A Patristic Commentary



The Book of Deuteronomy

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

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The Book of DEUTERONOMY

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THE DIVINE COVENANT
AS A SUPPORT FOR OUR DAILY LIFE

The Book of Deuteronomy is a group of farewell talks by the prophet Moses, the first leader of the people of God, when he was 120 years old, before his departure from this world. He presented them to the new generation, which was born in the wilderness, and was about to enter into the Promised Land, under the guidance of Joshua the son of Nun. The Holy Spirit inspired these talks, in order that the commandment of God would be their guide and Law in the new land.

They were talks by a father to his children or grandchildren; to give them his practical spiritual experiences, as conforming to the new generation; in a simple historical and behavioral way; aiming with the goal of becoming a support to every soul, to cross over and to inherit.

What did the prophet Moses present to his people before his departure from this world? He presented a convention, or a constitution of love; given by God to His very beloved people; whom He has chosen and sanctified to be dedicated only to Him.

The prophet Moses represents the "Law," that leads us to the Lord Christ and to His Kingdom; and reveals to us the royal way, which brings us to the bosom of God the Father. That is why the book of Deuteronomy came as an invitation, directed to every believer who longs to enter into the heavenly Canaan, under the leadership of our Lord "Jesus" the Savior of the world, to carry the divine commandment in a spiritual concept. It prepares his depths, as well as his words and behavior, to set forth to the new heavenly life, through the work of the Holy Spirit of God; to accept the entry into the divine covenant, set by God with His beloved people; who would pay back love for love; through joyful obedience to His commandment.

It is a book that is convenient to every era; and that motivates every soul to cross over as though to heaven; to strive incessantly, in the sweetness of spirit; to continue her journey under the exalted shadow of God; to grow incessantly; and to fight with no fear or disturbance; in the shadow of a new covenant, presented to her by her Christ; to live free of any bondage, and to set forth to heaven.

These talks concentrate on the "divine covenant." Our constitution in our daily journey is not bare ethical laws, but a living confrontation; and a union with God, who, from His side, presents to us a covenant, in which He proclaims that He carries us on His arms, the way a father carries his son. It is a covenant, in which God presents to us the "Spirit of adoption;" and reveals to us our new position as His chosen and treasured possession; who have exalted rights, with a spirit of commitment on our part (Deut. 7:6-15).

This covenant governs our inner life, our feelings, and our family, social, religious, and national behavior; and even our relationship with beasts and birds.

If this book concentrates on **God's commandment**, that reveals God's love and His longing to sanctify us; it is to proclaim to the believer his belonging to the people of God, as a royal kingdom and a holy nation.

Finally, the last month in Moses' life, reveals what the heart of that greatest among the prophets embraced; as man, when he feels that the moment of his departure from this world is very imminent, he pours out his depths. What does the heart of the prophet Moses embrace? Four closely-connected things; that constitute the secret of the strength of his ministry; which are:

* **The divine comm**andment: by which he was preoccupied all along the days of his ministry until his last breath; being a divine heavenly treasure, through which we respond to God's love, and enter with Him into an eternal covenant.

* **The praise**: Before his departure, he presented a final praise, to proclaim that his soul would never cease to rejoice until his last breath.

* **Blessing his people**: Despite all the troubles he suffered from his people, he ended his life by words of blessing to each of the tribes.

* **Creating the spirit of leadership**: In the form of a cross, he placed his hands on the head of his disciple Joshua the son of Nun; to encourage him not to fear or be dismayed, until he brings all the people, together with the civil and religious leaderships, to the land of Canaan, the symbol of heaven. By that he left after him great leaders.

Those four things (the commandment; the life of rejoice and praise; blessing others; and encouraging the spirit of leadership), are the secret of his success all along the days of his ministry.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

THE NAME OF THE BOOK

The name of this book, in almost all the modern languages, came derived from the two Greek words: '*Deutero*,' meaning "two" or "the second;" and '*nomion*,' meaning, "law." That is why it is called in English 'Deuteronomy.'

In the Hebrew language, this book carries four names:

1. In the Hebrew origin it is called '*elleh haddebarim*;' and abridged to '*debarim*;" namely, '**these are the words**," which are the first words of the first chapter of this book.

2. '*Kith*;' namely, **the fifth book of the Law**.

3. **The book of rebuke or advices** '*seper tokahoth*;' especially as far as chapter 28 is concerned. It seems that this dignified old leader, realized that, being in his last moments, there was no more time for niceties with the people; but he had to be firm. It was fitting for the people to whom all that love was given; especially through the forty years of ministry of the prophet Moses, to carry the fear of God; and to realize how frightful is the falling in His hands.

4. It is also called '*misneh hattotra*' or '*misneh*;' meaning, **'a copy'** (see Deut. 17:18). In the Septuagint version, it is called '*deuteros namos*;' namely, (the Second Law); probably because in (Deut.17:18 *LXX*) it came as "**a copy of this Law,**" or is intended to be a Second Law, beside what came in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. What came here, is not to be considered a repetition of what came in those three books, but is rather an explanation of the Law in the light of what happened through the forty years in the wilderness. It is a parade, to the new generation, presented by the prophet Moses, a month before their entrance into the land of Canaan, and before his departure; in order that all of them would be qualified by obedience, springing from faith, and by the practical divine love. It is a perpetual reminding of the Law of God: "*Bind them as a sign on your hand; fix them as an emblem on your forehead; and write them on the doorpost of your house and on your gates*" (Deut. 6:8, 9).

HISTORY OF ITS WRITING

According to the Jewish tradition, accepted by the Christian tradition, it was written in the plains of Moab, east of Jericho, east of the River Jordan; by the end of the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Those talks, whose writing covered about a month of the year 1405 BC, began to be read on the first day of the eleventh month of the fortieth year, after the exodus from the land of Egypt (Deut. 1:3), following the victory over king Sihon of the Amorites, and king Og of Bashan (Deut. 1:4).

It is noteworthy that the author of the book of Deuteronomy does not refer to the events prior to the possession of Canaan; does not include anything about the division of the kingdom; about the persecution and affliction by the Philistines; nor about the events mentioned in the book of the Judges. Moreover, the two phrases "*All Israel*," and "*the portion given to you by God*," both reveal that the writing of this book conforms to that particular time. And it is also obvious that the two chapters 33 and 34 were written shortly after the departure of Moses from this world.

THE KEY OF THIS BOOK

The key of this book is the covenant of love and obedience. The word '**love'**

comes 22 times in this book. As to **obedience,** as presented by this book, it is a practical response to God's love for man. Without obedience, man loses the taste of love; As man longs to be loved, he also longs to love; Obedience is a sign of the freedom of human will, that expresses its love in a practical way.

In Psalm 103:7, it came: "*He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the people of Israel*." The children of Israel knew the works of God; yet they did not recognize Him according to the knowledge of a living encounter; Moses, on the other hand, knew God's ways; namely, through a practical knowledge. This book came as a fruit of this knowledge; combined with an experience of forty years in the wilderness.

ITS FEATURES

1. The book of Deuteronomy should be considered from four angles:

* A book of the Law.
* Farewell speeches by the leader of the people.
* A covenant between God, the King, and his people.
* Instructions from God to His people prior to their entrance to the Promised Land.

The Law, undoubtedly, plays a major role in the book of Deuteronomy; which is Called "**the Law**" (Deut. 1:5), or "**the book of the Law**" (Deut. 30:10). The context of the Law (Chapters 12 to 26) came to represent the backbone of the book. Yet, we should not consider it as a Law book in the narrow sense; as the Law is put according to salvation dimensions with a spacious goal; Whereas this book comes to interpret faith; And if it does include laws or statutes, their goal is, for the believer, to accept God's will working in him, and to bear the spirit of obedience to the Lord. It is the book of the people, who enjoy salvation, and who are liberated from servitude; in order to be bound by a covenant of love with God; to practice the blessed life through being attached to God; and being united to one another. According to what came in Deut. 30:11-14, the "Law" is the sign of the divine presence in the hearts of the people of God; Whoever keeps it, is practicing the spiritual life. In other words, this book reveals the mutual love exchanged between God and His people; By His divine love, He chose His people presenting to them salvation; And they, in turn, pay Him back love for love; through dedicating their hearts by obedience to His commandments, and the liturgical worship, as a practical way of proclaiming their love to God, with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their might (Deut. 6:5).

2. Although the book includes history, yet, it is not a book of history. It introduces history just to reveal God's dealings, in order for us to receive His divine covenant. It is also counted as "a book of sermons," representing a concept of prophetic sermons, used later on by the later prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

3. This book includes a sermon presented by the prophet Moses in three installments, or let say three sermons; although some divide them into eight talks. Yet, it should not be considered as mere sermons, but rather as a presentation of the Law in an attractive sermon-like way; whose goal is enjoying salvation; practicing the practical love for God (Deut. 6:4); presenting thanksgiving (reminding them of God's works with them and with their fathers), by the spirit of righteousness (Deut. 9:6); and practicing obedience, as a pretext of their entrance into the land of promise; to get into the presence of the Lord, and to enjoy the fellowship with Him.

4. This book is considered an invitation by the prophet Moses to the future generations after him, to find a new chance to enjoy, in faithfulness, a covenant with God, through a realization of God's will and His dealings with their fathers. This invitation is directed to everyone, and in particular to leaders like the kings; being

said: "…*You may indeed set over you a king, whom the Lord your God will choose… When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this Law written for him in the presence of the Levite priests. It shall remain with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear his God*" (Deut. 17:14-20).

The prophet Moses often reminds them of God's promises to their fathers; From one aspect, he opens the eyes of their hearts to realize God's dealings with His believers along all ages; and from another aspect, remembering the faithfulness of their fathers in their relationship with God, would support them, and would become like a cloud that protects them from the heat of temptations. And as **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Remembering the saints, raises the soul that became weighed down by calamities, and brings it back; It would be like a cloud to protect the soul from the intensely burning hot rays of the sun[1].]

5. The Jews, in their spiritual infancy, committed themselves literally to what came in this book; in a way that killed its real meaning and significance; Whereas in the New Covenant, we seek from these commandments and statutes, deep spiritual concepts, that grant life in the Lord.

6. For the first time, we hear about **the curse of being hanged on a tree** (Deut. 21:22, 23); and a reference to the anticipation of the coming of the Lord Christ (Deut. 18:15, 19).

7. While this book likens that of Leviticus, in its inclusion of several laws; it differs from it in the fact that, while the book of Leviticus cares for the statutes concerning the priests; that of Deuteronomy, on the other hand, cares for those pertaining to the people. Most of what came in chapters 12 to 26, constituting more than half of the book are laws and statutes that concern the believer.

8. This book as a whole is considered as a call to obedience to God; a call to the new generation to learn from the bad example of the one that preceded them, with their stubbornness, rebellion, and thick hearts. The generation that came out of Egypt was all dead, except for Joshua and Caleb, who, alone entered the Promised Land.

9. Of the unusual features of the book of Deuteronomy, was, that talking to the people of Israel, sometimes came in the singular tense, and some other times in the plural; which led some people to assume that this book has two different sources. However other scholars confirm that this carries a certain theological significance.

10. Some scholars, who claim that this book had several sources, depend on the presence of certain general and side introductions (Deut. 1:1-5; 5:1; 27:1). Yet others believe that that was customary when talk was directed to other persons, or when the one who talks himself changes, as it is the case in Deut. 27:1, 9, 11; 31:14, 24 etc.

11. In certain sections of the book, it is noticed that the author presents the statutes first in a very simplified way; then proceeds to give advices, warnings, and promises. This shows that this book is not meant to be a constitution of statutes; as much as it is meant to be talks and sermons of salvation. As an example of this is what came concerning the release of debts at the end of every seven years (Deut. 15:1-11); in which it began as a provocation to the release of debts, followed by a definition of this action (Deut. 15:2); then by a personal provocation to the listener to apply it generously[2]. This same trend was used in talking about the principles of tithing (Deut. 14:22-27); and about setting the Hebrew slave free (Deut. 15:12-18).

12. The book proclaims the importance of leading a sound spiritual life and

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[1] *In Hebr hom. 28:3.*

[2] *Gerhard von Rad: Deuteronomy, 1966, p. 105-107; studies in Deuteronomy` 1953, p. 15-16.*

behavior; not only in serious matters, but also in those that seem of minor importance. It mixed major and minor statutes together **with no distinction between this and that.**

13. The book reveals the spirit of fatherhood of the prophet Moses toward his people. While expressing his yearning to enter the Promised Land, that he was denied, he nevertheless cared very much for his people to enter into it; as though through their entrance, he would personally enjoy it. His fatherhood also appears in his farewell talks to Joshua, to fill him with joy and courage, to fulfill his mission.

THE DIVINE COVENANT

This book presents the divine Law (the Torah); the body of consummated teachings; proclaimed through the fellowship with God, and in between the believers; so that they would enjoy the blessings of **the covenant with God**.

The divine covenant is the main line in the whole book; proclaiming its activity in the life and blessings of the believer; in his commitments as the one chosen by God; in His future plans for him; and in how the covenant is transformed from recording historical events, into one that touches the life of the new generation. It is as though, as the new generation was about to enter the Promised Land, Moses received a copy of the covenant made between God and their fathers, to let the new generation sign it themselves; in order to realize that it was not just a covenant between God and their fathers, who have already departed; but it is a contemporary covenant made personally for them, to enjoy its blessings, and to be committed to its responsibilities.

THE LAW AND THE CALL TO LOVE

The book of Deuteronomy – which is the book of the Law – reveals the concept of the Law, to be a call to love God (Deut. 6:5; 10:12; 11:1; 13:22; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20); the love that moves our hearts and our behavior in our dealings with God, with the people, and even with ourselves.

* When the Lord Christ was asked about the greatest thing that came in the Old Covenant, He quoted (Deut. 6:4,5).
* The love of Israel – like that of the Christian, as it came in (1 John 4:19) – is based on the experience of love of God the Savior.
* Our love for God is shown in our love for others (1 John 3:18; 4:20, 21; Deut. 10:19).
* The Ten Commandments are based, not only on man honoring God (Deut. 5:6, 15), but on his honoring others as well (Deut. 6:16, 21).

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY AND THE THEOLOGICAL THINKING

Some believe that they would not be exaggerating on saying that the book of Deuteronomy is the fountain of the theological, biblical, and historical thought, of both the Old and the New Testaments. When the prophets talk about God, they talk about God who sets a covenant with His people, as it came in the book of Deuteronomy. And the blessings that men of the Old Covenant experienced, as they lived by faith, love, and obedience to God, are those that came in the book of Deuteronomy. God, who gave a promise to Abraham, has realized it, as it came in this book.

In the book of Deuteronomy, came the origins of those teachings of the New Testament, pertaining to God’s love and His salvation work by Christ Jesus; to the enjoyment of the eternal inheritance; and to the realization of God’s promises to those saved.

God as revealed in this book, is both a collective and a personal God; who wishes to refer Himself to His people; as well as to every single member of His people; A philanthropic God; A holy God who does not stand sin; A righteous God, who does not stand iniquity or oppression; A King who leads His people to inherit and rejoice; and A God, faithful in His promises; and in His exalted care. In His love for man, He desires to proclaim to him His secrets; the One and only God.

Of the most prominent aspects of this book, is that the people are committed to be referred to God; and to dedicate their hearts and life to Him. It is the book of dedication to God, through the response to the divine covenant with the spirit of obedience.

Of the most important subjects that are dealt with in this book are

a. **Servitude and redemption**: Israel should not forget (Deut. 4:9) that he was a slave in the land of Egypt (Deut. 5:15), the house of bondage (Deut. 5:6); from which God redeemed him, by a strong hand and a stretched arm (Deut. 4:34).

b. **The good portion**: God granted them a good land (Deut. 1:25); flowing with milk and honey that He swore to their fathers to give them and their descendants (Deut. 1:8), as an inheritance (Deut. 4:21).

c. **The love of God**: They should love the Lord their God (Deut. 5:10) with all their hearts and their souls (Deut. 4:29); as He loved them first (Deut. 4:37); they should fear Him (Deut. 4:10); hold fast to Him (Deut. 10:20); should destroy the names of other gods (Deut. 5:7; 7:24) which they have not known (Deut. 11:28).

d. **The Lord's people**: All Israel should be united together to listen to the word of God (1:1; 5:1); as they are a "*holy people to the Lord*" and "*above all the peoples on the face of the earth*" (Deut. 7:6); and they should care for the poor, the orphans, the widows, and the strangers, because they are all their brethren (Deut. 1:16; 10:18).

e. **The Lord's altar**: They should bring their gifts and sacrifices to "*the place where the Lord their God chooses to put His name*" (Deut. 12:5, 11), and there, they shall rejoice (Deut. 12:7).

f. **The sin and purification**: All sins are distasteful; especially that of idol worship, because it is "*an abomination*" (Deut. 15:9; 7:25); the hearts of the rulers should never have compassion in dealing with such sins (Deut. 13:8).

g. **The promises of blessing**: There are promises of God's blessings (Deut. 7:13). If they learn them and be careful to observe them (Deut. 5:1), to give them rest from their enemies (Deut. 3:20), to prolong their days on the land which the Lord their God is giving them to possess (Deut. 4:26); it may go well with them (Deut. 4:40); to bless them in all the work of their hand (Deut. 2:7); to let them eat and get fulfilled (Deut. 6:11); and whatever their hearts desire (Deut. 12:15).

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY AMONG THE BOOKS OF MOSES

The book of **Genesis** came to prepare humanity to realize God's love for man, providing him with the whole world to enjoy, possess, and dominate. Although He presented man with love, yet he responded with rebellion, and isolated himself from God, the source of his life. However, God did not forsake him in his death, but presented to him the exalted plan of salvation.

The book of **Exodus** came to proclaim God's choice of His people, as a 'leaven' to sanctify humanity. They had to be freed from servitude, and from all traces of sin, to bring them forth from the land of bondage to where the inheritance is, and to the realization of the divine promises.

The book of **Leviticus** came to present the divine Law pertaining to worship, to reveal the sanctification by blood and the enjoyment of redemption; As God desires that man becomes sanctified according to His image.

The book of **Numbers** demonstrates how the people are trained and taught by God, during their wandering in the wilderness of this world, where God appear as their Leader, Who cares for them Himself.

Then, as the people came to be on the gates of Canaan, of which the old generation have been deprived, on account of their persistent rebellion; He **presents them with the covenant**, that leads them to enjoy the glory, if they proclaim their love of God, and their fellowship with Him through obedience. This is **the theme of the book of Deuteronomy** that brings them up to the book of Joshua where they see God presenting to them the inheritance and the glory.

In summary we can say:

- The book of **Genesis** presents God the Philanthropic.
- The book of **Exodus** presents God the Liberator of man from servitude.
- The book of **Leviticus** presents God who sanctifies man.
- The book of **Numbers** presents God the Leader of man in his journey of sojourn toward heaven.
- The book of **Deuteronomy** presents God who sets a covenant with man.
- And the book of **Joshua** presents God glorified in man by the eternal inheritance.

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY AND THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH[1]

Who studies the two books will notice how the author of one of them has been full aware of the other book. There are several words, and phrases, common to both, and even thoughts that are similar in theme; in a way that is not noticed in any other book of the Holy Scripture.

It is only logic to assume that Jeremiah, as a priest, was fully aware of the book of Deuteronomy. So it is not strange for him to show a great interest in studying it and quoting much from it.

It is however not acceptable to assume that the two books are written by the same author; and that Jeremiah is the author of the book of Deuteronomy; as, together with several words that are mutual in the two books, there are likewise, several differences in words and expressions. We can only say that Jeremiah was influenced by the first book and quoted it.

The assumption that Jeremiah wrote the book of Deuteronomy and referred it to the prophet Moses, implies that Jeremiah was a swindler and deceptive; something that is not conforming with his straightforward and strong personality; He, who stood firmly against the king, his men, his family, the religious leadership, and all the people. Such a man who adamantly challenged everyone would not resort to lies and deceit.

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Of the most important results of the book of Deuteronomy, is probably the appearance of the community of the '*Essenes*,' who moved from the wilderness of Judah, during the second century BC, to the northwest of the Dead Sea (Qumran); who were also called, '**The community of the eternal covenant**.' The book that regulated that community starts with the following words: "Everyone abiding to the

[1] *Pulpit Commentary.*

principles of this community, crosses over to the covenant before God[1]." In one of their songs it came: "With every day and night, I will enter into a covenant with God[2]." And one of their main rites was the annual celebration of the renewal of the covenant, according to what came in Deuteronomy 27; where the priests proclaim the blessings, while the Levites proclaim the curses[3]; following the same procedure that was done for the new generation of God's people in the wilderness (Deut. 1:15). Among the scrolls of 'Qumran,' at least 14 were discovered for the book of Deuteronomy.

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

Some scholars believe in the great impact of the book of Deuteronomy on the Christian society in the New Testament. This book is one of four important books of the Old Testament, to which the Christians refer: The books of Genesis, Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Isaiah[4]. The New Testament quoted 81 times from the book of Deuteronomy. Out of the 27 books of the New Testament, 17 books were quoted from the book of Deuteronomy.

This book has an impact on the theology according to the Gospel of John. The overall concept of the new commandment of love (John 13:34; 15:12), conforms to the concept of the commandment in the book of Deuteronomy, as a principal divine command to love; that seeks from man to give his whole being to God.

This book had a special place in the teachings of the Lord Christ; being the only book from which the Lord quoted during His debate with the tempter (Compare Matthew 4:4 with Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:7 with Deuteronomy 6:16; and Matthew 4:10 with Deuteronomy 6:13); In His sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:31 with Deuteronomy 24:1); and in His response to one of the scribes (Mark 12:3 with Deuteronomy 6:5); He also quoted from it when He summarized the Law (Matthew 22:37).

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY AND THE MIDDLE EAST TREATIES

Gerhard von Rad believes that the book gives the impression to have been a speech during a certain religious celebration, probably in that of the renewal of the covenant[5]. He also believes that this book includes the following four main sections:

1. A historical parade of the events of Sinai, together with some comments (1–11).
2. A reading of the Law (26: 12-15).
3. A sealing of the covenant (26:16–19).
4. A proclamation of the blessings and the curses (27, etc.).

Some scholars, rejecting this theory, confirm that in the Old Testament, there is no indication of any such religious celebrations as suggested by von Rad. Several Scholars believe that the book in its form, to a great extent, likens the form of the treaties done in the Middle East during the second thousand BC (especially among the Hittites[6].) "E. Mendenhall,' depending on 'V. Korosvec' (1931), believed that those treaties were usually done according to the following lines:

1. An introduction for the treaty or the constitution, proclaimed by the king.
2. A historical introduction that clarifies the old relationships between the two

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[1] *QS 1:16.*
[2] *QS 10:10.*
[3] *QS 1:18 ff.*
[4] *J. A. Thompson: Deuteronomy (Tyndale O.T. Commentaires), 1974, p. 11.*
[5] *Grhard von Rad: The Problem of the Hexateuch and On the Essays, 1966, p. 27-33.*
[6] *V. Korosec: Hethitische Staatvertrage, 1931.*

parties.

3. The main general and special principles of the treaty.
4. The blessings that would dwell on those who abide to it; and the curses that would dwell on those who break it.
5. The witnesses: usually the gods who guarantee the fulfillment of what come in the treaty.

'Mendenhall' added a sixth factor: putting a copy of the treaty in the temple; to be publicly read before the people, every now and then.

By this view, some scholars, like 'Merdith G. Kline' believe that the book of Deuteronomy conforms to the general form of any treaty at that time. That is why, the book representing one unit - an authentic Mosaic work - presents a salvation treaty, done by God with His people; and follows the same lines:

1. An introduction to the treaty or the constitution, by the intermediary of the covenant (1:1-5).
2. A historical introduction; or a history of the covenant (1:6 - 4:49).
3. The main foundations of the covenant – the greatest commandment (5:1 –11:32).
4. Additional special commandments.
5. The consequences of the covenant: The blessings and curses; together with an oath of obedience (27–30).
6. The continuity of the covenant (Deut. 31–34).

Scholars introduced an abundance of comparative studies between the covenant proclaimed in the book of Deuteronomy, and the old treaties in the Middle East; Among those scholars were G. J. Wenham and D. J. McCarthy[1] who rejected the claim that the first three historical chapters were added later on to the book; as the historical introduction always formed an important part in the old treaties; and confirmed the correct location of chapter 27.

Although chapters 31 to 34 of the book of Deuteronomy do not belong to the skeleton of the covenant, yet they touch the essence of the renewal of the covenant. As it was important to set Joshua as the prophet Moses' heir, to proclaim the continuity of the covenant; the song of Moses came in harmony with the idea of the covenant.

Finally, Moshe Weinfield, together with some later authors, clarified that the form of the book literally follows the tradition of a written covenant at that time; and is not, as 'von Rad' claimed, a mere parade of what came during a certain religious celebration[2].

God always desires to renew His covenant in every era; and always seeks the loyalty of His people (6:5; 10:12, 13). He prepares every believer to live by the spirit of responsibility; with the perpetual joy under the leadership of the King of kings, who granted him the enjoyment of Canaan. This book presents an important fact that God, the only real King, who saved the people from the bondage of Pharaoh, is bringing them over to the heavenly life.

