been slaves in the land of Egypt, and how much they would have appreciated it if such a law had been in Egypt *for them* (see verse 22).

Deuteronomy 25:1-3 demand justice in court. A wicked person is to be condemned, and a righteous person is to be acquitted. In ancient Israel, to inflict physical pain on a convicted criminal was not considered inhumane, cruel or unusual. Rather, it was to satisfy the victim’s demand for some sense of justice, to deter others from committing crime and to reinforce to the criminal himself the fact that sin and crime brings pain and suffering. We might ask ourselves whether it is more “humane” to lock up a convicted criminal for months or years in a tiny cell, caging him like an animal. God saw to it, however, that the offender was not to be “humiliated” in the sight of Israel when he received the beating—the maximum number of blows could not exceed 40. Thus, rather than being inhumane, this law recognized the guilty person as a human being whose dignity should be preserved. In other nations, people were sometimes beaten with a lash or rod to extract a confession (Acts 22:24). This was not allowed under God’s code of law. Blows were to be used only to punish after guilt had been established.

Verse 4 of Deuteronomy 25 teaches compassion for animals. An ox that works should be fed. Indeed, to restrain an animal from eating food that is continually before it is frustrating and torturous to the animal. Moreover, there is a practical benefit: To keep an ox engaged in its job of treading grain, it is best to allow it to eat the very grain it is treading. The principle even has practical

applications in the human realm. Paul would later apply it to the ministry, who for their service should have their living expenses paid out of the tithes and offerings collected from the members and supporters of the Church (1 Corinthians 9:7-11). This also allows them to devote more time to their ministerial responsibilities rather than an outside occupation.

Levirate Marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5-19)

July 30

Deuteronomy 25:5-10 addresses a statute that had unique application to ancient Israel. Now called the law of levirate marriage, from the Latin word *levir*, meaning “brother-in-law,” it stated that if a married man died without children, his widow was to be married to his brother (her brother-in-law), or his nearest of kin if there was no brother, and the first child of this new union was to be regarded as the offspring of the deceased husband (compare Genesis 38:9; Matthew 22:24).

This was to be done so that the name of the dead brother would “not be blotted out of Israel.” It also ensured that the widow would continue to be provided for. Obviously, then, this could have put certain economic strain on the levir, particularly if he already had a family, as he had to provide for a wife and for the raising of a child until that child was old enough and independent enough to carry on the name of his “father” on his own. The nearest of kin could, however, refuse to take the widow as his wife, although he would have to go through a humiliating process in which everyone saw his selfishness in being more concerned for himself than for his extended family (verses 9-10). In the case of Ruth in the biblical book bearing her name, her deceased husband’s closest relative refused to marry her, so that Boaz, the next in line on the kinship list, was free to do so (Ruth 3:13; 4:1-9).

The law of levirate marriage is not applicable in the Church today. One reason is that a literal application of it would often require a converted brother-in-law to marry an unconverted sister-in-law, or vice versa, which would be contrary to 1 Corinthians 7:39 and 2 Corinthians 6:14. Also, if the brother-in-law were *already* married, the application of this law would violate the biblical teaching (discussed earlier) that a man is to be the husband of only *one* wife. As this is specifically mandated in the New Testament for ministers and deacons, it is understood to be binding upon all men in the Church.

“Look Down...and Bless Your People” (Deuteronomy 26)

July 31

God here gives some final instructions, closing with the saving of the third tithe for the poor. Those who have obeyed God and been careful with all He has commanded are entitled by Him to ask of Him a special blessing. Had Israel been careful in obeying God, He would have poured out blessings upon blessings on the ancient nation. They would have become a special people—a treasured nation to God. Yet Israel failed to live up to God’s condition of obedience.

In modern times, national Israel has been greatly blessed because of God’s unconditional promises to Abraham, as explained in our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*—but not nearly to the degree it would be if it humbled itself in sincere obedience to God. And sadly, Israel’s wrong choices will soon plunge it into the depths of curses, as the next chapters of Deuteronomy lay out.

Yet God is fulfilling His greatest promises in and through the new *spiritual* Israel, His New Testament Church, the members of which He has chosen to ultimately be His special people. As God’s spiritual people learn to obey Him with ever-growing care, they increasingly receive more and greater blessings from Him.

As Deuteronomy winds to a close, it is clear that God is looking toward the future—to the time when there will be people who do obey Him and deeply treasure the gifts He gives.

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