[1] *D. J. McCarthy: Treaty and Covenant Analcta Biblica, 21, 1963, p. 131 ff.*
[2] *Moshe Weinfield: Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School, 1972.*

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY AS A COVENANT WITH GOD

FORM OF A TREATY	THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
The title: Refers to the king who sets a constitution with his people.	**The title**: (1:1-4) Moses as a representative of God, the King of kings, who seeks to set a covenant with his people.
A historical introduction: Parades the king's works with his people.	**A Historical introduction**: (1:5 -4:43) God's dealings with His people since Horeb (Numbers 10:11-13).
The statutes: What the king expects from his people with whom he sets a constitution.	**The statutes**: (3:33- 26:19) a review of the general statutes (4:44-11:32), together with special statutes (12-16), by which the people are going to live in the Promised Land.
Keeping the documents of the constitution that include its conditions.	**Keeping the covenant**: (10:1-5; 31:24-26) Keeping the two tablets of the Law in the Ark of the Covenant.
Reading the constitution: The constitution should be periodically read in a public place, so as not to be forgotten.	**Reading the covenant**: (6:6-9; 17:18-20) Commitment to read it at homes, besides being read publicly by the king.
The witnesses: Summoning the gods as witnesses to the constitution.	**The witnesses**: No need for witnesses, as God is the Witness. God often swears by Himself as a Witness to His promises.
The blessings and the curses: Benefits for him who abides by the constitution; and curses on him who breaks it.	**Blessing and curses**: (27-28) A list of blessings for those who keep the covenant and of curses for those who break it.
The oath and celebration: Both parties swear on faithful obedience by the Constitution.	**The oath and celebration**: (27:1-8; 29:10-15) Placing a stone of testimony, on which the Law is written, once the people enter the Promised Land; and a public festival is held on Mount Ebal, where they swear to be, together with their children, faithful to the covenant.

THE COVENANT AND KEEPING THE RIGHTS OF THE CREATION

Desiring to enter into a covenant, in which God proclaims an exchange of love between Him and man, on an eternal level; this covenant came to care for the rights of man, beasts and birds; so that the believer would not live with a closed heart, but spacious with love. In the book of Deuteronomy we shall see the important aspects on which the divine covenant concentrates, of which are:

1. **Caring for everyone**; Together with the bond between man and the congregation and his love for them; the congregation on its part keeps the right of every man; whatever his age, or his religious or social position are. The congregation sanctifies and respects the right of everyone. Everyone should be responsible for his own actions.

2. **The false testimony**: The covenant gives security to the believer, protects

him against false witnesses, and vain accusations; and lets him live safely and without fear.

3. **The Woman**: The covenant is keen not to abuse the weakness of women's position in society at that time.

4. **Man's freedom and dignity**: The covenant seeks to abolish the notion of bondage among the believers; as a prelude to its destruction on a general level.

5. **The inheritance**: The covenant would keep what the believer is going to enjoy of inheritance in the Promised Land.

6. **The possession**: The commitment of a believer to refrain from any abuse against the boundaries of others' possessions.

7. **The fruit of labor and work**: Keeping the right of a laborer or a hired hand to get the wages on his day's work, with dignity and with no humiliation.

8. **The Sabbath rest**: It is the right of both the body and the soul to have rest; including those of the hired hand, the slave, and even of the beast.

9. **The matrimony**: The covenant cares for keeping the matrimonial and family relationships intact.

10. **The justice**: No accusation, however serious it may be, is to be accepted, without a just trial, and a thorough investigation.

11. **The collective system**: Beside the complete equality of all believers in the sight of God; every believer should respect the collective system, recognize the position of others, and give dignity to whom it is due.

12. **The submission to the Law and the commandment**: No one, whatever his religious or civil position may be, is above the Law or the divine commandment.

13. **The beasts**: The beasts having been created to serve man; man on his part should care for them.

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY AND THE HOLY WAR

The book deals with the issue of the holy war, sets a system for the behavior of warriors in war (Deut. 20:1-9); for dealing with the cities that fall in their hands (Deut. 20:10-18); with the female war captives they take (Deut. 10:10-14); with their personal cleanliness (Deut. 23:10-14); And with relieving the newly married from taking part in war (Deut. 24:5); and with dealing with Amalek (Deut. 25:17-19).

WHY DID GOD ALLOW HIS PEOPLE TO DEMOLISH THE SURROUNDING PEOPLES WITHOUT MERCY?

(a) Those peoples represented the sins that should be demolished. And as God's people, at the beginning of their spiritual life, were unable to discern between the sinner and the sin, therefore killing the sinner implied the destruction and uprooting of the sin.

(b) The corruption in those peoples was unbearable. In the worship of Baal, mothers used to offer their children to burn in fire amid the beats of the drums to override their screams. Women and girls also dedicated themselves to adultery, to collect money for the temples. The perdition of those peoples with their vicious and corrupt life was therefore unavoidable.

(c) There was a great need to prepare a people that are holy enough to produce the Savior, who would open the door of salvation before the whole world. The people of God have always been strongly influenced by the nations surrounding them. Despite God's warnings and His provocations to demolish them, they were diverted to share with those peoples their idol worship, their abominations, and violence in offering human sacrifices. How would then be the case if they were not given those divine commands? God intended to prepare out of them a divine pure people, who

would minister to the nations later on.

(d) God was preoccupied with the eternal perdition of those pagan peoples, more than by their demolition in the present world.

However, we notice that **God has often showed compassion toward individuals or congregations that surrounded His people**, when they responded to their natural Law, or whenever they abided to His warnings. He did not allow for Abimelech king of Gerar to perish, when he tried to take Abraham's wife for himself; but said to him: "*Yes I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against me; therefore I did not let you touch her…*" (Genesis 20:6).

God also showed compassion toward **Rahab the harlot** with her whole household, and let her live among the children of Israel, because she hid the two messengers who were sent by Joshua to spy Jericho (Joshua 2-5). She eventually even came to be among the genealogy of the Lord Christ in the flesh! The Lord Christ also commended the queen of the South and the people of Nineveh, saying: "*They will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them*" (Luke 11:29-32).

THE UNITY OF THIS BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

Certain scholars tended to separate the chapters 1–4; 27; 29-31 from the book, with the claim that their sources are different from those of the rest of the book. But who studies the wordings and the nature of the language of the book, would realize its unity, beside the simplicity, clarity, and sermonic nature that characterize it.

The analogy of language in several of the historical books of the Old Testament is referred by some to the fact that their authors were influenced by the nature of the book of Deuteronomy in the days of the kings. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, S. R. Driver tried to present a critical and exegetical commentary on the wording and nature of this book that remained of significant value up to this very day[1].

ITS MOST IMPORTANT INCLUSIONS

- The Ten Commandments (Deut. 5:6-21).
- The 'Shema': "*Hear, O Israel*!" (Deut. 6:4-9).
- About the false prophets (Deut. 13:1-5).
- About the false diviners (Deut. 18:9-15).
- About the Philistine era (Deut. 29:1-30:20).

ITS CONTENTS

1. God's historical works of salvation (Deut. 1–3).
2. A call to abide by the commandment (Deut. 4).
3. God's main requirements (Deut. 5-11).
4. The main basics of the practical life (Deut. 12-26).
5. How does a nation that practices these basics live.- (Deut. 27).

The book clarifies the need for four things, in order for the people and their descendants to keep the covenant:

1. The need for the **heart**: Mentioning many details concerning the Law, yet it concentrated on the heart (Deut. 6:4-5), in which the whole being of man, with his energies and possibilities are dedicated to the Lord.

2. The need for **action**: As the living testimony to the commandment springs

[1] *S. R. Driver: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy, 1902, p. Ixxviii-Ixxxiv.*

from the heart, and is practiced in the daily life; It often repeats the words: "*Keep the commandment."*

3. The **fatherhood**: A certain generation could not present the commandment to the following generation, unless it bears the spirit of true compassionate fatherhood (Deut. 6:7-9), by which the successive generations would taste the fatherhood of God.

4. **Care for everyone**; especially the needy, the outcasts, and the afflicted. Statutes came to touch the beings of strangers (Deut. 1:16-17; 10:18-19); the widows and the orphans (Deut. 10:18; 14:28-29); the priests and the Levites within the gates (Deut. 14:27-29; 18:1-8); the bond servants (Deut. 15:12-18); the raped women (Deut. 22:23-29); the people in debt (Deut. 15:1-3); the poor (Deut. 15:4-11); the female war captives (21:10-14); and the poor hired servants (Deut. 24:14-15).

ITS DIVISIONS

We may say that the book as a whole is set, with a well-defined exalted plan, on three sermons: the first and third sermons are abridged, whereas the second sermon is very long.

1. **The first sermon** (Deut. 1-4). Concentrates on God's dealings with His people on their exodus from Egypt, His care and protection for them, together with chastising the rebellious. The sermon starts with an introduction to the whole book (Deut. 1:1-5); and ends with a provocation by the prophet Moses to his people, to pay back God's love, by abiding by His commandment (Deut. 4:1-40); followed by an annex concerning the cities of refuge (Deut. 4:41-43).

2. **The second sermon** (Deut. 5-28). Presents an application of the covenant with God, and the statutes mentioned in the book of Exodus, that suits the people as they enter the Promised Land. It concentrates on keeping away from idol worship and pagan abominations; on setting a sanctuary in the middle of the land; and on preparing for the kingdom. It is considered as the backbone, or the heart of the whole book, starting with the fifth chapter, after a short introduction (Deut. 4:44-49).

3**. The third sermon** (Deut. 29-30). Prophesying the fall of the people in the near future, the prophet Moses speaks of the blessings and the curses, and prophesying their fall in the far future, he speaks of their scattering among the nations, then, their eventual return. The sermon ends by a proclamation of the choice between death and life (Deut. 30:15-20).

4. **Final actions and commandments**: (Deut. 31-34). An annex to the three sermons. As the prophet Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land, his disciple Joshua was chosen as his successor.

Finally in chapter 34, the author mentions the death of the prophet.

THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK

Both the Jews and the Christians have, through tradition, agreed that the prophet Moses is the author of this book; with the exception of its last part that recorded the death of Moses, assumed to be written by either Joshua the son of Nun, or Eleazar the high priest. Some believe that the book was first orally delivered by Moses, then, was written afterwards (Deut. 1:3; 31:24-26).

The school of criticism tried to attack violently the reference of this book to Moses, claiming that some unknown authors has written it 600 years later. A theory appeared at the beginning of this century, claiming that an unknown prophet has set the material of this book before the reform that took place in the days of Josiah in the year 621 BC (2 Kings 22, 23), and assuming that writing it was with the intention of religious reform in general; and the concentration of the worship in Jerusalem, in particular, as the worship of God at that time took place on the high places, and was considered legal.

But the book itself mentioned nothing about those high places, while dealing with the statutes (Chapters 12-26); nor in the talks before that, or in the command to build an altar on the Mount of Ebal (Deut. 27:5), which makes it difficult to accept this theory.

Some modern scholars assumed that the book was written after the captivation; some claimed that it was written in the last days of Hezekiah, while others believe that it was written in the days of David. Each of those theories contradicted and cancelled all the others! But the recent trend is the belief that the prophet Moses was the author of most of this book.

The critics depend in their rejection of referring the book to the prophet Moses, mainly on the assumption that writing was not known at that time, but it became evident that writing goes back to a long time before Moses[1].

They also say that this book was written to glorify priesthood in Jerusalem. Yet, it is obvious that the book never referred to priesthood or to Jerusalem[2].

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE TESTIMONIES ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK3

The book bears the following inside and outside testimonies that strongly confirm that the prophet Moses is its author, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

1. In the book itself, it came that the author is the prophet Moses (Deut. 1:5; 31:9, 22, 24, 30).

2. The other books of the Old Testament refer this book, as well as the first five books, to the prophet Moses (Joshua 1:7; Judges 3:4; 1 kings 2:3; 8:53; 2 kings 14:6; 18:6, 12; Ezra 31:2; Psalms 103:7; Malachi 4:4).

3. The Lord Christ refers this book to the prophet Moses (Matthew 19:7-9; John 5:45-47), beside the authors of the New Testament (Acts 3:22; 7:37, 38; Romans 10:19).

4. It is obvious that this book was known to the authors of many of the books of the Old Testament, like Judges, Ruth, First and Second books of Samuel; and First and Second books of Kings; which shows that the book was known directly after the departure of the prophet Moses; and that it was used in Israel.

5. Several prophets quoted from the book of Deuteronomy; or were aware of what came in it:

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[1] *J. Vernon McGee: Deuteronomy, 1991, p. viii.*
[2] *J. Vernon McGee: Deuteronomy, 1991, p. viii.*
[3] *Cf: The Pulpit Commentary, Deuteronomy.*

a. It is obvious that the author of the book of Jeremiah had the book of Deuteronomy before him and in his mind.

b. This book was known to the prophet Isaiah, as it is clear from the following analogies: (Isaiah 1:2 with Deut. 32:1; Isaiah 1:10 with Deut. 32:32; Isaiah 1:17 with Deut. 28:27; Isaiah 27:11 with Deut. 32: 8; Isaiah 41:8 with Deut. 7:6; 14:2; Isaiah 41:10 with Deut. 31:6; Isaiah 42:2 with Deut. 32:15; Isaiah 46:8 with Deut. 32:7; Isaiah 50:1 with Deut. 24:1; Isaiah 46:8 with Deut. 32:7; Isaiah 50:1 with Deut. 24:1; Isaiah 58:14 with Deut. 32:13; Isaiah 59:10; and 65:21 with Deut. 28:29; Isaiah 8 with Deut. 28:31).

c. There are certain indications in the books of Amos and Hosea, that the book of Deuteronomy was known in their days; of which are: Amos 4:6-10, 11 (Deut. 28:15 etc.); Amos 6:12 (Deut. 29:18); Amos 8:14 (Deut. 9:21; 6:13); Amos 9:14, 15 (Deut. 30:3); Hosea 4:14 (Deut. 23:17, 18); Hosea 4:10 (Deut. 19:14; 27:17); Hosea 5:14 (Deut. 22:39); Hosea 6:1; 5:4 (Deut. 32:39; 28:68); Hosea 13:9 (Deut. 8:14); Hosea 13:9 (Deut. 33:26).

6. In the book of Deuteronomy, certain attributes of the prophet Moses are distinct; as they were in the precedent books in several ways; as for example his zealous spirit; his talks that emerge from the heart (Exodus 2:12, 13); his capabilities as an author and a leader; his concentration on the basic teachings without disregarding the details; his talks emerging from extensive experience; his admirable ways of expressing himself; and his consistent mentioning of God, having been His dedicated servant (Deut. 34:5). His strong proclamation of the truth is as distinct in this book, as it was in his history, recorded in the books of Exodus and Numbers.

7. Several things remind the reader of the prophet Moses; as for example, the quick references to his speeches (Deut. 9:22); the talk about his receiving the Law (Deut. 24:9); as well as memories of the events, the thoughts, the prayers, and the personal emotions of Moses, that are distinct in all his speeches.

8. It is obvious that the book of Deuteronomy conforms the time of the prophet Moses, more than that of Josiah, as some claim; As from both the geographical and historical aspects, it refers to what conform to the period between the Exodus and the entry into the Promised Land. The reader feels as though he is crossing the 'Valley of Zered' (Deut. 2:13); stopping at the 'wilderness of Kedemoth' (Deut. 2:26); going around along the way to 'Bashan;' and staying in the valley opposite 'Beth Peor.' (Deut 3:29).

9. Certain modern studies show that this book demonstrates the way the treaties, during the period between the fifteenth and the fourteenth centuries, were conducted.

10. This book shows how the children of Israel were commanded to destroy utterly the nations and the peoples in the land of Canaan, not to make any covenant with them, nor to show mercy on them (Deut. 17:1-15). If its author wrote it in the days after the prophet Moses, when the people came to possess the land of Canaan in the days of Joshua; that command would be barren and of no significance.

11. The commandment concerning taking off the sandal of him who refuses to raise up a name of his dead brother (Deut. 25:9), was considered an old commandment in the days of 'Ruth' (Ruth 4:7) in the era of the Judges. If this book was written after the era of the Judges, it would not come that way as a custom that was not normally followed.

12. The command issued to "*blot out the remembrance of 'Amalek' from under heaven*" (Deut. 25:17-19); would not be mentioned here, if the book of Deuteronomy was written when the war with Amalek became an ancient history after

the entry into the Promised Land. The same thing also applies to the war against the Canaanites (Deut. 20:16-18).

13. What came in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, confirms that the author lived before setting Saul a king in the days of the prophet Samuel; or else he would refer to him as a king who misused his authority at the expense of his people.

14. From what came in Deuteronomy 17:16, it is obvious that the danger of a probable return of the people to Egypt, was still there; which is not the case after the conquest of the peoples of Canaan, and the actual possession of the Promised Land.

15. The talk concerning the cities of refuge (Deuteronomy 19) reveals that both the talker and the listeners have not yet entered the west bank; and the cities of refuge have not yet been designated by name; which actually happened in the days of Joshua the son of Nun, after the conquest of the west bank.

16. Some scholars believe that the book of Deuteronomy does not include one single phrase that it was written in an era that followed that of the prophet Moses, except for his death and burial. The general atmosphere of this book indicates that its author is the prophet Moses or one of his contemporaries; as for example the many references to their presence in the land of Egypt, and their exodus from it; and the preparations to enter the west bank.

APPARENT DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY AND THE OTHER BOOKS OF MOSES

Some scholars claim that Moses is not the author of the book of Deuteronomy, presenting evidences that refer to certain discrepancies that exist between this book and the other preceding four books; of which the following are:

1. It came in Deuteronomy 1:22, **that the people suggested to the prophet Moses the sending of spies**; whereas in Numbers 13:1, 3, it came that it was God who issued the command to send the spies. There is no discrepancy between the two texts, but actually integration. The people suggested that to Moses; and when the issue was raised to God, He consented. So Moses abided by God's command, and not to the people's suggestion.

2. In Deuteronomy 1:37; 3:26; 4:21, it came **that when God became angry with Moses because of the people; He denied him the entrance into the Promised Land**; whereas in Numbers 20:12; 37:14, it came that God denied that to both Moses and Aaron because of their disbelief and not hallowing God. If we go back to Deuteronomy 32:51, we find that the talk conforms to what came in the book of Numbers; saying: *"Because you trespassed against Me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin, because you did not hallow Me in the midst of the children of Israel."* There is no discrepancy, as the direct reason for denying Moses is his sin of not hallowing God at those moments, which he did, because of the murmuring and the rebellion of the people.

3. The book of Deuteronomy spoke about **offering the sacrifice in one place chosen by God**; which is not referred to in the other books. This claim is not correct; as it is actually referred to in Leviticus 17:8, 9. What is mentioned in Exodus 20:24, concerning the worship in several places; came directly after receiving the Law on the Mount of Sinai, when the people were constantly on the move; together with the Sanctuary. It was as though; God was confirming to them that wherever the Sanctuary is among them, their worship would be accepted.

4. In Numbers 18:20-32, it came that as the Levites had no possessions among the children of Israel, they get the tithes from the other tribes against their service in the temple. And those, in their turn, give their tithes to Aaron the priest. In the book of

Deuteronomy 14:22-29, it came that the children of Israel present their tithes before the temple, of the fields and the flocks, to the Levite, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, within their gates. Some believe that what came in the book of Numbers was written by Moses. Whereas what came in the book of Deuteronomy was written later on; and claim that the two laws were different in context, and could not be conformed. Yet, actually, the first one is a general Law to which everyone was committed; namely, giving the tithes to the ministers of the temple. But as the people were about to enter into the Promised Land, with its abundance of everything; they were commanded to present other additional tithes; as is testified by the Talmud and Josephus the Jewish Historian. The first tithes are for the Levites; the second for the feasts; and in the third year, the second tithes are to be given to the poor and the needy[1].

The second tithes were referred to in Tobit 1:7. And the second tithes in the third year are considered as 'third tithes.'

5. The book of Deuteronomy 12:17, 18, mentions that **the believer should eat the tithes and the vows in the place chosen by God;** together with his son, daughter, servant, maidservant, and the Levite within his gates, and rejoice before the Lord. And in the book of Numbers 18:15-18, it came that the firstborns of beasts are to be given to the Lord; the priest eats the waive breast and the right thigh. Some ask how can the people, in the house of the Lord, eat the firstborns, that, according to the book of Numbers, are considered a possession of God; and a portion of it is to be eaten by the priest. This is rebutted by saying that neither the book of Deuteronomy, nor the book of Numbers, say that the people or the priest were to eat the whole sacrifice. The book of Numbers stated the portion of the priest; and the rest of the sacrifice were to be given to the one who offered it, to do with it according to what came in the book of Deuteronomy.

6. In the book of Exodus 29:27, 28, and in the book of Leviticus 7:28-34, it came that **the breast of the peace offering and its right thigh are the priest's portion**. And in Deuteronomy 18:3, it came that "*this shall be the priest's due from the people, from those who offer a sacrifice, whether it is bull or sheep; they shall give to the priest the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach*." The critics say that, as what came in the book of Deuteronomy is different from what came in Exodus and Leviticus, the author could not be the prophet Moses. This could be rebutted by saying that the book of Deuteronomy does not say that this is the entire portion of the priests; but is an addition to what they were allotted to get. During their wandering in the wilderness together with the people, they used to partake of God's gifts like the Manna and the water coming out of the rock; beside the fact that then, as nobody needed clothes or sandals; the actual needs of the priests or the Levites, was not much. But, as the time came to enter the Promised Land, and the people were to get a huge inheritance, that was denied to the priests or the Levites; the latter became in need of a greater portion that could make up for their deprivation of having a portion of the land.

7. In the book of Numbers 35:1-8, **48 cities with their fields, were designated for the Levites;** and Joshua distributed them by lot (Joshua 21); but the book of Deuteronomy often says the expression "*the Levite within your gates*," with no mention of the cities given to the Levites; which gives the impression that the Levites were like strangers with no cities or homes. As an answer to this we say that the Levites had no portion of their own in the land; and those cities given to them, were

[1] *Josephus: Antiq. 4:8,22.*

taken out of the portions of the other tribes, to accommodate the Levites with their beasts. So, although they lived in those cities, yet they were away from the cities of the rest of the tribes, as though at their gates; and they are committed to sustain them.

8. Some believe that the expression "***Beyond the Jordan***" (Deut. 1:1), gives the impression that the author is west of the Jordan, and talks about Moses on the other bank of the Jordan; namely the eastern bank; Thus the author of the book could not be the prophet Moses. To refute this we say that Moses used the expressions that were common in his days. The expression "*beyond the Jordan*" was common among the Canaanites before the Israelites crossed over to the other side. Also his expression "*toward the west*" to mean (toward the sea); and "toward the south" to mean (Toward the Negev or Negeb); although the sea for Moses was not at his west; nor the "Negev" at his south; yet those were the common expressions among the surrounding peoples in those days. Moses wrote while in Sinai, about the 'Negev' as being "toward the south," although it was actually "toward his north;" because the 'Negev' was known in that region by this expression.

This is something natural even nowadays. If somebody in 'Edinburgh' is talking about something that happened in 'Norfolk,' he mentions the name 'Norfolk, meaning (North-folk), although its location is not to the north of 'Edinburgh' but to its south. Likewise, 'Southerland,' meaning, "the southern land" is actually to the north of 'Edinburgh.'

THE PROPHET MOSES AS A TEACHER

The Holy Bible in its Old and New Testaments, have no record of farewell sermons by any of prophet, disciple or apostle of the Lord Christ, like those three sermons of Moses, one month before his departure from this world – the prophet Moses who tried to excuse himself from that prophetic mission of salvation; on ground of being slow of speech and slow of tongue; ended his life by giving such sermons of a successful teacher.

This book reveals the personality of the prophet Moses as a teacher, characterized by the following features:

(1) As I mentioned in my commentary on the book of Exodus, the prophet Moses, who started his ministry by feeling his complete inability to talk eloquently, because of being slow of speech and slow of tongue; have become a teacher of his people; from whom, even certain Greek Philosophers have learned much[1].

(2) His talks were always mixed with practical love; and as said by the apostle Paul: "*By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin., esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward"* (Hebrew 11:24-26). So he counted the afflictions of his ministry, and sharing with his people their labors, a fellowship of bearing the reproach of the cross together with the Lord Christ the Savior of His people. He counted every affliction as a living deposit on his account. As a teacher, he carried a true fatherly heart; asking for God's forgiveness for his people; saying: "*Now, if You forgive their sin – but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written"* (Exodus 32:32). The book of Deuteronomy came to reveal strongly, the heart of the father and teacher, full of love and compassion toward his people[2].

(3) One of the fruits of the compassionate fatherhood is, for the true teacher to

[1] *Cf. The Author: Exodus, Alexandria, 1981, p. 9 (in Arabic).*
[2] *Cf. The Author: Exodus, Alexandria, 1981, p. 213-214 (in Arabic).*

know how to deal with the new generations, to keep them from feeling what we call nowadays ‘the gap between generations.’ The new generation did not feel the difference in age between them and Moses, 120 years old; because he, in his fatherhood, knew how to reach their world. Even in his last moments; he dealt with them as though one of them, with no haughtiness nor despise. Nowadays, it is a common complaint, that many teachers, especially the elderly ones, represent an old generation, haughty, and not caring for the behavior, thoughts, and concepts, of the new generation; something that leads to such a wide gap.

(4) Of the factors that made of the prophet Moses a successful teacher, is probably the inner joy that filled his heart, even in his advanced years; something that we hardly see in elderly teachers.. In this book we see him, in his 120 years of age, presenting a new song of praise to the Lord.

(5) He was a futuristic teacher, who, by his heart, looked forward to the future; and realized the needs of his people along their long journey. In his sermons in this book, his talk, although is based on the dealings of God with His people in the past; yet, not to make them live a solid old history; but to bring them forth to a futuristic view of their entrance into the Promised Land, and settling down there.

As a live leader, he ascended just before his death, by a divine command, on the Mount of ‘Nebo,’ to look at the land that his people were about to enter. So, it is always fitting for the true teacher to ascend by a divine command, to behold the future, and to work by a living futuristic view. It may probably be difficult for the present generation to comprehend; and may probably be despised and counted as something not factual.

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(An Introduction)

YOUR COMMANDS ARE MY SUPPORT IN THE JOURNEY OF MY LIFE

❖ My soul moans, yearning for love.
Grant me, together with Your prophet Moses, to receive Your commandment.
To touch in it the exalted fountains of Your love.
Not to consider it as just positive and negative commands.
But to see in it, Your longing to enter with me into an eternal covenant.
You have loved me first… to make me love You!

❖ Your commandment transforms my life into a symphony of love.
To sing Your love until the last breath of my life.
To utter together with the prophet Moses, the songs of your love, until I depart.

❖ Your command sanctifies my whole being.
To make my words, blessed.
To long together with the prophet Moses, to bless everybody.
I wish all to be leaders working in Your vineyard!

❖ Let me ascend together with Moses on the mountain alone.
There, to die like a sojourner, and set forth to my home.
No one to shroud or to bury me;
But the hand of Your love would stretch to care even for my corpse.
You are my love; You are my life!

THE FIRST DIVISION

THE FIRST SERMON
(Deuteronomy 1 to 4)

CHAPTERS 1 to 4

Nothing would qualify man for success, like looking back to past events and benefiting from the experience of those before him. That is why the prophet Moses spoke to the new generation, born in the wilderness, before their entrance into the Promised Land; to remind them of the dealings of God with their fathers; not to present a historical parade of events; but to confirm the following points to them:

God's care for man; especially in the wilderness of this world (Deut. 1:31; 2:7).

As **the rebellion has been the cause of denying their fathers the enjoyment of the Promised Land**; he provokes them to obey God.

Presenting thanksgiving to God, instead of murmuring and denying His gifts and care.

Through worshipping God and keeping His commandments, we may enjoy life (Chapter 4).

The people reached 'Kadesh Barnea,' on the border of the Promised Land (Deut. 1:9-15); and as they murmured and refused to enter it (Deut. 1:16-33); God made them wander in the wilderness until that generation dies (Deut. 1:34-40). The tribes set forth toward the north, and crossed Edom (2:1-18) to reach the land of Moab (Deut. 2:19-25). Then they were commanded to enter through the land of the Amorites; and they were opposed by 'Sihon,' king of the Amorites, and 'Og,' king of Bashan,, those were delivered by God into the hands of His people (Deut. 2:26 – 3:17). The prophet Moses set forth with his people toward Canaan stood at its frontier, to handle the leadership to his disciple Joshua. As for him, he was not allowed to enter into the Promised Land, because of his doubt of God's promise at 'Meribah;' or because he struck the rock twice (Deut. 3:18 – 29; 33 – 51; Numbers 20:12).

CHAPTER 1
LIKE A FATHER CARRIES HIS SON

The book of Deuteronomy started with an introduction to the farewell sermons of the prophet Moses; parading the circumstances, history, and location of their writing. It is like a historical introduction presented by the King of kings, to proclaim His dealings with His people in the past when they were in the wilderness with no human help. By that He is enticing them to receive and to respond to the divine covenant, set between God and His people.

The first sermon includes a historical parade of the journey from Horeb to the land of Moab (Chap. 1 to 3).

In this chapter, Moses clarifies God's care for His people in the wilderness; and how the people have partaken of the decisions of the prophet Moses. God has chosen Moses as a leader, in a time when the people were incapable of making decision for themselves. Yet Moses, in his love for his people, wished them to partake of his decisions; whereas they paid his love back with rebellion, denial, and lack of confidence.

1. An Introduction 1–5.
2. God realizes His promise to their fathers 6–8.
3. The people take part in running their daily life 9–18.
4. Having doubts and sending men to spy the Promised Land 19–40.
5. Persistence on rebellion 41–46.

1. AN INTRODUCTION

This introduction reveals the role of the prophet Moses as a shepherd. Despite his advanced age of 120 years; knowing that he has already fulfilled his mission; and that it was high time to surrender the leadership to his disciple Joshua; he presented three long talks to the whole people. He is a faithful leader and teacher, who spoke with a compassionate, but firm spirit; and would not stop teaching them until the last moments of his life.

Moses did not parade his achievements along the past 40 years of his ministry; and he had much to talk about; but he paraded God's work with them; caring for their salvation and their eternity. What preoccupied Moses was not his own success, but his people's enjoyment of God; and their acceptance of entering into a covenant with God, and not with him personally. Moses actually revealed that he was faithfully seeking what is for their edification and growth, and not what is for his own sake.

Although the people were about to enter into an incessant series of battles against the peoples that used to dwell in the Promised Land; yet Moses did not talk about military issues, nor about special topics pertaining to the new life; he was only concerned with their relationship with God, as a living foundation of their conquest and their growth in all aspects of life.

"These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan -- in the wilderness, on the plain opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahab" (Deut. 1:1).

The name 'Moses' appeared 99 times in the New Testament; each of which throws some light on the book of Deuteronomy.

In "**All Israel**," we find one of the expressions unique to the book of Deuteronomy. Moses was addressing the whole people, all Israel, inviting them to listen. That does not imply that he spoke directly to the whole congregation, which

was not practically possible; but he most probably spoke to the elders of Israel, who in turn spoke to the people. The two expressions: "**the elders of Israel**," and "**the people**" were equally used.

The repetition of the expression "**All Israel**" in this book, is to confirm that God was dealing with them as one people; not on account of that they were Jacob's seeds, but because they were bound together in a covenant with God. That was a covenant of the whole congregation, through which each believer enjoyed a personal relationship with God; as though the covenant was set with him personally; yet with no isolationism, individualism, or selfishness. God sets His Church as one bride; and sets us as members in that one bride, united to her Groom.

In saying "**beyond the Jordan**;" [5,1] meaning "East of the Jordan," does not necessarily mean that the author was on its west; but it was rather a common old expression at that time, for "East Jordan;" that is still used up to this day. That is although some believe that the introduction and the end of this book were written by either Joshua the son of Nun, or Eleazar the scribe, after recording the sermons of the prophet Moses.

This expression came 18 times in the book of Deuteronomy and the book of Joshua, to mean one or another bank of the Jordan, or even the whole region of the Jordan. In 12 times, it meant the eastern side, and in the remaining 6 times it meant the western side; sometimes with some explanation to designate the side meant.

The author fixed the location where Moses gave his sermon as follows:

(1) "In the wilderness;" which literally means in Hebrew, a spacious pasture, a name given to any uninhabited place, either fertile or barren. As long as we are in the wilderness of this world, we are in need of the word of God. The commandment is the companion in our sojourn. We say together with the Psalmist: "*I live as an alien in the land; do not hide your commandments from me*" (Psalm 119:19).

❖ Whoever loves the earthly things and lusts, is not thinking of being with Christ after his departure from this world; and would not be able to say: "*I live as an alien in the land*," as he cares about the land. Whereas whoever says "*Do not hid Your commandments from me*," is rather a saint… That is why the prophet asks God to reveal to him His great commandments for the heavenly life[1].

Origen

❖ Being an alien in the land, the Psalmist prayed to God not to hide His commandments from him; he is enjoying love as a unique or essential thing. Now he desires to have the love for the sake of God's ordainments; and for his desire he deserves to be commended and not condemned[2].

St. Augustine

(2) "On the plain": The word "plain" in Hebrew means "wilderness;" meaning here, the lowland from the **Red** Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba, and similar lands. The Arabs nowadays call this region "Arabia." In (Ezekiel 47:8,) it designates the region from the north of the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba; 100 miles long. Amid the bitterness of the barren plain, God presents to us His word; to say together with the Psalmist: "*How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey in my mouth*" (Psalm 119:103).

The word of God has a special sweetness; more than all the philosophical knowledge, and wisdom of the world. There is a great difference between studying the word of God in a human dry mental way; and eating it or feed on it, in which case it

[1] *Cf. The Author: Psalm 119, Alexandria, 1996, (in Arabic).*
[2] *Cf. The Author: Psalm 119, Alexandria, 1996, (in Arabic).*

becomes a sweet fulfilling food, far sweeter than honey. It gives sweetness to the soul, to transform the dryness of our cruel heart into the sweetness of spaciousness and compassion! It is as though the word of God in its sweetness, transforms the believer to the sweet life; that others would find it sweet to deal with him.

❖ Sometimes, for certain Scripture verses, there is a sweet taste; as when man repeats a simple verse (from the Bible) in his prayer several times, and is reluctant to move to another verse[1].

St. Isaac the Syrian

❖ For me, the words of God become like honey; I cry out for the sake of knowledge; and raise my voice for the sake of wisdom[2].

St. Gregory the Nazianzus

(3) Opposite Suph": The word "Suph" (*Cuwp*) in Hebrew, means "red," that if connected to the word "Yam" or "Sea," it would refer to the 'Red Sea.' It may also mean 'a hurricane;' or, although not mentioned here, it may refer to a location in the plains of Moab, called 'Supha.' Ptolemy also referred to people called 'Sophonites,' who dwelt in Arabia of Petra (Arabia Petraea).

Wherever this expression "**Opposite Suph'** or 'Opposite the Red Sea' is mentioned, it refers to crossing over from the land of bondage, and entering into the heavenly Canaan. This will not be realized without the water of Baptism, in which we enjoy Baptism together with the Lord Christ; to gain by His Holy Spirit, the spirit of adoption to God.

(4) "Paran," is the name of the wilderness on the border of 'Idumea,' where the Israelites were camping (Numbers 10:12; 12:16); south of the Jordan toward the mountain of Sinai; most probably the wilderness of 'Maze' - an irregular plateau extending from the series of the mountains of 'Maze' in the south, to the border of the holy land.; and from the Gulf of Aqaba in the East to the Gulf of Suez and the Mediterranean Sea in the West.

The wilderness of 'Paran' has many memorabilia, among which, is that, once Miriam was cured of her leprosy, through the intercession of her brother Moses," the people moved from Hazeroth and camped in the wilderness of Paran." **Origen** believes that the word 'Paran' means the (the visible mouth); as a reference to the 'divine incarnation.' As, by the cure of Miriam from the leprosy of disbelief, the procession set forth to Paran; namely to the belief in the divine incarnation, as a way to cross over to heaven, and to enjoy the incarnated Word of God..

(5) **"Tophel**," a Hebrew name meaning (calcareous); It might be the location known today as 'Tofailah Tafylah,' a village embracing about 600 inhabitants, between 'Bozeah and 'Kerak,' on the eastern side of the mountains of Edom, about 14 miles south east of the Dead Sea. Calcium was used to plaster the walls to make it difficult for the enemy to climb on during a battle. So, the word grants us strength that the enemy cannot infiltrate to us and climb on our walls.

(6) "**Laban**," A Hebrew name meaning, "white;" also called 'Libnah;' the second stop where the Israelites camped on their return from 'Kadesh' (Numbers 33:20, 21). The white color symbolizes purity; as the goal of the divine word is the enjoyment of purity.

(7) **"Hazeroth**;" probably '**Ein-Khuderah,**' about 36 miles northeast of Mount Sinai. There, Miriam and Aaron murmured against Moses; and Miriam had leprosy (Numbers 12). The word 'Hazeroth' means 'settlement;' Origen believes that

[1] *Ascetical Discourses, 22.*
[2] *In Defense of His Flight to Pontus, 77.*

it means "a perfect or settled building," or "blessing," while others believe that it means "houses" or "sheds." The goal of the commandment is settling down in the bosom of God the Father.

It is supposed to be the location mentioned in Numbers 11:35; 12:16, from which the Israelites entered into the wilderness of Paran. Yet, as the rest of the locations are on the eastern side of 'Araba' – the Plain; it is probable that 'Hazeroth' here, is different from that mentioned in the book of Numbers, that has to be far from Sinai, on the south or south-west of Mount Sinai; probably at El-Hudhera. There are probably several places called by the name 'Hazeroth.'

(8) **"Dizahab,'** Most probably not 'Zahab' on the Gulf of Aqaba. There are many places called 'Zahab.' 'Zahab' or "gold" refers to heaven; as the goal of the commandment is for the heart to set forth to heaven; so that man in his wholeness can enjoy the heavenly life.

"Eleven days to reach Kadesh-Barnea from Horeb" (Deut. 1:2)

In short, the location where Moses gave his first farewell sermon; or presented God's commandment to the new generation, reveals the work of the word of God in the believer's life:

- **"The wilderness**" refers to man's need for the commandment, as his companion in his sojourn in the land.
- **"The plain**," refers to the sweetness of the commandment amid the barrenness of this world.
- "**Opposite Suph**." Demonstrates our need to enjoy the water of Baptism; like crossing the Sea of *Suph* together with the people of God; setting forth from the land of bondage, heading toward the heavenly Canaan.
- "**Paran**," reminds us of the incarnation of the Word, who came to talk to us mouth-to-mouth through His commandment.
- "**Tophel**," demonstrates our need for the commandment, as a wall plastered by calcium, to make it difficult for the enemy to climb it.
- **"Laban**," confirms the goal of the commandment, to enter into purity.
- **"Hazeroth**," proclaims to us our enjoyment of the inner settlement, through obedience to the divine commandment.
- **"Dizahab**," lifts our hearts up to heaven; something that would not be realized except through the commandment, as a royal, heavenly, and divine way.

The Jewish interpreters believe that the places mentioned here, refer to the locations where the people plainly sinned[1]. As we already said, the Jews consider the book of Deuteronomy as "The book of reproofs." As though the prophet Moses proclaims the necessity of the renewal of the covenant with God, in the midst of the locations of sin; It is only God who can lift us up, and carry us on His arms to the Promised Land; granting us His fulfilling and rich promises.

Up to this day, the distances in the region of the Near East are sometimes estimated in terms of the number of hours or days it takes the travelers to cross them. A journey of one day on foot, covers about 20 miles. On the back of camels (in the desert), it covers 3 miles per hour; namely 30 miles per day. The Israelites, having been moving with their herds and children, and carrying all their possessions, their progress was usually slower than the normal rate; not reaching 10 miles, and

[1] *Barnes' Notes.*

sometimes only five per day.

"Horeb," literally means (desolation) (compare Jeremiah 44:2); a name given to the region around Mount Sinai, where God first appeared to Moses (Exodus 3:1). Moses, as far as the journey in the wilderness is concerned, differentiates between two main stages: The first stage, is that of the murmuring, the thankless, and unbelieving old generation; that extended about 40 years; as though in a maze. The second stage is the journey of 11 days.

"Kadesh-Barnea": "Kadesh" means (holy); several places are called by that name. It is located at the extreme south of Judea. It was the first stop of Israel in the journey of Sinai; From there, the spies were sent, and to it they returned (Numbers 12:16; 13:26); It is about 11 days walk far from the mountain of Moses (165 miles).

The prophet Moses refers to the 11 days journey from Mount Sinai, or 'Horeb' (Deut. 6:19; 4:10, 15) to 'Kadesh-Barnea,' where the people came to the entrance of the Promised Land. They did a journey of 40 years in a sort of maze, because of their lack of faith; whereas a journey of only 11 days brought them over to the border of the Promised Land. The journey of 11 days with faith, made it up for 40 years of maze, because of lack of faith. Faith works in our life to make up for the years, eaten by the locusts.

Sin, especially that of the lack of faith, brings man over to a state of maze, not knowing where to go. It turns the short ways into long ways of maze; whereas the journey of faith, brings the soul, in a short time, to the gates of heaven, or to the open high Canaan.

"In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the Israelites, just as the Lord had commanded him to speak to them" (Deut. 1:2, 3)

This talk was on the first day of the eleventh month of the fortieth year; Miriam died in the first month of that year; and Moses also died in the same year. It is as though the entrance into the Promised Land needed new leaderships other than Miriam, Aaron, and Moses; in preparation for Joshua to take command, to lead the new generation to enjoy the new land.

What Moses did in the wilderness, was nothing but God's work, with, by, and in him. And what he uttered, just before his departure, are God's words in his mouth; saying: *"… as the Lord had commanded him to speak to them" (Deut. 1:3).*

"This was after he had defeated king Sihon of the Amorites who reined in Heshbon, and king Og of Bashan, who reined in Ashtaroth and in Edrei" (Deut. 1:4)

In our study of the book of Numbers, Chapter 21, we saw that **Origen** believes that the word 'Sihon' means "haughty" or "a barren tree;" referring to the haughty and fruitless devil[1]. And that the word 'Heshbon' means "thinking," or, according to some, it means (account). **Origen** says: [Why is the capital of king Sihon called 'Heshbon'? Because 'Heshbon' means "thinking;" representing the most important part in the kingdom of the devil; the basis of his ability[2].]

'**Heshbon'** the capital of Moab, that 'Sihon' took over and made it the capital of his kingdom.

'Bashan' on the eastern frontier of the Sea (lake) of Galilee.

'Ashtaroth,' the capital of 'Og," a little more than 20 miles east of the Sea of Galilee.

'Edrei,' a little less than 20 miles southeast of Ashtaroth.

'Sihon' dominated the south side of the Jordan; whereas 'Og' dominated its

[1] *Origen: In Num.*
[2] *In Num. Hom. 13.*

north side.

"Beyond the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this Law as follows" (Deut. 1:5)

"*Expound this Law,*" implies that it was not his intention to repeat the old laws, but to expound them for the edification of the new generation, who were about to enter the land of Canaan. God's commandment does not change, but is presented to every generation according to their fulfillment, their needs, and their circumstances.

The word **"expound**" in Hebrew literally means "dig" or "go deep into;" as though the prophet Moses sees in the divine Law, a mine of riches, in which the believer needs to dig in, and to get into its depths, in order to discover its riches, to use them for his own benefit, and that of his brethren. There is a great difference between someone who hears about the word of God, and another who goes deep into it, and acquires it for him as a true treasure beyond evaluation.

The word "**Law**" came in the singular tense, which means that, what is in the book represents an integral unit that could never be divided. This word became the name of all the five books (Ezra 7:6; Matthew 12:5); then of the whole Old Testament (John 10:34; 15:25). It came 35 times in psalm 119 alone.

2. GOD REALIZES HIS PROMISE TO THEIR FATHERS

Having designated the date of the event and the location, he started in his first sermon to reveal God's longing to realize His promise to His people.

"The Lord our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying, 'You have stayed long enough at this mountain. Resume your journey, and go into the mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the plain, in the hills, and in the vale, and in the south (Negev), and by the sea side, to the land of the Canaanites and the Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. See, I have set the land before you; go in and take possession of the land that I swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them and to their descendants after them" (Deut. 1:6-8)

Moses refers God to his people; saying, **"The Lord our God"** (Deut 1:6); "**The Lord your God**" (Deut. 1:10); and "**The Lord God of your ancestors**" (Deut. 1:11). He is the God of the Church (Deut. 5:6); the Church of God and His own people. The relationship between the heavenly Groom and His bride is a personal one.

If the people are longing to enter into the Promised Land to enjoy its goods; God is longing more to realize His promise to us. He is inciting us to move and go forth along His way, to enter through the open gates of heaven; and to open our mouths wide, for Him to fill; and to stretch our hands, to receive His blessings.

The Amorites and the Canaanites: Palestine, since the old time, was known as the land of Canaan, and its inhabitants, as the Canaanites (Genesis 10:19; 12:6). The Amorites, mentioned on the ancient archeological remains that date back to 30 centuries BC; infiltrated into Canaan. The name 'Amorites' was used to refer to all the inhabitants of Canaan; having been the strongest of its nations.

Although the prophet Moses did not enter the Promised Land, he gave his people the following information about its extent:

The '**Arabah,'** is the valley of the river Jordan, from the Sea of Galilee to the region, south of the Dead Sea.

The mount the Amorites, south of the Dead Sea. "Negeb' (**Negev**), is the region north of Sinai, and south of the mount of the Amorites.

The land of the Canaanites; namely, 'Phoenicia;' with the city of 'Sidon,' and the seacoast of the Mediterranean to the west.

'**Lebanon**' in the north.

The great river; namely the river '**Euphrates**' to the east.

All that was literally realized in the days of king Solomon (1 kings 4; 21); according to God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to their descendants after them (Genesis 12:7; 15:18; 26:3, 4, 13-15); then confirmed to the prophet Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:8, 17).

"You have stayed long enough at this mountain" (Deut. 1:6).

He has given them the Law, and cared for them all along the ways of the wilderness, led them by Himself day and night; Now He is commanding them to move, in preparation to enter into the Promised Land. God requests from us to move in the proper time; He knows when we should rest, and when we should move. He calls us to set forth to the mountains of eternity, to find a place for ourselves in His bosoms.

Israel spent nearly 40 years wandering in the wilderness; and the reason for this delay has been man's slothfulness, rebellion, and un-readiness to enter. From His side, God from the beginning, has almost taken our hands and dragged us along, to set forth with Him to the Promised Land; provoking us saying: ***"You have stayed long enough at this mountain; resume your journey… go in and take possession of the land" (Deut. 1:7, 9).*** He wanted us to hasten; and carried us in His fatherly bosom to set forth with us (Deut. 1:31; to take possession (Deut. 1:21; Revelation 3).

"I have set the land before you" (Deut. 1:8).

While preparing the people to enter into the Promised Land, for the duration of 40 years in the wilderness, He set for them the land that they were going to possess, to become easy and well defined. Such is the way God prepares our hearts during the journey of this world, putting the heavenly Canaan before our eyes; and saying: "*I go to prepare a place for you*" (John 14:1).

"The land that I swore to your ancestors…" (Deut. 1:8). This reference to the promise that God swore by an oath to their ancestors (Genesis 22:16), was repeated several times. Moses always reminded the people that God's love was not presented to them because of their own worthiness (Deut. 7:7; 9:4), but because of God's grace and His early promises to their ancestors. The items of that promise; namely, the great number, the possession of the holy land, and gaining an overall blessing; are all repeated here.

3. THE PEOPLE TAKE PART IN RUNNING THEIR DAILY LIFE

How amazing is the personality of the prophet Moses; he begins his sermon by revealing God's compassion toward His people; then proceeds to tell about his personal weakness, and how he is unable to bear the burdens of the people by himself.

"At that time I said to you, 'I am unable by myself to bear you; the Lord your God has multiplied you, so that today you are as numerous as the stars of heaven. May the Lord, the God of your ancestors, increase you a thousand times more and bless you, as He has promised you! But how can I bear the heavy burden of your disputes all by myself? Choose for each of your tribes individuals who are wise, discerning, and reputable to be your leaders'" (Deut. 1:9-13).

The prophet Moses does not refer to the fact that it was a suggestion by Jethro, his father-in-Law (Exodus 18:13-26); He just says that he asked them to choose 70 elders to help him bear their burdens. Those became later on the assembly of the 'Sanhedrin;' who, instead of helping Moses to bear the burdens of the people, and bringing them over to the Savior Messiah, they delivered the Lord Christ to death, and opposed Moses' Law in the spirit, with the pretence of defending it, and protecting its

letters.

The goal of Moses, as the representative of the Law, was to lead the believers to Christ; for all to experience the sweetness of the evangelic life, and to enjoy the pledge of heaven; and it was fitting of the assembly of the Sanhedrin to bear the same spirit. So is the goal of every priest, to preach the word of God, and to bring every soul over to the experience of the new resurrected life. It is likewise fitting for the deacons – who represent the assembly of the Sanhedrin for Moses – to act along the same line, while serving tables, as did the chosen deacons in the time of the apostles (Acts 6); and as is clear in the speech of the archdeacon Steven (Acts 7).

The prophet Moses probably counted the choice of the 70 elders, as one of his faults; having felt unable to bear by himself the burdens of his people; unaware that it is God, who actually bear those burdens. Some scholars believe that his intention was to reveal to his people that he requested others to share the responsibility with him; to give the people the right to choose their leaders (Deut. 1:13).

As a true leader, Moses considered the leadership and the greatness, as burdens he was committed to bear; and shrewdly, he sought for qualified individuals to share the responsibility with him. The prophet Moses, as the leader of the people, did not wish to be their only leader, although he was worthy of that honor, and although he accomplished what nobody else could have; he sought helpers who share with him the responsibility and the honor.

In the book of Exodus, we see how Moses, the great among the prophets, does not despise the counsel of a heathen; "*but heeded the voice of his father-in-Law, and did all that he has said*" (Exodus 18:24). He, who out of love for God and his people, despised the royal court with all its possibilities (Hebrew 11:24, 26), listens with the spirit of humility to the voice of Jethro. On this, **St. John Chrysostom** comments, saying: [If Moses learned from his father-in-Law, such constructive things, of which he was not aware; how much it is fitting for us within the Church to follow his example; namely to seek the help of others... How is it possible for a non-believer to comprehend things that a spiritual man could not?[1]]

" As numerous as the stars of heaven" (Deut. 1:10).

God's promise to Abraham was realized (Genesis 15:5-6). Some may probably say that man, by means of a powerful telescope, can see more than 25 million stars; Did the people entering the land of Canaan reach this number? To answer this we say that, when God promised that to Abraham, He told him to have a look at the sky with his naked eyes, and not with a telescope; and the naked eye can see about 3000 stars. In the second census we know that there were about 603,000 men of war; So God's promise was realized more than Abraham himself could ever imagine!

He says: "*Today you are as numerous as the stars of heaven*" (Deut. 1:10); and did not say, "as the sand of the sea;" Seeing them as splendid stars that enjoy the heavenly glory, he counted them as stars of heaven.

With his care for his people, he blesses them, and keeps on blessing them (Deut. 1:10-11). In the land of Egypt, during about 250 years, the Israeli people so multiplied that Pharaoh got filled with envy and fear (Exodus 1:9). Now, after 40 years in the wilderness, their number greatly multiplied, yet to the pleasure of Moses, who prayed for their blessing a thousand fold.

"Choose for each of your tribes individuals who are wise, discerning, and reputable to be your leaders. You answered me, 'The plan you have proposed is a good one.' So I took the leaders of your tribes, wise and reputable individuals, and

[1] *In 1 Cor. hom. 1:4.*

installed them as leaders over you; commanders of thousands, commanders of hundreds, commanders of fifties, commanders of tens, and officials, throughout your tribes" (Deut. 1:13-16)

The '**officials**' were those who supervised the execution of the decisions issued by the rulers, judges, or other leaders. Before the exodus, officials used to work under the Egyptian taskmasters to count the numbers of bricks (Exodus 5:6); but now they became commanders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens; not under servitude, but for executing justice (Deut. 16:18; 20:5; 5:8, 9; 29:10; 20:28).

He asked them to choose individuals to bear leadership and responsibility; according to certain criteria; they should be:

a- **Wise** (*chalsaamiym*); namely, those who got much knowledge.

b- **Discerning** (*Uwnboniym*); namely, who can carry out justice.

c- **Reputable** (*wiyadu'ium*); namely those who, through practical experience, have proved their ability to achieve great works.

The prophet Moses did not include in his criteria, that they should be of temporal dignity or riches; but they should rather be wise, discerning and experienced. With the same spirit, God requested from the people to choose ministers (deacons) of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, to minister to the poor (Acts 6:3-6).

"I charged your judges at that time: 'Give the members of your community a fair hearing, and judge rightly between one person and another, whether citizen or resident alien" (Deut. 1:16)

In the tribal system of Israel, they had four levels of people:

- "**The descendants of the fathers**;" including the elders and rulers.
- "**The aliens**;" of other nations whom they allowed to dwell among them.
- "**The sojourners**" (Leviticus 25:35); of the defeated peoples.
- "**The slaves**;" purchased with money or born in the house.

There was also the "**stranger**;" who temporarily dwelt among them for trading or other businesses.

An alien should be treated as a brother; so should be anyone who is subjected to persecution. This is unique to the book of Deuteronomy that we do not see in the laws of Egypt or Babylon at that time (See 10:18, 19).

"You must not be partial in judging; hear out the small and the great alike; you shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God's. Any case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it. So I charged you at that time with all the things that you should do" (Deut. 1:17, 18).

If God, in His love for man, provokes him to receive His promises to enjoy them, the prophet Moses, as God's minister, honors the will of people. In his love for them, he would have wished to bear all their burdens alone; but because of their immense increase, he felt great inadequacy; although he rejoices for their growth, and longs to see them grow a thousand times more; not only in number, but in glory; that is why he likened them to the stars of heaven.

- Moses presented to the chosen men, a system of work that may be summarized as follows:

They should not hasten to judge without hearing with longsuffering, to all parties (Deut. 1:16). The prophet Isaiah says: "*The Lord God has opened my ear; and I was not rebellious*" (Is. 50:5).

They shall not be partial in judging (Deut. 1:17); they should judge justly

between one person and another, whether citizen or resident alien.

They shall not be intimidated by anyone; for the judgment is God's; who will protect them; or he will judge and condemn them.

They shall not be shy of admitting their inadequacy; if any case is too hard for them, they shall bring it to Moses to hear it (Deut. 1:18).

They shall accurately follow the system; judging according to the following stages:

* God, as the King, and the supreme judge.
* Moses, as the man of God and His deputy.
* The priests, who consult God through the Urim and the Thummim.
* The rulers of the tribes, or the princes.
* The commanders of thousands '*Chiliarchs*.'
* The commanders of hundreds '*Centurions*.'
* The commanders of fifties '*Tribunes*.'
* The commanders of tens '*Decurions*.'
* The officers, who are appointed to execute the commands of the above.

So all shall ultimately submit to God, from whom they draw their authority, and before whom they will be judged. Then, each will submit to the level above him.

Because Moses proclaimed his inadequacy to bear alone all the burdens of the people of God; he set out of them leaders for war, and for taking care of the daily concerns of the tribes (Deut. 1:9-17); without disregarding his own responsibility, especially for the hard cases (Deut. 1:17). However, the people, on their part, paid back God's love and Moses' care by murmuring and doubting.

4. HAVING DOUBTS AND SENDING MEN TO SPY THE LAND

Some scholars believe that Moses, on his part, erred in seeking a group of elders to support him in his leadership of the people, having felt his inadequacy; and that the people, on theirs, erred in seeking a group of spies to spy the land that God commanded them to enter and to possess[1].

However, the error of the people differed from that of Moses; as the decision of the people implied disbelief. While ten of the spies came back speaking about the mighty Amalekites, who were dwelt in the land of Canaan; Only Joshua and Caleb came back carrying with them some of the fruit of the land. The ten concentrated their eyes on the opposing Amalekites, whereas those two concentrated theirs, and put their hearts in the truth of God's promises.

Weak faith or the lack of faith, draws our depths to fear the disturbance of the devil, the sin, and the world; Whereas faith draws the heart of man and his inner energies to God's promises; trusting in their sure realization; and counting every opposition, to add to his belief and glory.

The prophet blames the people for their request to send spies before entering the land of Canaan; something that was not mentioned in the book of Numbers. They did not trust the promise of God, but sought the counsel of men; Instead of having the Son of God go before them to illuminate their way, they sought the candles of the spies.

"Then, just as the Lord our God had ordered us, we set out from Horeb and went through all that great and terrible wilderness that you saw, on the way to the hill country of the Amorites, until we reached 'Kadesh-Barnea'" (Deut. 1:19).

The prophet demonstrates in his talk, how dangerous the journey has been, saying, "*and (we) went through all that great and terrible wilderness*." By

[1] *J. Vernon McGee: Deuteronomy, p. 15,16.*

remembering all the dangers that surrounded us, we tend to give thanks to God who led us through them.

God brings us into that wilderness, that is not only *great*, but also *terrible*; to learn the spiritual war, and to enjoy the sanctity (Kadesh). It is through the narrow way of the cross that we cross over from the wilderness to God's paradise, full of fruits.

In that wilderness, we enter into war, not against flesh and blood, but against "*principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age*" (Ephesians 6:12); we fight, together with the apostle Paul, wild beasts in Ephesus; saying with the Lord Christ, that "*it is the hour of the forces of darkness*." We shall keep fighting the seven days of the week.

"I said to you, 'You have reached the hill country of the Amorites which the Lord our God is giving us. See, the Lord your God has given the land to you; Go up, take possession, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors has promised you; do not fear or be dismayed" (Deut. 1:20, 21).

The Hebrew word "inherit," translated as "take possession," implies entering to possess the land in place of someone else, either by conquest or through inheritance. It came more than 52 times in the book of Deuteronomy, even in the part concerning the statutes (For example Deut. 19:2, 14; 23:20). The original word "inherit" is translated as "take possession" (in Deut. 2:31; 26:20).

"Go up, take possession, …do not fear or be dismayed" (Deut. 1:21).

God requests from every soul to practice its rights in the following main issues:

- To "*go up*;" we are called to an incessant "*going up*." As who does not go up, will go down and fall. In other words, unless man goes up together with Christ to His heavens, to enjoy the spirit of conquest, he will fall together with the devil into his hell.
- To "*take possession*": Whoever incessantly goes up will enjoy the position of 'royalty,' to be counted by the King of kings as 'a king' of authority.
- "*Not to fear or be dismayed*": the Christian is a king and a leader; if he collapses by fear, he would lose his position as a child of God. It is not fitting for the believer to fear; but to have trust and confidence in God, the heavenly Father.

While God called on them to go up, to take possession, and not to fear; their response was a request to spy the land that God has promised to give their ancestors. Instead of going up to become kings, they wished to be spies; and instead of trusting God, and of being proud of the royal authority given to them, they feared and became dismayed! What a painful situation in which we often fall!

"All of you came to me and said, 'Let us send men ahead of us to explore the land for us and bring back a report to us regarding the route by which we should go up and the cities we will come to.' The plan seemed good to me and I selected twelve of you, one of each tribe. They set out and went up into the hill country, and when they reached the Valley of Eshcol they spied it out and gathered some of the land's produce which they brought down to us. They brought back a report to us, and said, 'It is a good land that the Lord is giving us.' But you were unwilling to go up. You rebelled against the command of the Lord your God" (Deut. 1:22-26)

He asked them to enjoy the perfection, out of which they got a pledge through the two spies who testified to how good the land was. But, they disregarded the good report of Joshua and Caleb.

Men of the Old Testament needed spies to taste the pledge of the fruit of the

Promised Land. Whereas, men of the New Testament enjoy the incarnated Word of God who carries them in Him, as members of His body, to enjoy the pledge of heaven. By that, He brings the believers over into the heavenly life, to present their life as a practical living testimony; having tasted the sweetness of the coming goods. They are an actual demonstration of what they preach; their life talks, and their behavior testifies to what they say.

The people heard about how the Promised Land flows of milk and honey. Yet, they were in need of leaders, who enjoy, not only mere theoretical knowledge, but also one that is confirmed by watching and experience. The twelve spies went to the Promised Land, and got complete information about the fertility of the land and its possibilities, beside the fortification of the cities and the size and the military experience of the enemy. Yet they became divided into two groups: one group saw that information (data) through a pure human eye; so their own souls collapsed, and made the souls of the people collapse. And another group saw the information through a divine eye of faith; and their hearts flared with longing to cross over. Up till the present day, the Church needs leaders who transform the knowledge into practical experience, and see it through a true divine eye, to cross over together with their flock to the heavenly divine promises.

"You grumbled in your tents and said, 'It is because the Lord hates us that He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to hand us over to the Amorites to destroy us. Where are we headed? Our kindred have made our hearts melt by reporting, 'the people are stronger and taller than we; the cities are large and fortified up to heaven! We actually saw there the offspring of the Anakim'!" (Deut. 1:27, 28)

The first defense for any ancient city was its walls; which, if penetrated by an enemy, the city will easily fall in his hands (2 kings 25:4).

The walls of Jericho were well known for their strength; that is why it was said to be "*fortified up to heaven*" (28). In its excavations it came that double walls, more than 40 feet high and about 66 feet wide, surrounded the city from all sides; the lower parts were of stone and the upper of bricks; and were plastered by a very smooth layer of calcium, to make it impossible to climb on during attacks. Some believe that the collapse of its walls has been through a divine plan by a devastating earthquake.

"I said to you, 'Have no dread or fear of them. The Lord your God, who goes before you, is the one who will fight for you, just as He did for you, before your very eyes, and in the wilderness, where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, just as one carries his child, all the way that you traveled until you reached this place" (Deut. 1:29-31).

Despite the report of the spies about the fertility of the land (25), that the Lord is giving them, they were in dread and fear (26-29); not trusting the Lord who fights for them. It is a difficult road; one of consistent war (against the devil). Yet it is a war of the Lord Himself; who walks before us to confront the battle and fight for us (30). We are not a party in the spiritual war against evil. God has confirmed to them that He dwells among them; walks before them on the road as their Leader and Guide; that He judges and condemns; and that he fights for them.

The word "Lord" in the Targum is'*Onkelos*': "*The Word of God … fights for you*" (30), the same word used by St. John about the Lord Christ, being the "Logos[1]."

He revealed God's work with them, when He granted them victory by a strong arm, as they came out of the land of Egypt; and when He gave them His true

[1] *Adam Clarke, Deuteronomy, 1.*

compassion in the wilderness. There is no way to doubt the compassion of God, who carried them on His arms just as a father carries his child. The prophet Moses has already complained that God put on him the task to carry the people in his bosom, "*as a guardian carries a nursing child"* (Numbers 11:12).

"In the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, just as one carries his child, all the way that you traveled until you reached this place" (Deut. 1:31). In more than one situation, God proclaims His compassionate fatherhood, and His exalted care for man; He carried His people as though on the wings of an eagle, not to bring them forth to the Promised Land, but to Him, to find in God Himself a unique Promised Land.

And here, He proclaims Himself as a Father who compassionately carries His son on His arms; not temporarily, but "all the way," to let the believer always feel that he is carried on eternal arms.

Notice the charges proclaimed by the prophet against them:

1. Rebelling and grumbling against the Law of God (26); against His authority.

2. They did wrong against God's goodness; assuming that He has brought them out of the land of bondage, to enjoy the Promised Land, because he hates them.

3. They embraced an unbelieving heart in the Lord their God (32). That is the center of evil; the rebellion against God's Law, and not trusting in His strength and His goodness, spring from disbelief in His word.

"But in spite of this, you have no trust in the Lord your God, who goes before you on the way to seek out a place for you to camp, in fire by night, and in the cloud by day, to show you the route you should take" (Deut. 1:33).

Why have their fathers been denied to enter the Promised Land? Their disbelief! Every sin could be easily cured. But it is disbelief that makes man lose his eternity! Along the way, we shall lack nothing; He would be like fire by night to keep us from falling; and like a cloud by day to keep on going (Deut. 1:33).

When the Lord heard your words, He was wrathful and swore, 'Not one of these – not one of this evil generation – shall see the good land that I swore to give to your ancestors, except 'Caleb son of Jephunneh.' He shall see it, and to him and his descendants I will give the land on which he set foot, because of his complete fidelity to the Lord.' Even with me, the Lord was angry on your account, saying, 'You shall not enter there; Joshua son of Nun, your assistant, shall enter there; encourage him, for he is the one who will secure Israel's possession of it. And as for you little ones, who you thought would become booty, your children, who today do not know right from wrong, they shall enter there; to them I will give it; and they shall take possession of it. But as for you, journey back into the wilderness, in the direction of the Red Sea" (Deut. 1:34-40)

Their disbelief has hurt Moses himself; having been denied entry into the Promised Land together with them. Here we should refer to what happened by the water of Marah (Kadesh), where the Lord said that Moses and Aaron did not hallow Him in the eyes of the children of Israel (Numbers 20:12). Yet the goodness of God transformed, even that divine wrath into good. In place of Moses who was denied to bring the people into the Promised Land, Joshua would do that. 'Our Joshua,' who would bring us over to the heavenly Canaan, would do what the Law could not do. The door was closed before the old generation; but the grace of God opened it before the new one.

We need to parade our life in both the recent and the distant past, to reveal God's exalted love, abundant grace, and unique care toward us; that would support us, provoke us to trust in His promises, to accept the entrance into the heavenly Canaan,

and to practice the pledge of eternity, under the guidance of Jesus Christ.

God Chastises the grumblers, who lack trust in Him, by denying them entrance into the Promised Land; yet He does not deny their children (Deut. 1:39).

5. PERSISTENCE ON REBELLION

"You answered me, 'We have sinned against the Lord! We are ready to go up and fight, just as the Lord our God commanded us.' So all you strapped on your battle gear, and thought it easy to go up into the hill country. The Lord said to me, 'Say to them, do not go up and do not fight, for I am not in the midst of you; otherwise you will be defeated by your enemies. Although I told you, you would not listen. You rebelled against the command of the Lord and presumptuously went up into the hill country. The Amorites who lived in that hill country then came out against you, and chased you as bees do. They beat you down in Seir as far as Hormah. When you returned and wept before the Lord, the Lord would neither hear your voice nor pay you any attention. After you had stayed at Kadesh as many days as you did…" (Deut. 1:41-46).

When God commanded them to go up to fight, they feared and refused. And when He proclaimed His wrath on them, and commanded them not to go up to fight, they did not listen and went up. Because they were not led by faith, but by their own will. In their refusal to go up, and in their going up to fight, they revealed their rebellion against the Lord.

Sin makes man stubborn against his beloved God. When God commanded them to go up to fight and to take possession, they refused (Deut. 1:26); and when He commanded them not to go up and not to fight, as He is not any more in their midst (42); and confirmed to them that they would be defeated if they do; they did not listen to Him, but arrogantly, foolishly, and haughtily, they went up.

It is amazing, how, even when He chastened them because of their rebellion, by not being in their midst (42). He did not wish them to be defeated by their enemies, so He commanded them not to go up and fight, before offering repentance, after which He would again dwell in their midst, and grant them victory.

They did not grieve because of their regret to have rebelled against the Lord; nor that they had the intention to go back to submit to His will; but on account of the defeat that has come over them. The people wept before God, yet it was like the tears of crocodiles, shed, not for the sake of a true repentance, and a return to God, to walk by the spirit of faith; but on account of their loss and reproach. They were not preoccupied with their relationship with God, and they shed, not the tears of repentance, nor of the wish to return to God with humility; but tears that bear pride and haughtiness for what would other people think of them as failures.

The apostle Paul says concerning the true grief: *"I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance; for you felt a godly grief, so that you were not harmed in any way by us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation, and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death"* (2 Corinthians 7:9, 10).

Here it is mentioned that it was the Amorites who chased them out (44); whereas in the book of Numbers it came that, "The Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and defeated them, pursuing them as far as Hormah" (Numbers 14:45). Here, he used the name 'Amorites,' having been the greatest nation in Canaan at that time, to refer to all the Canaanites as a whole; as it also came in (Deuteronomy 1:7)[1].

[1] *Barnes' Notes.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 1)
LEAD US IN THE JOURNEY OF OUR SOJOURN

❖ At Horeb, You said to Your people: *"You have stayed enough at this mountain."*
Say a word, to let our souls set forth to the heavenly Canaan.
And not wander around the mountains of the world.

❖ You haven't set the land before us, as You did with the people of Israel.
But You opened up the gates of heaven before us to enter.
And presented to us the bosom of God the Father to settle down in it.
Let Your Holy Spirit carry us, for our souls to settle down.

❖ Moses could not alone bear the burdens of the people.
You have carried on Yourself my sins and iniquities.
You brought me out of that horrible wilderness.
And brought me into the heavenly sanctuaries (Kadesh).

❖ You commanded me: *"Go up … take possession … Do not fear!*
By You, I go up; as You made me heavenly one.
By You I take possession; as I am a king.
I do not fear; as I am Your child!

❖ The people of the old rejected the sun of Your counsel.
And sent on the candles of the spies.
They did not honor Your promise and Your wisdom.
They rebelled against You, and by their hearts they rejected the Promised Land.
Grant me the spirit of obedience, O You, the amazingly Obedient Son.

❖ When I look back at the past, I see You carrying my fathers on Your arms.
Satisfying them with the fat of Your love, granting them Your true promises.

❖ They sinned against You. They did not believe Your faithful promises.
And yet You carried them like a father carries his child.
Carry me, and take away from me the spirit of rebellion.

CHAPTER 2

DISCERNMENT IN DEALING WITH OTHERS

In the first chapter, the prophet Moses presented the iniquities of the people, and what they earned as fruit of their rebellion. Now, having reached the gates of the land of Canaan; in them the divine promise to their father Abraham, held fast along the generations, will be realized; if they adopt the spirit of discernment in their behavior, and their relationships with the nations.

Although God, in His love for His people, dwells among them, grants them the Promised Land, and fights several nations on their behalf; yet, He wished them to walk according to His plan, with discernment and wisdom. He commanded them not to attack the children of Esau (Deut. 2:1-8), their brothers (Esau and Jacob were brothers); who have already got a divine promise to get the Mount of Seir as an inheritance (Genesis 36:8). He commanded them as well, not to fight against Moab and Ammon (Deut. 2:9, 18), being the children of Lot. But He commanded them to fight against Sihon, king of the Amorites (Deut. 2:24), who hardened his heart and did not let them pass through his land; and promised to grant them conquest over him; and all the cities of Sihon would be theirs (Deut. 2:26-36).

God, who grants them victory in their battles, does not want them to turn into a people that love to make war and to take possession, for its own sake, but, if they make war, it should be in the Lord; and if they take possession, it should be as a divine gift. That is why He designated limits and goals for their wars.

1- Their journey into the wilderness 1–3.
2- A divine command not to fight against the Edomites 4–8.
3- A divine command not to fight against the Moabites 9–19.
4- A divine command to fight against Sihon and Og 20–37.

1. THE JOURNEY INTO THE WILDERNESS:

"After you had stayed at Kadesh as many days as you did, we journeyed back into the wilderness, in the direction of the Red Sea, as the Lord had told me, and skirted Mount Seir for many days. Then the Lord said to me. 'You have been skirting this hill country long enough; head north" (Deut. 2:1-3).

Verse 1 refers in a concise way to the maze journey as a whole, as the listeners were not in need of hearing its details. The two verses 2 and 3 came to refer to the command concerning the stage from Kadesh to the Mount of Hur (Numbers 20:22; 33:27); and directing the people to go south from the Mount of Seir, around the land of Edom (Numbers 21:4); then north toward Arnon, namely, on the way to the wilderness of Moab."

The word **'Seir'** means "with dense hair," a land dwelt by the Horites (Genesis 14:6); then seized by Esau and his descendants (Genesis 32:3); was called 'the Mount of Seir,' because it was a mountainous land on the eastern side of the Arabian wilderness; where one of its summits, that of Mount Hur, reached a height of 1600 meters. The Israelites had to go around it in a circle, through a very rough terrain, because the Edomites refused to let them cross through their land.

In the last chapter, God's command was not to be slothful: "*You have stayed long enough in this mountain"* (Deut. 1:6). Here, He also commands them: "*You have been skirting this hill country long enough; Head north*" (Deut. 2:3).

Except for Caleb and Joshua, all the generation that came out of the land of Egypt have died; those are who refused to enter the Promised Land, according to God's command; and Moses was about to die. That is why God said that they have

stayed long enough in that mountain.

Of the fruits of sin, is that man becomes slothful, and reluctant to move; and when he does, he goes as though in a closed circuit. The devil at first, strikes man with the sin of laziness and slothfulness; then provokes him to move and to act with no goal; to corrupt and waste his energy.

❖ The believer is in need of the spirit of heavenly wisdom and discernment, to keep on going; yet along the royal way, and with no diversion.

St. John Cassian

2. A DIVINE COMMAND NOT TO FIGHT AGAINST THE EDOMITES

Although Jacob acquired both the blessing and firstborn status, God granted his brother Esau and his descendants to possess Mount Seir. Now, God, warns His people against approaching or attacking Mount Seir; as He had given it to their brothers, anticipating their return to Him, to enter into the new land, the heavenly Canaan, through faith in the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

God, the Philanthropic, asks everybody not to overpass the boundaries of others. And as the apostle Paul says: "*He has made from one blood every nation to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation*" (Acts 17:26).

" And charge the people as follows: 'You are about to pass through the territory of your kindred, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. They will be afraid of you, so, be very careful not to engage in battle with them, for I will not give you even so much as a foot's length of their land, since I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession" (Deut. 1:3-5).

He gave them the right to pass through the boundaries of their brothers; gave them awe in their sights; yet they should not abuse those rights. He warns them "*to be very careful*;" not for any possibility that the children of Esau might defeat them, but in order not to lose the spirit of justice, and not to fall in the sin of not keeping the divine commandment.

Although a man of God is so much feared, yet he should be careful not to think much of himself, lest he would lose the spirit of humility before God; and, instead of honor, he would be humiliated.

In this chapter, it is to be noticed that God, although He is the Creator of everything, and the Lord of all, yet, He always offers a clarification of His command; We see Him repeating the word, "*for I.…*" (Deut. 2:5, 9, 19). He is an amazing Father, who likes to speak to His children, not with the sense of giving orders and commands, but with the spirit of understanding, to let them comprehend the secrets behind every action of His. He wishes to speak to us, the way He did to Moses; being said: "*The Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend*" (Exodus 33:11).

He gave them this commandment – honoring the possession of others – warning them against approaching Mount Seir, of which He would not give them even so much as a foot's length (Deut. 2:5). As we may start by a foot's length; then would take more and more, of what is not our right to have, that is why the commandment confirms: "*Don't touch; don't taste;"* Keep away altogether!

When God gave the Ten Commandments, He did not give an explanation for each commandment. Saying, "Don't steal," He did not say why so; because He gave it, as though to little children, unable to realize the spiritual concept of the commandment. But He soon provided the explanation; saying that the commandment not to steal, is not just for the sake of obedience by the commandment; as we may

even steal with our mind and our heart, if not with our hand. He said: "*Be holy, for Your Father is Holy*;" namely, be perfect, for your Father is perfect. Holiness and perfection' namely, being like God, is the cause behind our refrain from stealing. That is why He gives us the commandment and then follows it by a divine proclamation.

The descendants of Esau or Edom expelled the Horites and dwelt in their land (12). The rulers of Edom, at the beginning, were chiefs or princes of tribes (Genesis 36:15-19) and then became kings later on (Genesis 36:31-39), before the setting of the kingdom of Israel. The Edomite was considered like a brother of the Hebrew; that the third generation of whoever becomes attached to them, would be counted as a Hebrew (Deuteronomy 23:7, 8). King David conquered them (2 Samuel 8:14); yet he let them stay in their land, after appointing guards over them. Then, they regained their independence in the days of Jehoshaphat (2 kings 8:20-22). The Edomites rejoiced when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem, captivated and sold those who escaped as slaves (Obadiah).

"You shall purchase food from them for money, so that you may eat; and you shall also buy water from them for money, so that you can drink. Surely the Lord your God has blessed you in all your undertakings; He knows your going through this great wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing" (Deut. 2:6, 7).

Although God allowed for their wandering along forty years, because of their rebellion and murmuring, yet He was as though walking with them in that long journey, caring for all their needs, and did not let them lack anything of the necessities of life. In the course of our chastisement, He does not forsake us, but attaches Himself to us, and provides us with all our needs. He wounds and He heals!

Although the manna did not completely cease to come down over them, until their first celebration of Passover in Canaan under the leadership of Joshua (Joshua 5:10-12); we, for the first time, see the people in need of purchasing food and water for money. For as long as forty years, God sustained them for free, but **He started to train them to purchase, before they come to enter the Promised Land**, where they are committed to agriculture and trade. God probably allowed them to purchase food and water, while at the same time, continued to rain the manna over them, to confirm to them that He does not intend to deprive them of what He has granted them. He proclaims His love and exalted care for them. What He actually abhors is lust and greed.

Those words reveal God's exalted love, care, and planning for His people. He could have brought them over from the land of Egypt to Canaan in few days; yet, by a divine plan, He let them wander forty years in that great wilderness, to enjoy the blessing of His hands, His walking with them for a longer period; and His realization of their needs, even those of little material importance. This is God's goodness that turns even the fruit of our sins to our own good.

Man, within few hours, can make a big ladder; yet he needs several years to get a great tree laden with fruits. So God did not wish to make a big ladder out of His people, but a fruitful tree; that He planted in Egypt, watered and cared for it along 40 years; to enjoy entering into Canaan, the symbol of heaven; as a natural fruit of God's work in their life.

We often hasten to get fruition; wish in few moments to bear the fruit of the Spirit; But God, in His great love for us, works quietly and with no haste; in order to let us perceive His work, realize its secrets, and experience the intimate fellowship with Him. He walks with us amid the great wilderness for so many years.

During those many long years, He did not present His people with lectures in

theology, but offered them Himself, walked with them in the wilderness, and fulfilled all their needs; to let them taste His love, and experience its sweetness.

"So we passed by our kin, the descendants of Esau who live in Seir; leaving behind the route of the Arabah, and leaving behind Elath and Ezion Geber" (Deut. 2:8).

'Elah' or 'Elath': is a Hebrew name meaning "trees." The region of 'Aqaba' is still rich in palm trees. 'Elah' is a town at the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba (the eastern arm of the Red Sea); close to 'Ezion Geber.' It was an important maritime port, and a center of caravans; that king David took over from the Edomites (2 Samuel 8:14); and was used by king Solomon as a port for his trade fleet. After the Edomites retook it, it was taken again, and rebuilt by Uzziah king of Judah (2 kings 14:22); then taken by Rezin king of Aram; and the Edomites returned to it (2 kings 16:6).

'Ezion Geber': was located west of the port of 'Elath;' the last of the stops of the children of Israel in their journey in the wilderness, before they reach the wilderness of Zin (Numbers 33:35); thought to be 'Tel-El-Khalifah, 500 feet from the Red Sea shore. The new excavations testify that it has been a great trade center; especially for the trade of iron and bronze. It has been of prominent importance in the days of king Solomon, where he built his fleet; By Ezion Geber, he could dominate the sea and land trade with the Arabian Peninsula. Then it lost its stance, and was taken over by Amaziah, who built a port in the region (2 kings 14:22; 2 Chronicles 26).

3. A DIVINE COMMAND NOT TO FIGHT AGAINST THE MOABITES:

"The Lord said to me, 'Do not harass Moab or engage them in battle, for I will not give you any of its land as a possession, since I have given Ar as a possession to the descendants of 'Lot'" (Deut. 2:9).

God has given them the promise to enjoy the Promised Land, and granted them the possibility to conquer, but He set for them certain limits. It was not their right to violate what God gave to the Moabites. By that, God intended to confirm to them, that despite His great love and generosity; they had to realize that God set limits for every nation, tribe, family, and individual; that the believer has no right to violate. That is why He commanded them to refrain from harassing the Moabites; although the Moabites intended to harass them.

Why didn't God allow for the destruction of the Ammonites and the Moabites?

a. Because they were the descendants of 'Lot,' the righteous man who was tortured by the deeds of the evil people of Sodom. It is as though God intended to pay 'Lot's righteousness, back to his great grandchildren. He did not acquit them, judged by their personal sins; but granted them certain temporal blessings, for the sake of Lot's righteousness, with the hope that they might return to God and follow the lead of their grandfather.

b. Because the land that the Ammonites possess was promised to them by Him, and was not included in the land He promised to give His people. It is also the right of the wicked to possess on earth; as the tares have their place together with the wheat; until the time of harvest comes, when the tares would be cast in fire.

God let the wicked have abundant goods on earth, with the hope that when they realize that it is not for their best; they would seek the heavenly blessings.

When the people did not trust that God is capable of granting them conquest over those kingdoms, He forsook them until all the men of war perished (16); so that

when they do conquer, they would then realize that it is from God, and not because of their might. God wishes to use all our energies for edification. Yet, if we depend on them, disregarding the hand of God, we would be denied His blessings. When we realize that, without Him we are nothing; then He would start to work in us, and by us.

As the men of war of Israel, those of the generation that was denied the entry into the Promised Land, died; and God's hand was no more against His people; He instructed them to cross over the Zered Valley, located at the southern end of the Dead Sea from the east; then to cross 'Arnon' (24), to enter into the domain of the Amorites.

> ***"'The Emim – a large and numerous people, as tall as the Anakim – had formerly inhabited it. Like the Anakim, they are usually reckoned as Rephaim, though the Moabites call them Emim. Moreover, the Horim had formerly inhabited Seir, but the descendants of Esau dispossessed them, destroying them and settling in their place, as Israel has done in the land that the Lord gave them as a possession. Now then, proceed to cross over the Valley of Zered.'So we crossed over the Valley of Zered; and the length of time we had traveled from Kadesh-barnea until we crossed the Valley of Zered was thirty-eight years, until the entire generation of warriors had perished from the camp, as the Lord had sworn concerning them. Indeed the Lord's own hand was against them, to root them out from the camp, until all had perished" (Deut. 2:10-15).***

Origin of the nations they encountered[1]

The prophet Moses presents to us a concise account of the nations he mentions here; namely, the Moabites, the Edomites, and the Ammonites; saying that those were not the original inhabitants of the land. The Moabites inhabited a region that belonged to a race of Anakim called 'Emim' (10); meaning, "the horrible;" as tall as the 'Anakim,' and are probably more fierce (10-11). They were roaming around, threatening everybody there. The Emim, the ancient inhabitants of the region east of the Jordan, were one day a strong and numerous people; and were called the 'Rephaim.' Calmet believes that the Emim were destroyed in a war against 'Chedorlaomer' and his allies (Genesis 14:5)[2]; and that 'Lot' headed there after the devastation of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Some believe that the 'Emim,' the 'Anakim.', and the Rephaim,' were most probably one and the same people bearing different names in different regions; and some believe that all the nomadic tribes of Anakim, were called 'Rephaim.' That was the atmosphere seen by the spies who were sent by Moses, and on whom they presented their gloomy report (Numbers 13:33).

By the same way, the 'Edomites' replaced the 'Horites' in Mount Seir (Deut. 2:12, 23); who were called 'the Sons of Seir' (Genesis 36:20, 21). They were defeated by 'Chdorlaomar' and his allies; then were destroyed and replaced by the children of Esau (2, 22). The 'Horites' were non-Semite mountain people; who immigrated after the year 2000 BC, to the north and northeast of Mesopotamia; spread afterwards all over the Law fertile region of Mesopotamia and Syria; and reached to Palestine and Egypt; preceding the Hebrews in Palestine. The Middle Euphrates was one of the centers of their culture, and the kingdom of 'Metano or Haingalbat' on the higher Euphrates was Horite, although its rulers were formerly Arians, the Hetites. The early Assyrian culture inherited and succeeded the Horite culture; and the Noso-Assyrians

[1] *Matthew Henry Commentary.*
[2] *Adam Clarke Commentary, 2.*

destroyed the Horites about the year 1400 BC.

The Ammonites likewise have occupied lands formerly inhabited by the 'Zamzummim' (20, 21); some wicked Semite people, their name meaning the "murmurers or the noise makers;" tall and mighty men, who inhabited the land east of the Jordan and the Dead Sea; also called the 'Rephaim.' Those, also known as the 'Zuzim' (Genesis 14:5), were attacked and conquered by 'Chedorlaomar;' and then were expelled by the Ammonites.

The prophet Moses mentions all that for the following reasons:

a. When certain regions became crowded after the great flood, the tribe that grew in number, expelled another of less number, and replaced it.

b. It is not necessary that the stronger always prevailed. The Anakim were expelled from their cities by ordinary people, probably because the Anakim were as wicked as those before the great flood (Genesis 6:4); so deserved the divine chastisement to be expelled from their land with no resistance on their part.

c. To confirm the unsteady and non-permanent nature of this world. A nation that assumes to be strong and great, would soon collapse and become replaced by another, thought to be weaker and more helpless.

d. To encourage Israel at that time to possess Canaan, disregarding the might and military possibilities of its inhabitants. If God's will did that with the Moabites and the Ammonites; what would He do to fulfill His promise to them.

As all set their faces toward the land of Canaan, in anticipation that the long awaited divine promise was about to be realized; all realized the following facts:

a. Thirty-eight years in the wilderness were lost because of rebellion. Their fathers could have otherwise inherited the land, and the current generation could have been born in the Promised Land itself. Sin corrupts man's time, energies, capabilities, and goals.

b. All the warriors who came out of Egypt died, those who learned the skills of war from the Egyptians – although they did not practice them there. Now, no man of war, of those who were trained by human hand will enter into the land of Canaan to fight; but those who were born in the wilderness, and were as though trained by God Himself, will do. Out of the old generation, no one entered except Joshua and Caleb; who, although born in Egypt, yet ,because they submitted to the Lord from the beginning; and realized that they will possess by the arm of the Lord, and not by the arm of man, they were worthy of entering together with the new generation.

c. They were all young; except for Joshua and Caleb, who although old, yet not spiritually old; as God renewed their youth like eagles. No one who is spiritually old, with the spirit of despair and weakness of faith, will enter the Kingdom of heaven. We are in need of continuous renewal of the spirit, in order to live in perpetual youth, until we cross over to eternity, and enter into heaven, where no slothful or despairing man would be.

They were commanded to proceed to cross over the Valley (Wadi) of Zered (13), (See Numbers 21:12). The word 'Wadi' here is 'Nahal,' meaning a mountain river channel, that becomes full in the rain season, and may dry up in other times; which is normal in the Jordan region. The Hebrew name 'Zered' means "flourishing." It is a water channel that comes from 'Mount Abarim,' and flows down to the southeast section of the Sea of Lot (the Dead Sea). It is the natural boundary between Edom and Moab; and was one of the last obstacles on the way of the Hebrews from Egypt to Canaan; known nowadays as 'Wadi-el-Hasa.'

With bitterness, the prophet Moses says: ***"… until the entire generation of warriors perished from the camp; as the Lord had sworn concerning them. Indeed***

the Lord's own hand was against them, to root them out from the camp, until all had perished" (Deut. 2:14, 15).

How difficult it is on the soul of that great leader, to find himself left alone in the camp! The whole wilderness turned into a cemetery where all the warriors were buried. If they happened to die in a noble battle, it would be an honor that would give comfort to their leader. But to see that the Lord's hand was upon them, because of their rebellion and mutiny; that would create bitterness in his heart.

Why did God allow for that great army to perish? As they despised God's commandment, and lost His holiness and righteousness, God intended to confirm to all generations, that, although capable to do and consummate His will without an army and with no preachers, yet He does not work in men who devoid His holiness and righteousness. It is sufficient, by only two - Joshua and Caleb - who bear obedience to God and faith in His promises; left out of the rebellious hundreds of thousands who came out of Egypt; for God to bring the whole new generation over to the land of Canaan. Here is God's mercy and His righteousness; that He does not seek the great number or the strength of body; but He seeks the righteousness and holiness.

"Just as soon as the warriors had died off from among the people, the Lord spoke to me, saying, 'Today you are going to cross the boundary of Moab at 'Ar.' When you approach the frontier of the Ammonites, do not harass them or engage them in battle, for I will not give the land of the Ammonites to you as a possession, because I have given it to the descendants of Lot.'" (Deut. 2:16-19)

'Ar,' a Semite name meaning "a city," one of the great cities of Moab, on its northern frontier by the rim of 'Valley of Arnon;' was called 'Ariopolis' by the Greeks, referring to 'Aris' their god of war. and 'Rabat Moab' by the Jews. Nowadays it is 'Kherbet-el-rabah,' 14 miles south of the River Arnon; namely, Wadi Mojib.

4. A DIVINE COMMAND TO FIGHT AGAINST SIHON AND OG

God, who commanded His people to control themselves, and refrain from fighting against Moab and Ammon, despite their richness and small number compared to His people; presented to them all what Sihon possessed, as a gift and a pay back for their obedience to Him.

"It also is usually reckoned as a land of Rephaim. Rephaim formerly inhabited it; though the Ammonites call them 'Zamzummim,' a strong and numerous people, as tall as the Anakim. But the Lord destroyed them from before the Ammonites, so that they could dispossess them and settle in their place. He did the same for the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir, by destroying the Horim before them, so they could dispossess them and settle in their place even to this day. As for the Avvim, who had lived in settlements in the vicinity of Gaza, the Caphtorim, who came from Caphtor, destroyed them and settled in their place. Proceed on your journey and cross the Wadi Arnon. See, I have handed over to you king Sihon the Ammorite of Heshbon, and his land. Begin to take possession by engaging him in battle. This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you upon the peoples everywhere under heaven, when they hear report of you, they will tremble and be in anguish because of you" (Deut. 2:20-25).

Although He gave them the possessions of king Sihon; yet they are not to acquire them in their sleep, but should engage the enemy in a battle, which symbolizes the spiritual strife, in which God Himself will fight for them and give them conquest. Firstly, the enemy opposing the truth would collapse. Secondly, God would transfigure with His presence in the midst of His children; and finally those who strive, would be granted the spirit of conquest; and be glorified, dreaded, and

dignified by all; a gift from God Himself (Exodus 15:14).

Now, the region from Og's Arnon in the south, to Sihon and the frontier of Og in Gilead in the north; From the higher reaches of the River Yabok in the east, to the Jordan in the west; all this region has fallen in the hands of the children of Israel. Yet, they did not possess any land of the Ammonites, according to God's command (19).

'**The Zamzummim'**: were probably the 'Zumzim' (Genesis 14:5); of those ancient peoples, we know very little.

The word '**Gaza'** here, or **'Azzah,'** derived from the Hebrew word 'Hazarim,' is not the name of a certain city; but means "villages." The 'Avins,' after being invaded by the 'Caphtorim,' became dispersed on several ruined locations (Genesis 10:14) that reveal their condition as a helpless people.

'**Caphtor'** is an island or a seaside coast from where the Philistines first came (Jeremiah 47:4; Amos 9:7). One of the theories, supported by the Septuagint version, says that the name 'Caphtor' was given to the region west and south of Asia Minor; from Lydia to Cilicia; In this version, translated 'Caphtor' is translated as 'Capadokiah' (Deut. 2:23; Amos 97). The two Egyptian words, 'Caphteo' and 'Caphtor' were used to refer to the island of 'Crete.' And as this theory, likewise, was not without difficulties, the name 'Caphtor' was given, not only to 'Crete,' but to all the islands around it, beside Asia Minor as well. It should be noticed that the word 'Cretans,' synonymous to the word 'Philistines,' mentioned in (Ezekiel 25:16; Zephaniah 2:5), was translated in the Septuagint version, as the 'Cretans.' In (Genesis 10:14) it came that the 'Caphtorim' were descendants of 'Mezraim.'

Although the Lord says that He delivered Sihon to Israel (24), yet Moses sent messengers to him to ask for permission to cross over peacefully through his land. Sihon, because of his hard heart, rejected the demand, and engaged the Israelites in battle.

Moses demand to cross the land of Sihon in peace; does not imply disobedience to God, who promised to give him the land of Sihon; but shows how much he is a man of peace; and reveals that, what will befall Sihon is a fruit of his violent and evil nature. What befell the Amorites was not because they are enemies to Israel, but is a realization of divine justice.

'Og,' as well, was defeated before the people of God, despite his following capabilities and possibilities:

a. 'Og' was a strong descendant of the 'Anakim' (11); his giant body is revealed by his abnormally huge bed (Deut. 3:11).

b. He was brave and bold; was not intimidated by the defeat of Sihon before Israel, but engaged them in battle. He rejected the offered peace; so his evil came upon his head.

Although Moses was not in need of a new confirmation from God, to spare him from fearing 'Og,' yet God gave that confirmation not for his own sake, but for that of the people.

'**Bashan'** fell into the hand of Israel; and the whole fruitful region in the east came into their possession. That opened the gate of hope before the people of God; that, as He gave them the land east of the Jordan, He will also give them that west of it. Although Moses was denied crossing over the Jordan, and entering into the land of Canaan, yet he saw by his own eyes, the beginning and the advance payment of inheritance, by what his people got in the east of the Jordan. So, through our strife on earth, we would come to enjoy a heavenly advance payment, an inheritance that opens our eyes to hope, after crossing over from this world, to enjoy the heavenly Canaan.

Because the Amorites, under the leadership of Sihon, have confiscated a

section of the land of Moab, God allowed His people to take possession of it.

"So I sent messengers from the wilderness of Kedemoth to king Sihon of Heshbon with the following terms of peace: 'If you let me pass through your land, I will travel only along the road; I will turn aside neither to the right nor to the left. You shall sell me food for money, so that I may eat; and supply me water for money, so that I may drink. Only allow me to pass through on foot – such as the descendants of Esau who live in Seir have done for me and likewise the Moabites who live in Ar – until I cross the Jordan into the land that the Lord is giving us.' But king Sihon of Heshbon was not willing to let us pass through, for the Lord your God had hardened his spirit and made his heart defiant in order to hand him over to you, as He has done. The Lord said to me, 'See, I have begun to give Sihon and his land over to you. Begin now to take possession of his land.' So when Sihon came out against us, he and all his people for battle at Jahaz, the Lord our God gave him over to us; and we struck him down, along with his offspring and all his people. At that time we captured all his towns, and in each town we utterly destroyed men, women, and children. We left not a single survivor. Only the livestock we kept as spoil for ourselves, as well as the plunder of the towns that we had captured. From Aroer on the edge of the Wadi Arnon (including the town that is in the Wadi itself) as far as Gilead, there was no citadel too high for us. The Lord our God gave everything to us. You did not encroach, however, on the land of the Ammonites, avoiding the whole upper region of the Wadi Jabbok, as well as the towns of the hill country, just as the Lord our God had charged" (Deut. 2:26-37).

'Kedemoth': A Hebrew name meaning "eastern locations;" It is a town in the province, east of the Sea of Lot, within the higher Wadi Arnon, taken over by the prophet Moses, and from which he sent messengers to king Sihon. Some believe that it is 'Kasr-el-Zaafran,' two and a half miles north of the city. It was at first given to the tribe of Reuben (Joshua 13:18); then to the Levite of Merari (Joshua 21:37; 1 Chronicles 6:79).

'Jahaz' or '**Jahza**' (Joshua 13:18; 21:36): A Moabite name meaning "a treaded on location." A Moabite city close to the desert, where the Hebrews fought and defeated king Sihon; and took over the land between Arnon and Jabbok. But it seems that the Moabites have taken it over back later on. It is thought to be located one mile south of 'Zarka Moen,' and 12 miles east of the Dead Sea, or said to be the village of 'Um-el-Mawalid' or 'Kherbet Eskander.' It became a portion for the tribe of Reuben.

'Aroer': A Moabite and a Hebrew name meaning "naked or nakedness," a city north of the Wadi Arnon in Moab, south of the Amorite kingdom of Sihon, known nowadays as 'Ar.' It is 12 miles east of the Dead Sea; a little south of 'Zeban.' It became a portion for the tribe of Reuben then taken over by Hazael the king of Syria, after it was taken over and fortified by the Gadites, and by Mesha the king of Moab. It was affiliated to Moab in the days of the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 48:19).

'Arnon': A Hebrew word meaning 'Zaerah;' a name of a river called nowadays 'Wadi-el-Mojib' in the modern Hashemite kingdom of Jordan; formed of 'Wadi Walah,' to the north east, 'Wady Enkeileh' to the east; and 'Seil es-Sa`ideh' to the south. The River Arnon flows in a deep trough, until it reaches the Dead Sea at a point a little distance from the middle of its eastern bank. 'Arnon' in the days of the prophet Moses has been the separating line between the Moabites in the south, and the Amorites in the north (Numbers 21:13, 26). In the days of the judges, 'Arnon' was the southern boundary of the tribe of Reuben that separated them from Moab (Joshua 13:16). The city of 'Aroer' is located on its northern coast; and close to it there was an

ancient crossing point, probably the one called ‘the fords of Arnon’ (Isaiah 16:2).

‘Jabbok’: meaning “luxuriant river;” a river known nowadays as the River of Zerka, “the blue river"”, that springs close to Amman, Jordan; winds eastwards then northwards, to pass by the city of ‘Zerka,’ that was called after it; then winds westwards, to flow into the River Jordan at a point 13 miles south of the Lake of Galilee; and 23 miles north of the Dead Sea. Jacob crossed this river, and there, wrestled with an angel (Genesis 32:23-30). ‘Jabbok’ was a natural separating boundary between Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og king of Bashan. The Hebrews took over the land located on its lower part.

‘**Caphtor**’ (22): May be ‘Crete.’ The Cephtorim are the Philistines who came from the southern coasts of Philistine at about the time of the Exodus (Compare Joshua 13:3; Amos 9:7). This nomination reveals that this book was written in an early time.

The person or the thing to be **“utterly destroyed**” (34), was usually designated for the worship of foreign gods; something abominable as sin itself; corrupted and corrupting, like a dress contaminated by a disease, and fit only for burning; lest the curse will fall upon those who let him live.

‘**The hill country’**: That region, located at the springs of Jabbok, was inhabited by the Ammonites, east of the plain “flat land” (Deut. 3:10), as described by an eyewitness.

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 2)

I HAVE SKIRTED THIS MOUNTAIN LONG ENOUGH

❖ In Your exalted love you cry out to me:
"You have been skirting this hill country long enough"
My heart was attached to the dangerous mountain of the 'ego.'
As a fool, I became lazy and slothful, for the sake of the comfort of my body.
And if I move, I go around myself.
Seeing myself as the center of the world!
My heart becomes closed before all, for my own ego.

❖ Grant me the spirit of wisdom and discernment; that my soul would set forth with love.
I long to walk along Your royal way, the way of humility, with the giving love.

❖ Your gifts are abundant for my brethren and me.
I thank You for what You have given me.
And in love, I honor the rights of my brethren.
I will never encroach on the land of my brethren; not even so much as a foot's length!
I will never become slothful in my commitments toward You, and toward my brethren!

❖ Grant me the spirit of discernment;
O You, who are wholly Wisdom!

CHAPTER 3

CONQUEST OVER OG KING OF BASHAN

After mentioning the conquest over Sihon king of the Amorites, the prophet Moses speaks here about the conquest over Og king of Bashan, and about dividing his land between the two and a half tribes. He also speaks about how he entreated the Lord, to let him enter into the land of Canaan. But God denied him that, allowing him only to ascend to Mount Nebo, to behold the land from afar, but not to enter into it.

The conquest over Og was connected to that over Sihon, both for the glory of God. And as said by the Psalmist: "*He struck down many nations and killed mighty kings – Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan; and gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to his people Israel*" (Psalm 135:10-12); and, "*Who struck down great kings, for His steadfast love endures forever; and killed famous kings, for His steadfast love endures forever; Sihon king of the Amorites, for His steadfast love endures forever; and Og king of Bashan, for His steadfast love endures forever; and gave their land as a heritage, for His steadfast love endures forever*" (Psalm 136:17-21).

1. Striking Og king of Bashan 1–11.
2. Dividing the land of Og 12–22.
3. Moses entreats the Lord to allow him to enter into the land of Canaan 23–27.
4. Moses' charge to Joshua 28-29.

1. STRIKING "OG" KING OF BASHAN

The prophet Moses reminds his people of how they conquered 'Og' king of Bashan; to give Gilead and all Bashan – the kingdom of Og – to two and a half Israeli tribes; then cross over to invade all the land; saying:

"When we headed up the road to Bashan, king Og of Bashan came out against us, he and all his people, foe battle at Edrei" (Deut. 3:1).

Bashan is a Hebrew name, meaning "soft, fertile land;" a province in the land of Canaan, east of the Jordan, between the two mountains: 'Harmon' and 'Gilead' (Numbers 21:33); called 'Bashan' after a mountain in that province (Psalm 68:15). Bashan embraced 'Horan;' 'Jaulan,' and 'Lagaa,' all of volcanic rocks and very fertile soil, with plenty of water, cultivated with wheat, barley, sesame, corn, and lentils. It was bounded from the north by the lands of Damascus; from the east by the desert of Syria; from the south by the land of Gilead; and from the west by the River Jordan; Its eastern side was penetrated by the Mount ed-Druze, the old Mount of Bashan, that crosses 'Golan;' and a series of hills, of old dormant volcanoes, that extend from the north to the south. As to the region of 'Lagaa,' it is a field of lava; namely, of volcanic rocks, that poured from the hill of 'Sihan,' an old volcano. Bashan was mentioned 60 times in the Holy Bible.

So Moses, bringing back to memory, his and his people's dealings with God in the wilderness, telling about the opposition of another king of the Amorites, and how God granted them conquest over him; He clarified the following facts:

(1) The conquest over the king of Bashan had not been a naturally human accomplishment; nor, as some think a mere coincidence, but it was actually according to a divine ordinance. God instructed Moses not to fear him, as He has delivered him, along with his people and his land, to the people of Israel.

"The Lord said to me, 'Do not fear him, for I have handed him over to you,

along with his people and his land. Do to him as you did to king Sihon of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon. So the Lord our God handed over to us king Og of Bashan and all his people. We struck him down until not a single survivor was left" (Deut. 3" 2, 3).

The divine command not to fear was not for the sake of Moses, but for that of the people.

(2) 'Og' king of Bashan was a mighty brave man. Although he heard about the defeat of Sihon king of Heshbon before Israel; he did not seek to enter with them into a covenant of peace, but went out with all his people to war; believing that he would conquer them.

(3) The abilities of king Og were extensive: He reigned over 60 cities, fortified by mighty walls, beside a multitude of villages without walls (5). His kingdom was strong, and seemed undefeatable. Conquest over him was a sure sign that it was granted by God Himself. The term 'city' here, does not necessarily imply having a huge population; as they were mostly inhabited by not more than few hundred people.

(4) 'Og' king of Bashan was a giant, probably a descendant of the Amalek, as is proved by his bed that indicated his huge body size. The Ammonites, after their conquest over the Amorites, kept that rare iron bed, 9 cubits long and 4 cubits wide, in 'Rabbah,' their royal city (2 Samuel 12:26).

Assuming that bed to be one cubit longer than the king's height, it would mean that the king was 12 feet high, which is something incredible. That is why some believe that it was probably one third longer than the king's height; that would even be 9 feet; still an enormous stature. Some Jewish Rabbis claimed fantastic estimates of Og's size, recorded in the 'Targum;' portraying him as several miles long![1]

(5) If we go through the people's journey, we shall find that, in all its stages, there were opponents, as God's way is not well received by the devil. In every generation, we see our Christ, rejected by the world, and in every era, we hear His divine voice; saying, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me*?" God grants conquest over the giants as well as over the evil weak enemies. He grants us conquest over the sins, that we consider too difficult to get rid of, as well as over those that we consider simple and of no real importance.

"At that time we captured all his towns; there was no citadel that we did not take from them – 60 towns, the whole region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan" (Deut. 3:4)

The whole region of "Argob" (4); believed by some to be called 'Trachonitis[2]' later on, a Hebrew name signifies the land associated with the trachon, "a rugged stony tract," is located in Bashan on the boundary of Geshur and Maacah. Whereas some others believe that 'Argob' is the eastern section of 'Horan,' seized by Jair from the tribe of Manasseh; hence it was called 'Havvoth Jair' (Joshua 13:30; 1 Kings 4:13).

Opposition to God would only mean loss; Og opposed God, and he lost his cities and villages. The wicked loses everything even his inner peace; "*There is no peace,' says the Lord, 'for the wicked'*" (Isaiah 48:22; 57:21).

"All these were fortress towns with high walls, double gates, and bars, besides a great many villages. And we utterly destroyed them, as we had done to king Sihon of Heshbon, in each city utterly destroying men, women, and children. But all the livestock and the plunder of the towns we kept as spoil for ourselves. So

[1] *Adam Clarke, Deuteronomy, 3.*
[2] *Adam Clarke, Deuteronomy, 3.*

at that time we took from the two kings of the Amorites the Land beyond the Jordan, from the Wadi Arnon to Mount Hermon (the Sidonians call Hermon Sirion, while the Amorites call it Senir), all the towns of the tableland, the whole of Gilead, and all of Bashan as far as Salcah and Edrei, towns of Og's kingdom in Bashan. (Now only king Og of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaim. In fact his bed, can still be seen in Rabbah of the Ammonites. By the common cubit, it is nine cubits long and four cubits wide" (Deut. 3:5-11).

The excavations revealed the huge size of the stony fortresses of Bashan.

What remained of the kingdom of Og, that mighty king of Bashan, is only his iron bed (11). What an unfitting fame it is! The Lord mocks the fame of the wicked. Captain Condor discovered a stony throne with the same dimensions at 'Rabbah;' that he assumes to be that bed.

Salacah (10) is 7 hours away south east of Basra of the Moabites; and as it was on the eastern boundary of the kingdom of Bashan, it was definitely very fortified. I became a portion of the tribe of God (Joshua 12:5; 1 Chronicles 5:11).

Sirion (9) means "glamorous;" a Sidonian name, probably used by a congregation of Sidonians (Judges 18:7), who dwelt at the foot of the snow-covered mountains. Some believe that word 'Sirion,' means "shield" in the Sidonian language; the same name the Sidonians called Mount Hermon (Psalm 29:6). It seems that this name was not given to a certain section of the series of Hermon Mountains, but was given to the part that was seen from Hermon, when someone stands on the Sidonian beach.

Senir is an Amorite name, that probably means "Mountain of light," a name the Amorites gave to Mount Hermon; and probably gave to a section of Mount Hermon (Gabal-el-Sheikh). That is why we see Senir and Hermon mentioned as separate mountains in (1 Chronicles 5:23).

"Only Og king of Bashan was left of the remnants of the Rephaim" (11).

Og was the last Ammorite king. It seems that his kingdom was called after Mount Bashan ; and was also called 'Batanea[1].'

2. DIVISION OF THE LAND OF OG:

"As for the land that we took possession of at that time, I gave to the Reubenites and Gadites the territory north of Aroer that is on the edge of the Wadi Arnon, as well as half of the hill country of Gilead with its towns, and I gave to the half tribe of Manasseh the rest of Gilead and all of Bashan, Og's kingdom, the whole region of Argob: all that portion of Bashan used to be called a land of Rephaim; Jair the Manassite acquired the whole region of Argob as far as the border of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and he named them – that is, Bashan – after himself, Havvoth Jair, as it is to this day). To Machir I gave Gilead, and to the Reubenites and the Gadites I gave the territory from Gilead as far as the Wadi Arnon; with the middle of the Wadi as a boundary, and up to the Jabbok, the Wadi being the boundary of the Ammonites; the Arabah also, with the Jordan and its banks, from Chinnereth down to the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, with the lower slopes of Pisgah on the east"(Deut. 3:12-17).

As the time of Moses' departure from this world was drawing near, God granted him two things to rejoice his heart: the first is to take possession of the region east of the Jordan, to let him taste the pledge of the whole Promised Land; and the second is letting him see the land west of the Jordan from the top of Mount Pisgah or

[1] *Adam Clarke, Deuteronomy, 3.*

Nebo.

Although the land, east of the Jordan, was given to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and Manasseh. Yet those tribes kept on helping their brethren in wars, until everyone found rest and settled down (Numbers 32). Likewise, the Church of Christ will not find rest and settle down, before its last member consummates his strife. Even the joy of those who did strive and conquer, then crossed over to paradise, would not be complete until their slave companions consummate their strife, to be crowned together with them. They keep praying before the divine throne for the sake of the salvation of the whole world! If the striving believers on earth, feeling their commitment of love, pray for the sake of their brethren; would those who have already crossed over to love itself, forsake their responsibilities to help their striving brethren by their prayers? And will their prayers, springing from love, be counted as a preoccupation away from God, who, together with the heavenly creatures, yearn for the salvation of all mankind?

Concerning Joseph's descendants, it is to be noticed

The children of Joseph were divided into two tribes: Ephraim and Manasseh. Then Manasseh was divided further into two groups: one group had its portion east of the Jordan, and the other had his portion, west of it. The group, east of the Jordan, was further divided into two families: the family of 'Jair' (14), and that of 'Machir' (15), each with its own portion. That probably realized the prophecy of Jacob, concerning what would happen to Manasseh, his firstborn grandson; when he placed his left hand over his head, instead of his right hand. And when Joseph tried to shift his father's right hand to the head of Manasseh, his father refused, saying: *"I know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations*" (Genesis 48:17-19). Jacob's prophecy was realized; as the tribe of Manasseh became divided into several small families, whereas that of Ephraim remained one whole undivided tribe.

The 'Geshurites' and the 'Maacathites' were two small kingdoms that were not seized by Israel, but were left to live under their authority.

The **Geshurites** were the inhabitants of Geshur, a Hebrew name meaning "a bridge," close to Argob, east of Maacah, within the portion of Manasseh. Geshur became independent, and to it, Absalom, the son of king David, escaped after he killed his brother Amnon (2 Samuel 13:37). On its boundary there was a bridge on the River Jordan, between Tiberias and El-Khaola; called the bridge of Jacob's daughters (Gesr-banat-Jacob).

The **'Maacathites'** were inhabitants of Maacah; a Hebrew name meaning (oppression). The Maacathites joined forces with the Arameans and the Ammonites in their war against king David, who defeated them. It is probably 'Beth En-gan'nim' (Joshua 19:21) nowadays; a portion of the tribe of Issachar, west of the sea of Galilee.

"At that time I charged you as follows: 'Although the Lord your God has given you this land to occupy, all your troops shall cross over armed as the vanguard of your Israelite kin. Only your wives, your children, and your livestock – I know that you have much livestock – shall stay behind in the towns that I have given to you. When the Lord gives rest to your kindred as to you, and they too have occupied the land that the Lord your God is giving them beyond the Jordan, then each of you may return to the property that I have given to you. And I charged Joshua as well at that time, saying, 'Your own eyes have seen everything that the Lord your God has done to these two kings; so the Lord will do to all the kingdoms

into which you are about to cross. Do not fear them, for it is the Lord your God who fights for you'" (Deut. 3:18-22).

"Gives rest" (20): the word "rest' flows with its blessings in the entire Holy Bible; and Israel got what God promises here, in the days of king Solomon (1 Kings 5:4). Yet His promise of rest is to be more perfectly realized in the rest that the soul finds in Christ (Matthew 11:28; Hebrew 4:5-8).

"***And I charged Joshua***" (21); the glimpses we see in the relationship between Moses and Joshua is magnificent. We see Joshua as the leader of the army (Exodus 17:9); as a servant of Moses (Exodus 24:13); and one of his choicest assistants (Numbers 11:28); Moses' love for Joshua is clearly demonstrated in (Deuteronomy 1:38; 31:3; Numbers 27:18-23).

3. MOSES ENTREATS THE LORD TO ALLOW HIM TO ENTER INTO THE LAND OF CANAAN:

"At that time, too, I entreated the Lord, saying, 'O Lord God, You have only begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your might: what god in heaven or on earth can perform deeds and mighty acts like yours! Let me cross over to see the good land beyond the Jordan, that good hill country and the Lebanon.' But the Lord was angry with me on your account and would not hear me. The Lord said to me, 'Enough from you!; Never speak to me of this matter again! Go up to the top of Pisgah and look around you to the west, to the north, to the south, and to the east. Look well for you shall not cross over this Jordan" **(Deut. 3:23-27).**

The prophet Moses entreated God to allow him to cross over together with the people, to enjoy the Promised Land. The response of God was: "*Enough from you! Never speak to me of this matter again*!" (26). The heart of Moses (the symbol of the Law) was yearning to enter into Canaan; but, on account of his people, his request was denied. He was allowed to go up to the top of the Pisgah to see the land by his own eyes. But it is Joshua who would cross over with the people, and divide the land among them. Thus, by the Law, they looked at the heavenly Canaan; but only by Jesus Christ (symbolized by Joshua), will we enter into it, and enjoy the inheritance.

For as long as forty years, Moses had prepared himself, longing for the divine promise to be realized, to cross over with the people, and to divide the Promised Land among them.

God, as a compassionate father, did not stand Moses' supplications and the screams of his heart. He said to him: *'Enough from you!'* and granted him to see the Promised Land from the top of the Pisgah; and to let his disciple cross over with the people, and divide the land among them. Yet, after about 2000 years, Moses did cross over to the Promised Land, when he accompanied the Lord, as He transfigured on Mount Tabor. In his supplication we notice the following:

1. He starts by thanking the Lord for His amazing dealings and gifts; and praises Him, saying: "***O Lord God, You have only begun to show your servant Your greatness and your might; what god in heaven or on earth can perform deeds and mighty acts like yours****?"* (24) Having got divine blessings, Moses praised God; and his heart flared more, to gain and enjoy God Himself and his exalted gifts. The more we see God and feel Him in our life, the more would be our yearning to see and to enjoy Him.

Moses did not preoccupy himself with his conquests, nor with the land that the people gained; but he got preoccupied with the greatness and might of God, as there is no god in heaven or on earth like Him. He previously said when he crossed over the Red Sea: *"Who is like You, O Lord among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in*

holiness? Awesome in splendor, doing wonders?" (Exodus 15:11) and as it is said: "*There is none like You among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like Yours*" (Psalm 86:8).

2. He entreated God to allow him to enter into the land of Canaan. He did not entreat him to let him reign or to have authority; but to allow him to see the "*good land*." He was longing to see the "good land" as a sanctuary for the Lord, where God dwells among His people. He was looking forward to see the Holy God dwells among His people to sanctify them.

3. God's response embodied both mercy and justice. Although God got angry with him on account of his people, and did not listen to him (26). Yet, it is the anger of a father, bearing a fatherly love and compassion, toward his son. Such compassion was already demonstrated in several circumstances: He granted him conquest over Sihon and Og, for two and a half tribes to inherit the land east of the Jordan. He granted him to look at the Promised Land west of the Jordan, from the top of Mount Nebo. Finally He granted him to encourage his disciple, who was like a son to him, to enter with the people into the Promised Land, and to divide it among them. Moses as a father would count what Joshua gets, as though he himself has got.

If God said to him: "*Enough from you*!" that was because the prophet Moses did actually get enough. As we said before, he was a symbol of the Law that led us to Christ, although he was not capable of realizing what the Lord Jesus has realized. It is as though God is saying to him "Enough! You have fulfilled your mission, and will gain heavenly glories. If you are not crossing together with them over the Jordan; yet you are going to cross over to the crown of the eternal glory." It was fitting for Moses to realize, that even the great among the prophets, has a specifies mission, that he is not to surpass. Finally, commanding him to encourage Joshua, that was to confirm to him that Joshua will face several troubles. Moses had got his portion of strife, and enjoyed conquests, together with certain weaknesses in his life. Now, it is his disciple's turn to share bearing the sufferings for the sake of the Lord.

4. MOSES' CHARGE TO JOSHUA

"But charge Joshua, and encourage and strengthen him, because it is he who shall cross over at the head of this people and who shall secure their possession of the land that you will see. So we remained in the valley opposite Beth-peor" (Deut. 3:28, 29).

As the Lord strengthened Moses' heart, saying to him: "*Do not fear*" (2); Moses, in his turn, was committed to charge Joshua, encourage and strengthen him, not to fear (28).

Joshua listened to the talk of his mentor the prophet Moses, reminding him, together with all the leaderships and the people of two things: The first, God's dealings with them, especially concerning their exodus from Egypt, caring for them in the wilderness, and their conquest over their enemies, especially over Sihon and Og; God who began the work, and consummated it along those forty years, will surely bring it to its ultimate end. Joshua with his own eyes saw God's exalted works; and listened to the words of Moses to remind him of them. The second thing, of which Moses reminded him, was God's promise to fight for them and with them, to possess and to inherit. And if God is with them, who could be against them?!

Beth-peor: was a city in the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, that probably got its name from the temple of the god 'Peor' that was worshipped there; and most probably the same god 'Priapus' of the Romans. The word **'Peor,'** is a Moabite name, meaning, "a fissure."

Moses probably, while looking from afar toward the temple of ‘Peor,’ his soul was bitter knowing what would later befall his people, when they fall into the worship of idols together with the rest of nations. If the calf “Ibis,’ has been in their hearts and thoughts, to let them make an image of him, that they worshipped, while Moses was on the mountain speaking to the God. How would they be after his death, and after they mix with many nations that follow these abominations.

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 3)

"ENOUGH FROM YOU!
NEVER SPEAK TO ME OF THIS MATTER AGAIN"

- Your prophet Moses kept entreating You to allow him to enter the Promised Land!
  Since his call, his eyes were looking forward to Canaan.
  And his heart kept crying out: When shall I find myself dwelling among Your people?
  He bore daily afflictions, in the hope to enter into Canaan!
  Not to inherit the land, but to see You dwelling among Your people!

- Who is worthy to listen to Your eternal voice:
  "I have granted you continuous conquests to conquer and to inherit!
  I granted you the authority, even over the devil and his works!
  I opened the gates of the heavenly Canaan before you.
  I prepared you to enter, and to settle down there eternally.
  Enough from you! You have already gained the pledge.
  Now, enjoy the perfection of glory.
  Enough from you! You have suffered much for the sake of Canaan.
  Now, Come to Me! Enter into My dwelling place!"

CHAPTER 4

A CALL TO APPROACH GOD AND THE RESORT TO THE CITIES OF REFUGE

After parading the dealings of God with His people along the history, up to the time when they came to stand at the gates of the land of Canaan (1-8), the prophet Moses clarifies to them the necessity of approaching God, particularly through receiving the divine commandment, and refusing the worship of idols. He incites them to remember what God did to them in the past, to proclaim Himself to them, through His love to them (9-14). This unseen God, who makes a covenant with them, should not be replaced by lifeless stones or wood or any creation (15-24). Whoever worships idols would destroy himself, whereas he who worships God and serves Him, sets himself free from bondage, and enjoys the covenant with him (32-40). He also proclaims God's care to protect the innocent through designating cities of refuge; in order to purify the earth of shedding innocent blood.

By parading the dealings of God with his people in the wilderness, the prophet Moses presents the following facts:

a. Through the commandments, we enjoy life, and enter into the Promised Land to possess (4:1)
b. Through it we realize that God is very near to His people listens to them (4:7), and speaks to them (4:36).
c. Warning against making images and idols to worship; "*For the Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God"* (24). He refuses mixing worshipping Him with worshipping idols. There is no other god beside Him (39).

1. Obedience to the divine commandment	**1–8.**
2. The divine commandment and the new generation	**9–10.**
3. Rejection of idol worship	**11–22.**
4. The divine covenant and the idol worship	**23–31.**
5. The One God who loves His people	**32–40.**
6. The cities of refuge	**41–43.**
7. An introduction to the second sermon	**44–49.**

1. OBEDIENCE TO THE DIVINE COMMANDMENTS

"So now, Israel, listen to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors is giving you" (Deut. 4:1).

The statutes: The original word is interpreted as 'engraved;" as a believer should behave according to his conscience and that of the nation, on which the divine commandment is engraved, so that time cannot wipe it out.

The ordinances: An ordinance or judgment in Hebrew 'Meshphat,' means "a decisive judgment," and the judge who issues it is called in Hebrew (Shaphit) (1:16, 17). Examples of the cases decided by judges and tribunals, are demonstrated in (Exodus 21-22:17). This word is also used for the decisive ordinances of God, to condemn the wicked and to quit the innocent. Therefore, the two words: 'statutes' and 'ordinances,' embrace all the laws of God.

What did God request from His people concerning the commandment?

a. To listen to the commandment: The first word in the Law is "**Listen**," and the first work of sin is to give the ear to other than God, to keep the word from working in the sinner. The first commandment to us is "listen," so that the word of God would enter into the depths of the soul, and there, it dwells, consistently work, and set the divine heavenly kingdom. The word "listen," does not necessarily have a mechanical and literal meaning, but implies an active listening, living and full of zeal. Such listening, flaring with the spirit of love, is some kind of prayer that would never fail.

The prophet Moses summarizes God's dealings with their fathers during their wandering in the wilderness, in that there is no other way toward conquest, except through obedience, springing from love. As reasons for obedience, he says that God wishes us to have an ideal life, "*that (we) may enter and occupy the land*" (1). Obedience is the only basis for the enjoyment of life, and for the realization of God's exalted promises to the believer. God wishes to give in abundance; and by obedience, we open up our hearts, and stretch out our hands to receive His amazing gifts.

If, on their side, they are committed to listen in the spirit of prayer, from his side, the prophet Moses is committed to teach what is God's, that is why he says:

"You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it; but keep the commandments of the Lord your God with which I am charging you" (Deut. 3:2).

Moses, who, before forty years, tried to excuse himself from ministering to God, on account of being slow of speech; has become a man of words, who speaks what is the Lord's, and even presents a whole book, almost formed of sermons or long talks with the leaderships and the people. He became a teacher of teachers, who presents God's words, and not his own, requesting from them not to add or to take away anything from what he is charging them; hence to keep the commandments of God.

b. To see and to act: He first requested from them to **"listen**" (1), and to "**see**" (3), then to "**act**," namely, to touch, using, together with the two senses of hearing and seeing, the sense of touching. It is thus fitting to turn the listening into action: ***"Observe that you may live, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the Lord the God of your ancestors is giving you" (1).***

We should act, not because God is in need of our action or ministry, but because by action we would enjoy life "*that we may live*," Whoever buries the commandment in his mind and does not turn it into action, his soul would become like a tomb in which there is no smell of life. By the commandment acting through our behavior, we may enter into God's promises, possess, and inherit.

Through his "**slow speech**," Moses presents God's living words, for everyone to listen to, by the spirit of prayer, together with action. Now, through the recent events of history, the Lord speaks to them with the language of action, saying:

"You have seen for yourselves what the Lord did with regard to the Baal of Peor – how the Lord your God destroyed from among you everyone who followed the Baal of Peor" (Deut. 4:3).

By **'Baal of Peor**." Is meant both the place and its god, as the Canaanite worship of Baal was mixed with filthy sexual acts and abominations.

Peter and John asked the people to behold God's work with them, when they healed the lame man at the gate of the temple, called the beautiful (Acts 3); saying: "*Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man w*alk?" (Acts 3:12).

Let us look at history with eyes opened by the Lord; and say together with the man who was born blind, '*I was blind, and now I can see*." Let us see, across the history and events, the exalted work of God; and comprehend His commandment written with the language of love, working in history.

c- Purity of the commandments:

"You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it; but keep the commandments of the Lord your God with which I am charging you"

"…while those of you who held fast to the Lord your God are all alive today. See, just as the Lord my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy" (Deut. 4:2; 4, 5).

If the commandment is a precious treasure, "*like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times*" (Psalm 12:6). As a precious treasure, we should neither add anything to it on our own, nor take away anything from it, but keep it pure in our life. Solomon the wise says: "*I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it*" (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

Close to the end of the Holy Bible, He placed around it a wall to protect it from any addition or subtraction; by saying, "*For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the book of life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book*" (Revelation 22:18, 19). It is fitting for the church to keep the Holy Bible without additions or subtraction. And her interpretations of it should always bear the same spirit of the book. And now, **what is the position of the Christian toward the Mosaic Law?**

We can summarize the answer to this question in the following points:

1. All things were written for the sake of teaching us. Yet, the Law also includes symbolic elements, that the Christian is not committed to keep literally.

2. They embrace eternal principles for holiness, justice, and truth; which are included in the Ten Commandments and the statutes built on them. They are for all times, for both the Jews and the Christians. They were quoted in the New Testament, with the expression: "*It is written*" (See Matthew 4:10; 5:17; Romans 13:9; 1 Peter 1:16).

3. As the Holy Bible clearly tells us that Moses wrote about Christ (John 5:46), let us then search for the Lord Christ in all its pages; as the Law as a whole was meant to bring us to Him (Galatians 3:24).

4. In observing the divine commandments and acting according to them, we proclaim the wisdom granted to us by God. ***"Therefore be careful to observe them, for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (Deut. 4:6).***

If the divine commandment incites us to fear God; it actually invokes the divine wisdom, according to the words: "*Behold, the fear of the lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding"* (Job 28:28). Let us testify to the work of God in us, to be glorified in us, when God's wisdom and His secrets are proclaimed in our life. By that, we testify to the ordinations and justified statutes of God (8), not just by words, but by practical life, by the righteousness of Christ working in us.

5. Through obedience, we testify to God before all, that He is close to us,

listening to our prayers, and responding to the covetousness of our hearts. The secret of the believer's greatness, is that by prayer, he becomes very close to God; as: ***"For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us; for whatever reason we may call upon Him" (Deut. 4:7).***

6. By observing the divine commandment and statutes and acting according to them, we testify that they are exalted and unique, not to be compared to those of nations***. "And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this Law which I set before you this day?" (Deut. 4:8).***

The Psalmist says: "*Therefore all Your precepts concerning all things, I consider to be right; I hate every false way*"(Psalm 119:128). And he also says: "*He declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and His judgments to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation. And as for His judgments, they have not known them*" (Psalm 147:19, 20).

If we compare the worship of God, with all its rites; and His laws, with all their details, to what prevailed in the world at that time, we shall find no way to compare, between what God has presented to His people, and what the other nations have been practicing and believing. Many of the modern and ancient Asiatic and European nations have quoted some of the Mosaic laws.

The fruits of obedience and rebellion are the following:

The prophet Moses confirms many times that obedience produces divine blessings (5).

Testifying before the nations to God and His work with His believers (6). Thus obedience goes hand in hand with preaching (Mark 16:15), as every true believer is committed to testify and preach the gospel of salvation. Every believer is committed to practice obedience, and to pass his experience to his children and grandchildren (9).

After speaking of the history of the people in dealing with God, he started to end his sermon by the necessity of getting attached to God Himself through observing His divine commandment. The goal of history is to connect to Him, in whose hands lies the history of mankind; and who desires to enter into history together with man, to carry him to Him; to what is beyond history. The divine commandments, statutes, and laws, have been all given to man, not just to submit to, but to get attached to Him, who is capable of raising him to what is above time and events.

2. THE DIVINE COMMANDMENT AND THE NEW GENERATION

Having spoken of the positive aspects: that the believer should listen (1), see (3), then act (6); He moves to a serious subject, that can destroy all the positive aspects; namely, forgetting all what he has seen with his own eyes, something that would lead to the corruption of his heart. That is why He presents the following warning:

"Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren" (Deut. 4:9).

Things do not stop at listening to the commandment, acting according to it, and keeping it pure, as a precious treasure in the heart; but man should teach it and deliver it to the new generations, in order to remember always what our physical eyes have seen of the temporal blessings of the Lord, and what our inner eyes have perceived of heavenly spiritual blessings. That was the secret of strength in the life of St. John the beloved, who recalling what he has seen in the Spirit, says: "*And we*

beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). *"Which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life"* (1 John 1:1).

The exalted love of God, and His amazing care, are things seen by the outer and the inner eyes. That is why, when we speak about them to our children and grandchildren, we are presenting a living testimony as eyewitnesses; we are confirming to them what we have seen, heard, handled, and tasted, of the sweetness of the Lord!

Disregarding or forgetting what the Lord has done to us, is a major crime and a denial toward a loving and an amazingly faithful God, to whom we are indebted with our life, and our resurrection as if from death. That is why the apostle Paul presents his gospel through his living experience, and says: "*We, who were previously in darkness...*" Forgetting the work of God, transforms the life of man, as well, to corruption; to become a denying criminal toward himself; whereas recalling God's dealings, turns his life into a daily praise, and a magnificent symphony, that bring pleasure to the heavenly creatures.

How to practice recalling God's dealings?

***"Teach them to your children and grandchildren"* (9).** There is no sweeter way to remember, than tradition, by which we deliver to our children the memories of what God has done to us. Let our talk to our children and grandchildren, according to the flesh or to the spirit, be a spiritual talk, concerning the work of God with us along the history. Yet, we shall not be able to testify to the Lord Christ before our children and grandchildren, unless we have actually seen Him. Talking about the Savior would not be as strong, unless the speaker has personally experienced salvation, and has realized the power of the Savior in his life in a practical way.

"Especially concerning the day you stood before the Lord your God in Horeb, when the Lord said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children" (Deut. 4:10).

There is no doubt that every man has certain days that could not be wiped out of his memory. The book of Deuteronomy is full of such days for the prophet Moses, which could be divided into four categories:

1. In the land of Egypt, and the journey to Sinai (8:34).
2. Giving the Law in Sinai.
3. The journey from Horeb to Kadesh (8:1).
4. The events of the journey of the final two years (23:4).

The second of these categories occupies a great part of chapters 4, 5, 9, and 11 of the book, dealing with the covenant of the Lord, the Ten Commandments, the lightening and thunder in Sinai, the apostasy to worship the golden calf, the intercession of Moses on behalf of the people, re-writing the Ten Commandments, and allotting priesthood to the tribe of Levites.

Moses asked the people to recall that special day, when he stood in the presence of the Lord in Horeb. Although all the days of Moses' ministry were unforgettable, and all were extremely fruitful; yet he would never forget that special day, characterized by:

- His standing in the presence of the Lord.
- The Lord's talk about His people.
- The lord's request from His people to gather together around His divine word, to

listen and to keep in memory.

- ❖ The goal of the divine word delivered to them, is to let them learn to fear God, and to teach it to the future generations.

These are the memories of that particular day for Moses, the great among the prophets. As far as we are concerned, we likewise, have our unforgettable day, the day when our Christ was hanged on the cross, to let us perpetually be in the presence of the Father. On that day, God the Father spoke to us, not just by mouth, but by the language of the working love, by presenting the blood of His Only-Begotten Son shed for our sake, in an inexpressible talk. On that day, the whole Church gather together with one heart, as members of the body of the crucified Lord, to hear the voice of love, to behold the glories prepared for her, and to get in touch with the heavenly One. On that day, the soul realizes the goal of the incarnated crucified Word of God; by whom she would enjoy the divine fear; that of the children toward their Father; and in which we are given the spirit of preaching and testimony to the truth before the opposing generations.

It is fitting for the new generation of believers, to look at the commandment in such a way:

a. He should "***Take heed***," namely, be alert, in order to discern between truth and vain.

b. ***He should "diligently keep (himself)***," namely, strive diligently to dedicate the inner depths to observe the commandment.

c. "***Lest (he) forgets***," namely, to preoccupy his mind with the commandment, and not to forget the mercies of God and His works with him.

d. "***Lest they depart from (his) heart***;" namely, it is not enough to preoccupy the mind with it, but to preoccupy the heart as well, in order to love the commandment with his whole inner being. When he keeps the commandment in his heart, it keeps his heart, keeps him from falling from God's hands, and keeps his depths from being deprived of the riches of the divine grace.

e. As he got it from his fathers, he should deliver it to his children, so that the commandment turns into a lived live tradition, handed from one generation to the next one.

f. **St. Athanasius the Apostolic** comments on this phrase, saying, that the creation with its exalted beauty; especially heaven with its stars, is a silent teacher, for the nations to recognize God, the Creator of all, and not to have other gods to worship[1]. When the insight of man is corrupted, he tends to turn what is beautiful, not for his edification, but for his destruction.

3. REJECTION OF IDOL WORSHIP

Out of the Ten Commandments, Moses chose that of refraining from binding to idol worship. When the people of God started to get in touch with other nations, some way or another, the diversion toward idol worship, and practicing its abominations, started to represent the most serious danger to threaten them.

You may say; 'Nowadays, there is no more idol worship.' The idol, actually, is anything that would separate your heart from God, or hinders your love toward Him. That is why the apostle Paul called a covetous man, an 'idolater' (Ephesians 5:5). Anything that would occupy the foremost place in the heart, and give priority over God Himself, is idol worship, even if it is only practicing a certain type of sport, or getting so much attached to a certain TV program or to the Internet; to replace God in the heart.

[1] *Contra Gentes, 45.*

Intending to talk about the rejection of idol worship, Moses started with the positive aspect; namely, his own encounter with God Himself; on Mount Sinai, that bears everlasting memories that time could not wipe out. As a matter of fact, Moses counts what happened in the old days with the generation that perished in the wilderness, as though it happened with the new generation. It is an encounter of God with His people along all generations. That is why he says to the new generation:

"Then you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain burned with fire to the midst of heaven, with darkness, cloud, and thick darkness" (Deut. 4:11).

As Moses set forth toward the top of the mountain to encounter God face to face, and to get from Him the tablets of the Law written by the divine finger, the people joined him; although they could only stand at the foot of the mountain. Moses was like a beloved child in the bosom of his father; whereas the people were as though cast on the ground before Him.

The prophet says: "***You came near and stood***," as though all his listeners were standing and beholding the great splendor of God during the delivery of the law; although many of them were either not yet born; or were younger than 20 years old. But what happened with their fathers did actually happen on their account, and on that of all the coming generations. That is why, when we hear these words, we should count Moses as though he is also speaking to us. We also came near and stood at the foot of the mountain. We saw the mountain burning with fire. We saw the glory of the Lord through the darkness, and the clouds, and God talked to us in the midst of the fire. We were together with Moses in Horeb, and heard the divine law.

"And the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; you only heard a voice. So He declared to you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.

And the lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess" (Deut. 4:12-14).

After speaking of their mission to deliver to the coming generations, what he has delivered to them, he intended to confirm that the delivery would not only be by words, but also by deeds; That is why in this chapter, he repeats the word "***observe them***." This is the living tradition, namely, delivering to the new generation, the living commandment working in us.

"***His covenant,***" this word came 27 times in this book; of which this is the first one. The original word: '*Breth*,' refers to a bill with conditions, and also a binding agreement between two parties, whether it is one of 'brotherhood,' like that between David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:3), or one of 'authority,' like that between David and his people, or a covenant of 'grace,' like that between God and Noah (Genesis 9:9). The covenant of Horeb was one of grace. God having chosen for Himself a people of His own; and they, in turn, took Him as their God (Exodus 19:5-8).

Moses presents to us his encounter, and that of his people with God, when they were given the Law; as a living example of the encounter with God along the generations. As God is a Spirit; and as those who worship Him should worship Him by Spirit and truth; it is not fitting therefore, to worship idols, whatever their forms are; but to encounter with God on the level of the Spirit, to enjoy union with Him. Idol worship does not harm God Himself, but would destroy man and corrupt his life that is why He warns them against it, saying:

"Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire; lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure; the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air; the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, or the likeness of any fish that is in the water beneath the earth.

And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them" (Deut. 4:15-19).

- When you decide to observe this commandment and reject all other gods; to have no God or Lord but the One God and Lord; you are declaring war on the others without entering into any pact with them. That is why, when we come to attain the grace of Baptism, we confess One God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit[1].

Origen

The Egyptian god 'Anobis' had the head of a fox; and the god 'Tut' the head of a hawk. The temples of moon worship were in Jerusalem and Haran in the days of Abraham; and the Egyptians worshipped the sun in 'On' (Heliopolis) (Genesis 41:45).

He commanded them not to make gods in the forms of man or woman, like 'Baal Peor' of Moab, and 'Priapus,' 'Ashtaroth' of the Romans, and 'Venus' of the Romans and the Greeks. And commanded them as well, not to make gods in the form of beasts, or birds, like the Egyptian calf 'Ibis,' or crocodiles, serpents, monkeys, dogs, and cats, etc.

God warns us against worshipping the sun, the moon and the stars; as all these were created for man's sake, and not the other way round. Some people used to believe that the sun, the moon, and the stars, not only created themselves by themselves, but also were the source of blessings to mankind. As the word 'sun' in Hebrew means "servant," being a public servant of the seen world, giving light to everyone, it is not fitting for the servant to be a god, nor what God has created to help us, to become the cause of our destruction.

If man compares himself to the sun, he may feel very inferior before its size, capabilities, and possibilities. Yet, he should realize that earth and heaven with all its stars will eventually come to an end, whereas man, with the grace of God, will live in glory forever. When 'Pascal' compared himself to the sun, he said: 'I am greater than the sun. The sun may be able to destroy me with its heat, but, feeling that, I can defend myself; whereas it would never feel victory!'

"And take heed, lest you lift your eyes, … and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars…" (19). The prophet Moses warns us against 'looking,' as the heart often goes after what the eyes see. When man concentrates his sight on something, the heart mostly opens up and submits to it.

"But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be His people, His inheritance as you are this day" (Deut. 4:20).

Some believe this to refer to that the Jews probably worked in melting metals, whereas others believe it to refer to the forced labor in hard work, like mines, etc.

Heating iron, then hammering it while red hot, appeared in the Middle East around the year 3000 BC, whereas establishing steal factories, especially to manufacture weapons, did not appear before around the year 1500 BC.

Coming out of Egypt, it was for the children of Israel, like coming out of an

[1] *On Exodus, homily, 8:4.*

iron furnace, as the burden of servitude was as intense as its heat, that was the highest known at that time.

"Furthermore, the Lord was angry with me for your sakes, and swore that I would not cross over the Jordan, and that I would not enter the good land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance" (Deut. 4:20, 21).

This is the third time he refers to God's refusal to let him enter into the land of Canaan (1:37; 3:26, 27); and every time he talks about how God became angry with him on their account. This repetition reveals the bitterness in his heart because of his deprivation of enjoying that long awaited blessing, and his great longing to enjoy the divine promise.

4. THE DIVINE COVENANT AND IDOL WORSHIP

"Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the Lord your God has forbidden you. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God" (Deut. 4:23, 24).

He concentrates on the commandment against idol worship, because God is a consuming fire (24). God refuses to dwell in a heart, together with false, and deceiving gods, as there is no fellowship between the divine kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness.

God is a consuming fire that flares the heart with the fire of love, which all the water in the world cannot quench; and yet, at the same time consumes every evil and corruption. The apostle Paul refers to this fire, saying: "*Fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries"* (Hebrew 10:27). And when speaking about the judgment of ministers, he says: *"Each one's work will become manifest; for the day will declare it; because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is; if anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire*" (1 Corinthians 3:13-15).

God is a consuming fire that Moses enjoyed on the mountain, becoming to him, glory and splendor; while destroying Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numbers 16). The divine fire makes the believer more pure, and scatters the rebel who persists on his evil and corruption. The same fire that purifies the precious metals, consumes every thing cheap and worthless. It also symbolizes the holiness and fair judgment of God.

Whoever mixes the worship of the living God with idol worship, is as though bringing his idols over to a consuming fire, in which they lose their form and whole being.

"A jealous God" (24): God's love is often compared to that of a husband, who dedicates himself to his wife with no reservation, expecting from her complete love in return.

- God is a consuming fire that uproots the coolness of the devil[1].

St. Jerome

- It is fitting for the minister of the Lord to be diligent and aware. He should be flaring like fire, so that through his zealous spirit, he would destroy every carnal sin, to be able to confront God, who according to the description of the saints, is a consuming fire[2].

[1] *On Ps., Homily 57.*
[2] *Paschal Epistles, 4:3.*

Pope Athanasius the apostolic

- Concerning the Holy Spirit, He came down in the form of tongues of fire, because of His purifying power; and because of His essence; as God is a consuming fire that consumes all evil[1].

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

- Don't marvel when you read that God the Father says, that He is "*A consuming fire.*" He also says: "*They have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living water*" (Jeremiah 2:13); and, the Lord Christ is said to be like fire that flares the hearts of those who listen to Him; and like a fountain of water that cools them off. He Himself said in His gospel: "*I came to send fire on the earth*" (Luke 12:49); and "*to grant a fountain of living water to the thirsty* (John 7:37-38)[2].

St. Ambrose

- The prophet Isaiah reveals that the Holy Spirit is not only light, but fire, saying: "*The light of Israel will be for a fire*" (Isaiah 10:17). The prophets likewise call him as a consuming fire; in which we behold the greatness of the Deity; its holiness; and the features of both the fire and the light. That is why it is often referred to and seen in the form of fire, and as described by the prophet Moses: "*God is a consuming fire.*" Moses himself saw fire in the bush; and heard God, when a voice came to him from the fire, saying: "*I am God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob*"(Exodus 3:6). The voice came from the fire that did not consume the bush. As God's secret was proclaimed; that He comes to enlighten the thorns of our body; and not to consume those who were in misery, but to take it away from them. He is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire; gives grace and destroys sin (Matthew 3:11). Thus in the symbol of the fire, God keeps His purpose[3].

St. Ambrose

- You, O God, are a consuming fire that consumes their lifeless interests, and renews them eternally[4].

St. Augustine

"When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, act corruptly and make a carved image in the form of anything, and do evil in the sight of the Lord your God to provoke Him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land to which you cross over the Jordan to possess, you will not prolong your days in it, but will be utterly destroyed.

And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you. And there you will serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell.

But, from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the Lord your God and obey His voice. For the Lord God is a merciful God. He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them" (Deut. 4:25-31).

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[1] *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: On Pentecost, 12.*
[2] *St. Ambrose: The Duties of the Clergy, Book 3, 18(105).*
[3] *St. Ambrose: The Duty of the Clergy, Book 1:14:164,165.*
[4] *St. Augustine: Confessions 5:30:4.*

It is a very serious matter; because the diversion from the worship of the Living God is a separation from the Lord, the Source of life and peace. Therefore, it is said: *"You will soon utterly perish from the land… and the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you to"* (26, 27). Man will perish when he rejects God working in him to edify him, and makes a god for himself; which *"a workman made it, and is not God"* (Hosea 8:6). He divert his sight from God, the Source of His life, to become a slave to what God created for his sake, like beasts, birds, reptiles, and fishes; or to worship his fellow man, or a heavenly creature. There is no comparison between the living God, who desires to make His covenant with His people, and the lifeless idols, the work of man's hands (6:15; 10:12; 11:13; 26:16; 30:2, 6, 10).

Here Moses is giving a warning to them and to their children after them, against forsaking the worship of the living God and following idol worship. This warning bore a kind of prophecy. By the eye of prophecy, Moses saw the captivity, that is going to come over his people, and their scattering among the nations. Foreseeing the future generations falling in idol worship, he called the earth and heaven to witness that he has warned them against the destruction that would come over Israel.

God is however opening the door of hope before His people, as well as before every believer, to return to the Lord their God, to enjoy His divine promises. If the people become scattered because of their sins; then returned to God; they will find the doors of His mercies wide open, and His arms stretched waiting to embrace them. The people often forget their covenant with God; but as soon as they return to Him by practical faith, translated in obedience, they will find Him receiving them by His mercies and compassion. He will never forget His covenant with His people.

Here, He presents repentance in a magnificent way, full of compassion, using the words "*turn to God*" (30). Come, *"He will not forsake you, nor destroy you*" (31). The Old Testament used the style of strong reception; when God speaks even with the fallen and the adversaries, to call them to return to the friendship, which they have betrayed.

The prophet opens their eyes toward the Lord to see Him as a compassionate father, "*For the Lord your God is a merciful God*"(31). This is the testimony of a man who realizes that the time of his departure from the world and his encounter with God is getting near. He is presenting his long experience in his last moments; as though he is crying out to his people, saying to them: 'I knew Him; I have lived with Him! I connected to Him on the mountain, as He was clothed in light and fire! He decided to deprive me of entering the land of milk and honey. All these things are now before my eyes; that is why I say: *"The Lord your God is a merciful God; He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them"*(31). He gave me His commandments, which I in turn gave to you. Together with the commandments, he presented to us His heart. He is the Judge, yet He is merciful. He is sitting on a fiery throne, yet He is preoccupied with man, who is very beloved by Him.

5. THE ONE GOD WHO LOVES HIS PEOPLE

"For ask now concerning the days that are past, which are before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether any great thing like this has happened, or anything like it has been heard.

Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the

fire, as you have heard, and live?" (Deut. 4:32, 33)

"***The days that are past***": Moses calls the people to remember what God has done with them, and in particular the wonders that happened at the time of their exodus. He mentions 'Egypt' 47 times; which is a clear indication that he is the true author of this book.

It is fitting for us to ask those who preceded us, besides seeking the knowledge from God, in the spirit of humility. 'Isaac Newton' saw himself like a kid standing by the shore of the ocean of knowledge, collecting some tiny glistening pebbles from among the rocks; and in humility he says, that before him, there is a huge ocean of knowledge that he has not yet achieved. Who among us can claim that he has reached half the ocean of God's knowledge? And that he can cover all the shores of this ocean? We should humbly say together with the kid Samuel, "*Speak Lord, for Your servant hears*" (1 Samuel 3:9).

Here, Moses presents a living call to compare between God, the Philanthropic and Savior of mankind, and the false gods, saying "*Ask… whether any great thing like this has happened, or anything like it has been heard"* (32).

God has not left Himself without witness, but He asks man – His beloved creation – to contemplate on His work with him; concentrating on the following points:

(1) He asks them to look back through the entire history of mankind since the creation of man: Has any people ever enjoyed the awesome God, the consuming fire, as they did enjoy, and yet lived, Although God is a consuming fire, yet He did not destroy man, his beloved creation, but spoke with him, and granted him the eternal life. Moses enjoyed that experience, having seen God in the midst of fire, where God spoke to him, in a magnificent conversation of love. On the Mount of Sinai, he experienced the divine fire, the gift of life. He saw the fire through the burning bush, approached it, and heard the divine voice. Having experienced the sweetness of the divine commandment, Moses did not find in the entire history of mankind since the dawn of creation, a greater event than when God proclaimed Himself in Horeb, and delivered the commandments to His people. He spoke to His people through the divine fire.

'Job' heard the voice of God through the wind, and was terrified, whereas, the children of Israel heard it through the fire, which, although more terrifying, yet they were not consumed. The fire about which the prophet Moses speaks, is not something he has heard about, but has actually experienced it at the beginning of his ministry and during it; that granted him a heart of fire, that all the water in the world cannot quench.

God asks them to reject idol worship; but does not deprive them of anything. He presents Himself to them to approach to Him, as a One God, unique in His love for His people.

(2) He is God of the impossible, who saves His people with a strong and mighty arms and great terrors, and grants them exodus from Egypt as a living example of his work with them.

"Or did God ever try to go and take for Himself a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?

To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord Himself is God; there is none other besides Him.

Out of heaven, He let you hear His voice, that He might instruct you; on earth he showed you His great fire, and you heard His words out of the midst of the fire" (Deut. 4:34-36).

He mentions the servitude, the sufferings and the wonders that God performed to show His might, as He mentions the Passover and the crossing over of the Red Sea, repeating the words *'from Egypt,'* as a joyful statement of victory.

"Because He loved… He chose" (37): The Hebrew word for "*loved,"* bears the meaning of (God's love) who chooses that conforms with the Greek word "*Agapo*" in the New Testament; namely, "spontaneous love," that comes as a grace, with no privilege on the part of the beloved. Moses finds no reason for God's choice of Israel, other than His absolute choice.

(3) He is a God who does good to His people.

"That it may go well with you and your children after you, that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord your God is giving you for all time" (Deut. 4:40).

The other nations, out of their fear of their gods and their wrath, used to offer them sacrifices to please them. They used to offer them captives or even their own children as human sacrifices; and inflicted themselves with wounds, to appease their rage. The true God, on the other hand, although appearing as a consuming fire, yet He never did so, to proclaim his fiery rage, nor to avenge, but to help His people, to support them, to flare their hearts with the fire of His love; and to *"be a wall of fire all around them"* (Zechariah 2:5).

The prophet Moses gave seven signs to demonstrate the role of the Almighty God in the salvation of His people:

1**. Trials**: God allows for afflictions to test His people's faith in Him, and their obedience to Him, with the purpose of drawing them to Him and of justifying them.

2. **Signs**: With the purpose of proclaiming that He is near them, He went before them as a pillar of light by night, and as a cloud shading over them by day. He gave them statutes accompanied by signs and wonders, and brought them out of the land of Egypt by a mighty hand, an outstretched arm, and great terror (24), all of which were with the purpose of destroying their adversaries. He brought them out as though from a furnace of servitude. He is a fire working on account of His believers and His people, and not to destroy them.

3. **Wonders**: For the sake of edifying His children; He even broke the laws of nature, like when He did to help them cross the Red Sea, and when He dropped manna over them from heaven.

4. **Wars**: To let them enjoy the Promised Land, they had to replace several nations, most of them mighty men of war, of great possibilities and capabilities; God intervenes as a leader of His people, to grant them victory and conquest.

5. **Mighty hand**: His hand was mighty on account of His believers, capable of confronting all the oppositions that would come in their way.

6. **Outstretched arm**: Capable of destroying evil and embracing souls. The Holy Bible often speaks of:

* **The arm of God**: It refers to the power of God working without limits, incessantly doing wonders for the good of believers.

*** The finger of God**: Which wrote on the two tablets of the covenant, refers to His fiery Holy Spirit.

* **The hand of God**: It refers to the incarnation of the Word, who consummates the work of salvation, and reveals the practical love of God the Father, by giving His Only-Begotten Son.

* **The outstretched arm of God**: It refers to God's longing to embrace those returning to Him.

7- **Great terror**: Against those with cruel hearts like Pharaoh and his people, by the ten plagues.

The goal of the commandment:

a. To let us realize God's choice of us and His longing for us to enjoy freedom. ***"And because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them, and He brought you out of Egypt"*** **(Deut. 4:37).**

b. To let us possess and rejoice.

"Driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land as an inheritance, as it is this day.

Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that the Lord Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.

You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord your God is giving you for all time" (Deut. 4:38-40)

It does not end at bringing them out of Egypt by a mighty hand, and setting them free from servitude to the devil, but He intends to let them have a happy stay in Canaan, and to settle down there. God draws us away from servitude to the devil, destroys all powers of evil, and let us sit together with Him in the heavenly places, to find an everlasting comfort in the bosom of God the Father.

6. THE CITIES OF REFUGE

"Then Moses set apart three cities on this side of the Jordan, toward the rising of the sun, that the manslayer might flee there, who kills his neighbor unintentionally, without having hated him in the time past, and that by fleeing to one of these cities he might live.

Bezer in the wilderness on the plateau for the Reubenites, Ramoth in Gilead for the Gadites, and Golan in Bashan for the Manassites" (Deut. 4:41-43).

The prophet Moses sees in God a refuge for every soul justified in Him. The statute of the six cities of refuge came as a reference and a symbol of the work of God. God set the cities of refuge (41-43; 19:2-13), to free the Promised Land from shedding innocent blood.

The three cities of refuge on the eastern side of the River Jordan: one in the portion of the Reubenites, a second in that of the Gadites, and a third in half the portion of the Manassites; were to become a model for setting three others on the western side of the Jordan.

The three cities on the eastern side of the Jordan were: 'Baser,' 20 miles north-east of the Dead Sea, close to those dwelling south of the eastern side; 'Ramoth Gilead,' for those dwelling in the middle, 30 miles east of the middle of the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, and 'Jaulan' for those to the north.

Some of those cities, previously centers of idolatryping, became 'cities of refuge,' where a manslayer, who unintentionally kills his neighbor, would flee to find safety and comfort; came to represent the house of God, the Giver of comfort.

For a further study of the cities of refuge, see the book of Numbers 35:6-15.

7. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND SERMON

"And this is the Law which Moses set before the children of Israel.

These are the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments, which Moses spoke to the children of Israel after they came out of Egypt.

On this side of the Jordan, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, in the land of Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt at Heshbon, whom Moses and the children of Israel defeated after they came out of Egypt. And they took possession of his land and the land of Og king of Bashan, two kings of the Amorites, who were on this side of the Jordan, toward the rising of the sun, from Aroer, which is on the bank of the River Arnon, even to Mount Sion (that is Harmon), and all the plain on the east side of the Jordan as far as the Sea of the Arabah, below the slopes of Pisgah" (Deut. 4:44-49).

The author gives us a preface or an introduction to the farewell sermons of the prophet Moses (1:1-5), followed by the first sermon, in which Moses demonstrated the exalted care of God for His people, despite their persistence on rebelling against Him (Deut. 1). God even set for them a plan for their wars. Together with giving them in abundance, He seeks to commit them to responsibility, and to sanctify them. He did not let them fight the Edomites or the Moabites, but made them overcome Sihon and Og (Deut 2, 3). Moses spoke to them many times of how much He longs to enjoy the Promised Land; although, because of them he was denied it, and delivered leadership to his disciple Joshua (Deut 3). Finally, all what preoccupied his mind was to see them connected with God by the divine covenant and to come close to Him (Deut 4).

He ended his sermon by setting the cities of refuge on the eastern side of the Jordan, to start on his second sermon concerning the testimonies proclaiming the will of God, the statutes to which the believers should be committed in their behavior, and the judgments that fix the mutual rights of men.

In this introduction the author confirms Moses' care, that the people should not be preoccupied with their conquest over the kings of the Amorites and the possession of their land; bur rather with their enjoyment of the divine commandment. Every believer should bear the will of God, rather than his own will; and should walk as is fitting for a son of God; and should keep the right of every being.

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 4)

LET YOUR COMMANDMENT CARRY ME TO YOU, O THE CONSUMING FIRE

❖ From the midst of the fire, You gave the two tablets of Your Law;
And by fiery tongues, Your fiery Spirit dwelt in me!
I welcome Your fiery commandment;
I bow before it, bearing the spirit of obedience;
In it I see Your signs;
And receive in them Your righteousness and Your purity;
O You Holy One!

❖ By Them I acquire You, O the divine Wisdom;
To become wise, and to enjoy Your knowledge!

❖ You introduced Yourself to me; a Consuming Fire.
Not to get me terrified, and flee,
But to approach You together with Your prophet Moses;
And to hear Your eternal exalted voice.
Your fiery voice terrifies my enemies.
By You, I enter free into Your kingdom;
To possess and to rejoice by You, O the source of my strength.

THE SECOND DIVISION

THE SECOND SERMON
(Deuteronomy 5 to 28)

THE COMMANDMENTS AND THE CONSTITUTION OF THE LAW

SUB-DIVISION 1: (Ch. 5-11) **General basics of the divine covenant.**
SUB-DIVISION 2: (Ch. 12-26) **Special commandments or statutes.**
SUB-DIVISION 3: (Ch. 27-28) **The rite concerning the blessings and the curses.**

THE SECOND DIVISION

THE SECOND SERMON

(Deut. 5 to 28)

THE COMMANDMENTS AND THE CONSTITUTION OF LAWS

This sermon is considered as the body, or the main part of the book of Deuteronomy. It presents to us the divine commandments, which we are committed to observe, to live and to enter into the heavenly Canaan to inherit and possess. The prophet Moses starts his second sermon by confirming the same goal, which is entering into a covenant with God, with a commitment of obedience and love.

1.God, the Legislator of the Old Testament, is Himself who consummates it in the New Testament; the two Testaments being the unchangeable word of God.

2.Through the cross, the Christian can comprehend it, not with a deadly literality, but in deep spiritual meanings.

3.The commandments of the New Testament reveal the depths of those of the Old Testament, and the later, as well, strongly reveal the concept of salvation and of the cross.

We can divide the second sermon into three sub-divisions:

Sub-Division 1: (Ch. 5-11): The general basics of the divine covenant.

Sub-Division 2: (Ch. 12-26): The special commandments and statutes.

Sub-Division 3: (Ch. 27-28): The special rite of blessings and curses.

SUB-DIVISION (1)
THE GENERAL BASICS OF THE DIVINE COVENANT
(Chapters 5 to 11)

Following the introduction to the sermon (Deut. 4:44-49), the prophet Moses parades the following general basics, on which the divine covenant is set:

a. The commitment to the Ten Commandments (5), the backbone of the Law, and the foundation of the spiritual life.

b. The commandment as the companion of the believer wherever he goes (6).

c. No fellowship with idolatry (7).

d. Observing the commandment is the goal of the wilderness and affliction (8).

e. Conquest is by God, and not by self-righteousness (9).

f. The commandment and the commitment to worship (10).

g. The enjoyment of the days of heaven (11).

CHAPTER 5
THE TEN COMMANDMENTS
THE HEART OF THE DIVINE COVENANT

The prophet Moses calls to him, not only the elders and the leaderships, but all the people as well, and asks them to take into consideration, that the covenant between God and Israel, is not one concerning only the past, but is perpetually set. He reminds them of the Ten Commandments, and of how they asked him to approach God on their behalf, to receive the Law from Him.

After speaking about purifying the Promised Land of idol worship, and of shedding innocent blood, Moses presents to us the backbone of the divine covenant; namely, the Ten Commandments, which conform to what came in Exodus 20:2-7, except for presenting a new interpretation of the celebration of the Sabbath, namely, that it is done in memory of the work of salvation by God of bringing the people of Israel out of the servitude of Pharaoh (15), instead of being in memory of creation (Exodus 20:11).

He ends his talk by confirming that the obedience to the voice of the Lord is a condition for the enjoyment of the goods of the new life in the Promised Land (22-33).

1. A present divine covenant	**1 - 5.**
2. The Ten Commandments	**6 – 22.**
3. Receiving the Law	**23 – 33.**

1. A PRESENT DIVINE COVENANT

"And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: 'Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearings today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them" **(Deut 5:1).**

Moses calls the people to hear the commandment, to learn, to keep, and to observe it; something that he previously confirmed in his first sermon. God commands us, firstly to 'listen,' secondly to 'learn,' thirdly to 'keep;' namely to bring the commandment to the depths of the heart; to keep it as though in a safe place (1); according to the words of the Holy Bible: *"Your word, I have hidden in my heart"* (Psalm 119:11); then fourthly to practice it. It is not enough to store it in the ear through listening; nor in the mind through learning; nor in the heart through memorizing and longing; but we should translate it into practical work. He does not want us to fill our minds but with theoretical thoughts, or our mouths with empty words, to translate the commandment into action. Namely, beside keeping it in the heart; we should dedicate all our feelings, and body members to put it to work. By that, the commandment would come to fill the mind, sanctifies the body members, and flares the heart with love. The whole body should take part in executing it; that man is wholly sanctified through receiving the commandment and reacting to it.

Nobody can claim that he consummates all the commandments to perfection, except the Lord Christ, as the commandments are like a mirror that, although it reveals what is inside the heart, yet it is incapable of renewing it or changing its nature. Or let us say, it is like headlights on the front of a car, that reveals the road ahead with all its obstacles, but falls short of repairing the road. That is why the apostle says: *"knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the Law no flesh*

shall be justified" (Galatians 2:16). It is not possible to be justified by the works of the Law; firstly, because the Law is incapable of correcting what occurred because of our sins; and secondly, because no one can consummate the commandments of the law.

What purpose then does the Law serve?

It was given because of the transgressions, until the seed should come, "*to whom the promise was made; and was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator"* (Galatians 3:19) "*Therefore the Law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor*" (Galatians 3:24, 25).

Behold, the Law has come to be at our service, to hold our hands, and to bring us over to the cross, saying to us: 'Come my little friends to the Savior. He is alone capable of justifying and glorifying you.' Therefore, the Law is good, proclaiming the thought of God, revealing our helplessness, and provoking us to enjoy the fellowship of the everlasting glory. "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23).

The prophet Moses transforms the commandments and the statutes into a covenant; saying: "*The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb*" (2). The commandments shown here by Moses, does God issue not just orders for man to obey, but, in their depths, are a covenant between God and man.

1. Looking at the commandments, the statutes, and the laws, as a covenant, gives special understanding to the relationship between God and man. God does not order and command as a Master whom His servants have to obey; Or a Creator, with whom His creation should not argue; But He lifts man up to debate with Him on an equal level. The believer sees in the commandments a fruit of a covenant that is set on his perfect free will. He deals with God as a reasonable being, who has the right to accept or reject, to debate and to argue.

2. This covenant is set between God and His present church. A new covenant that never gets old. It is not a covenant that was made between God and the previous generation, but is a current, and a going on one.

"The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who are here today, all of us who are alive. The Lord talked with you face to face on the mountain from the midst of the fire" (Deut. 5:3, 4).

Although it is a personal covenant, made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; yet it is set for the present generation to enjoy as well, as though set personally with them. God sets His personal covenant with the present Church, and with every believer as a living member in her; "*not with our fathers… but with us*." The Hebrew version implies that it is "not just with our fathers, but with us as well." Here, the prophet Moses puts on his people a personal responsibility; having been the first to dwell in the Promised Land as pioneers. Through this covenant, God talks with them "*face to face"* (4).

3. Not like what 'Eliphaz the Temanite' said: "*Now a word was secretly brought to me, and my ear received a whisper of it. In disquieting thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men. Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones shake*" (Job 4:12-14).

4. The mediator of the covenant here is the prophet Moses, who stands in between God who dwells in heaven and the people at the foot of the mountain. The goal of his mediation is to present the Law to the people, and to let them hear the voice of the Lord and not to die. In this he is a symbol of the Lord Christ, the Mediator between God the Father and man, in which man enjoys the divine Word;

and becomes the subject of pleasure to God the Father.

"*The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb*" (2). Moses refers to the specific location, to let them feel their responsibility and privilege.

2. THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Here, Moses repeats the Ten Commandments together with their interpretation. The old generation who heard the Ten Commandments was already dead, and their bones had decayed. The new generation was in need to hear those commandments and their interpretation, in the light of the experience of forty years in the wilderness.

Some people may object and say that this is a repetition of what already came in Exodus 20, so let it be! The Book is confirming the importance of these commandments, and of the commitment to hear them more than once, as they are basic to the life of the believer. Yes, He previously spoke of the Ten Commandments, and here he reminds the people of them with some more detail. It is fitting for us not to get bored of hearing the commandment until we consummate it, in order to have the will of God work in us. The repetition of talk of the commandment should rather bring us joy, and as the apostle Paul writes: "*For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe"* (Philippians 3:1).

"The Lord talked with you face to face on the mountain from the midst of the fire.

I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up the mountain. He said…" (Deut. 4:4, 5)

Indeed, He is an awesome God. A Consuming Fire! Yet He grants life to His people; saying: "*For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we had, and lived?*" (Deut. 4 26) "*He has shown us His great glory, and His greatness; and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire. We have seen this day that God speaks with man; yet he still lives"* (Deut. 4:24). So we comprehend the commandment, not as orders issued, but as being lifted up as though on a mountain, to encounter with God in His glory, speaking with us face to face, and we do not die.

The Ten Commandments are considered the center of the Law, and the foundation of God's covenant, and we can count the chapters 12 to 26 as a detailed application of its principles on the life of the people in the land of Canaan. While the people of the Old Testament cared to apply its outer appearance, our Lord Jesus reveals its depths. Christ made of it a Law "to enter life," when He asked the young man to keep them to live (Matthew 19:18). And He made it as well, the Law of life for all His followers. The old people assumed that they are justified, just through having the commandment delivered to them. Whereas in the New Testament, having discovered that mankind are unable to keep all the commandments in their depths, we realize our need for the Lord Christ who justifies us with His blood, and supports us by His Holy Spirit, to help us keep the commandment.

"I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the House of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children of the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me. But showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My

commandments" *(Deut. 4:6-10).*

God, His name being 'Jehovah,' God of the covenant, enters in a fellowship and a relationship with His chosen people, as their own portion. And, in the fulfillment of time, He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). This personal relationship between God and man is the foundation of the Christian faith.

"*He visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children*" (9), not in the crime itself, but as far as its consequences are concerned. That is the truth that we know by practical experience, the way we experience the promise of mercy "*to thousands, to those who love Him and keep His commandments*" (10).

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you.

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall not do any work; you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you.

And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord your God brought you out from there by an outstretched arm, therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day" (Deut. 4:11-15).

Man needs to separate the Sabbath for worshipping the Lord, and listening to His voice, so as not to run through a feverish struggle to create wealth or to acquire wisdom; but to have his life with meaning, according to the purpose of God and his guidance. This commandment is a prophecy about the coming eternal rest (Hebrew 4:9). By this the Jewish Sabbath changed into the Christian Sunday, where the true rest in Christ Jesus is.

"Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your *God* is giving you" *(Deut. 5:16).*

This commandment concerns the most sacred human bond; namely fatherhood; as the name 'Father' refers first to God, then God gave man the honor to use it. Man can choose his friends, but his parents are a gift from God, chosen by Him as a way to bring man to the world, an exalted and unequaled gift.

Honoring the parents comes in the second place following that of honoring God, the One with the highest authority.

The Lord Christ rebuked the Jews for setting a human tradition, opposite to this divine commandment (Matthew 15:3-6), by which the son breaks the practical commandment to honor the parents; and disregards their material needs, through claiming to offer what he should provide them of sustenance, as a 'Corban' dedicated to the temple (Mark 7:8-11). And according to **Origen**: [Hearing that what their children were supposed to give them for their life necessities, became part of the 'Corban,' meant to be dedicated to God, caused parents to refrain from taking it from them.] He also says that the Pharisees, as lovers of money, used to pretend to collect it for the poor, depriving the parents of the gifts of their children support[1].

❖ The Lord Himself made it clear that this commandment of the Law, saying:

[1] *The Author: The Gospel According to St. Matthew, Alexandria 1983, p. 343 (in Arabic).*

"*Honor your father and mother*," should not be interpreted by mere words, namely, that man demonstrates vain appearances that he is honoring his parents, while leaving them poor, and in need of the actual necessities of life. He commanded children to be committed to sustain their parents, to give them back in their old age, the blessings they got from them during their childhood. On the contrary, the scribes and the Pharisees used to teach the children to tell their parents, 'The gift I am offering to the temple, will benefit you, just as if I am giving it directly to you to purchase food.' And it often happens that, while the fathers and mothers are in great need, their children offer sacrifices to the priests and the scribes to eat[1].

St. Jerome

"You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal" (Deut. 5:17-19).

"*You shall not murder*." This sixth divine commandment proclaims the holiness of human life. Life as a whole is a gift from God; on which we should look with respect and reverence.

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Deut. 5:20; and Exodus 20:16).

This ninth commandment, although it may look passive in its form; yet it is actually positive in its meaning; as it puts the truth against the vain; namely, speaks against the vain in favor of the truth. All our talk and testimony should be true, and our judgment should be just.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, his manservant, his maidservant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's" (Deut. 5:21)

"*You shall not covet*" (21 and Exodus 20:17). This commandment differs from those preceding it, in that it addresses what lies in man's heart and not what appears of his outer behavior; something that only God sees whether is broken or kept. In its passive form, it speaks against coveting what belongs to others, whereas in its positive form, it teaches self-satisfaction and faith (Hebrew 13:5, 6).

The little difference between how it comes here and how it came in Exodus 20:17 refers to the fact that, as the people here were about to enter Canaan, where they would start for the first time to have personal possessions, like fields for example, Moses warns everyone against coveting his neighbor's field.

In the so-called second letter of Clement the Roman, the author connecting between the true knowledge of God and the love of neighbor, says: [I wish, brethren, we know Him in our conduct by loving one another (John 13:35; 15:12; 1 John 3:11)… It is fitting for us to be compassionate toward each other, and not to be greedy; to get to know God through these works; and not through what are opposite[2].]

Fr. Caesarius of Arles, gave two sermons connecting between the Ten Commandments and the ten plagues[3]; in which he said:

[The number of commandments came equivalent to that of the plagues, which came over the Egyptians, because of their arrogance and vain pride; as God presented His commandments to heal our serious wounds. You can realize how the commandments correspond to the ten plagues and in the same order. The first plague corresponds to the first commandment; likewise the second plague corresponds to the

[1] *Letter 123 to Agruchia.*
[2] *So-called Second Letter of Clement 3:4.*
[3] *Fr. Caesarius of Arles: Sermons 100, 100a.*

second commandment; the third to the third; and so on up to the tenth[1].]

The first commandment concerns the One God, and not mixing between Him and the pagan idols (Exodus 20:3), came to deal with the first plague against the Egyptian, in which the water turned into blood. If the blood refers to carnal lusts, that came as a fruit of not believing in the One God, through the first commandment, the senses that were darkened would become wise and sanctified.

Because the Egyptians intended to murder the Hebrew children and to shed their blood, God turned the water of their River into blood to let them drink from it[2]. We can say that the first commandment grants us to stick to the worship of the One God, so that our violent, lusty, and bloodthirsty nature would turn into one, which is mild and watered by the Holy Spirit.

The second commandment concerns not taking the name of God in vain; as who does that would not be guiltless (Exodus 20:7), whereas he, who acquire the name of Jesus – the Truth – would bear the fellowship of the divine righteousness. We can say that this commandment is a cure against the second plague that concerns the invasion of the earth by frogs, which refer to the atheist heretics and philosophers who provide deceiving philosophies, devoid of divine spiritual wisdom, that bear likeness to the incessant croaking of the frogs among the muddy waters, providing noise for the ears, but no true nurture to the soul or to the mind[3].

The third commandment, concerns keeping the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8), It actually refers to the work of the Holy Spirit, the Grantor of freedom, the true comfort of the heart, and peace of the mind, through good conscience, who dwells in man to enjoy the spiritual Sabbath; drawing him to the heavenly spiritual a worship, instead of being confused by temporal things[4].

The fourth commandment, concerns honoring the parents (Exodus 20:12), confronting the fourth plague by the flies, as he who does not honor his parents would suffer the wickedness of the devil, and his torture[5].

The fifth commandment, against adultery (Exodus 20; 14), deals with the plague that struck the cattle. He who covets his neighbor's wife or daughter, not listening to God's words: "*Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding*" (Psalm 32:9), would lose his human nature, as though turning into a beast in the form of man. If you have no fear of becoming like a beast, have fear of dying like one.

The sixth commandment is "*You shall not murder*" corresponds to the sixth plague by boils that broke out in sores on man and beasts. The murderers are those whose souls are burnt by the fires of anger, becoming like ashes of a furnace. The murderer kills themselves, before killing any other. The commandment here asks us to avoid having our heart burned with anger, that causes deadly boils, but have our hearts filled by the love for others that gives a cure for the soul.

The seventh commandment, "*You shall not steal*" corresponds to the very heavy hail that rains down on man, beast, and crop in the field. He, who takes unjustly what is not his, will have loss coming upon him like very heavy hail. He may think that he gained many visible things through his evil lusts, when he has actually lost many invisible ones, through the hail of God's heavenly wrath.

If those who steal can look into the fields of their hearts, they would realize the

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[1] *Fr. Caesarius of Arles: Sermons 100, 1.*
[2] *Fr. Caesarius of Arles: Sermons 100, 2.*
[3] *Fr. Caesarius of Arles: Sermons 100, 3.*
[4] *Fr. Caesarius of Arles: Sermons 100, 4.*
[5] *Fr. Caesarius of Arles: Sermons 100, 5.*

extent of their loss, through the destruction by hail, brought upon their own resources by their persecution of others. That is why the apostle Peter draws our hearts to the inner riches, saying: "*Let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God*" (1 Peter 3:4), so that we be rich, not before people, but before God.

The eighth commandment, "*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor*," corresponds to the plague by the locusts that destroy crops of the field by their mouths. He, who bears false witness, destroys himself and his brothers by the false words of his mouth; against which the apostle Paul warns us, saying: "*If you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another*" (Galatians 5:15).

The ninth commandment, "*You shall not covet your neighbor's wife*," corresponds to the plague of the thick darkness. Indeed, he who covets his neighbor's wife would be plagued by thick darkness; as nothing causes more blindness to the soul, and provokes great anger, than practicing such uncontrollable folly.

The tenth commandment, "*You shall not covet anything that is your neighbor's*," corresponds to the plague of the death of the firstborn. Everything man acquires for himself is to leave for his heirs, of whom the dearest is the firstborn. He, who robs his brother's possessions that he intends to leave for his heirs, will be deprived of his firstborn himself through death, and not just of the inheritance he would get. Who is this dead firstborn, but faith that is the heart's firstborn; as no one can do a good work, unless he has faith in his heart, as its firstborn.

Fr. Caesarius ends his hundredth sermon by saying that, by the Ten Commandments, man would be liberated from the unjust persecution of the Egyptians, namely, from the spiritual persecution in his depths; his heart would be freed, and he would set forth to the Promised Land through divine help.

We can divide the Ten Commandments into three integrated sections:

(A) Commandments concerning our relationship with God:

1. **Being bound to God alone and to no other** (Commandment 1), whose secrets we got to know, through the incarnation of the Word (Matthew 11:27).

St. Augustine[1] states that when the Lord Christ spoke with the Jews about being made free by the truth, they answered him, saying, that they have never been in bondage to anyone (John 8:31-36), although Joseph was sold as a slave (Genesis 37:28), several prophets were captivated (2 kings 24; Ezekiel 1), the Israeli people fell into the servitude of Pharaoh (Exodus 1:14), and even in the very time of the Lord Christ, they were forced to pay taxes to the Roman Empire (Matthew 22:15-21). The Lord Christ' intention was to set them free from the servitude of the 'ego,' the vain pride; but they understood freedom according to carnal concept.

2. **Refraining from idol worship** (Commandment 2); so as not to divert to idol worship [Setting idols in the heart, like selfishness; love of possessing etc.]

The prophet Moses proclaims that God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children. How can he, in the same book, confirm that the fathers shall not be put to death for their children, and the other way round? (Deut. 24:16) **St. John Chrysostom** answers, confirming that the first context concerns the children who consummate the measure of their fathers, and become more evil than them[2].

[1] *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, trac. 41:2.*
[2] *See In John, homily 56.*

3. **Not taking the name of the Lord God in vain** (Commandment 3): In the old days, swearing in the name of God, as a sign of honoring God and fearing Him, was allowed. But in the New Testament, as man was lifted up to the level of spiritual maturity, it is fitting for him not to swear at all (Matthew 5:34). This commandment cares for the sanctification of the mouth. When the apostle Paul talked of the corruption of humanity; and that all have gone astray, he concentrated on the mouth, saying: "*Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit. The poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness*" (Romans 3:13, 14).

4. **Keeping the Sabbath** (Commandment 4; see also Exodus 20). In a previous detailed study dealing with this subject[1], we noticed that this commandment, in essence, is not a heavy one for the believer to be committed to; but is actually a feast that reflects the spirit of joy over all the congregation, over every believer together with his household, with the strangers under his roof, and the hired hands working for him. It even reflects on the beasts in his fields.

The books of the Old Testament gave special concentration on the commandment of keeping the Sabbath; with the intention of anticipating the coming of the Savior, the Giver of the true comfort, who is to save us from the bondage of the devil. And as **St. Clement of Alexandria** says: [We hold fast to the spiritual Sabbath until the Savior comes, when we shall have rest from the sin[2].] And **St. Augustine** says: [In Him, we rest and see; see and love; love and praise. Such will be the end with no end![3]]

The difference is more apparent in the fourth commandment. In the book of Exodus (31:13), God commands us to keep the Sabbath, because, as He created the world in six days, it is fitting for us to sanctify the seventh day, namely, to dedicate it to extend worship and thanksgiving to the Creator. Whereas here, He gives it a new interpretation, namely, sanctifying the Sabbath for the sake of His salvation works, and the renewal of our life, as He has set us free from the servitude to the devil (Pharaoh), and brought us over to the heavenly Canaan. Now the Lord Jesus became our Sabbath, in whom God the Father finds His pleasure (comfort) in us, and we find ours in Him.

The Lord reminds His people of the bitterness of servitude that they had in the land of Egypt, counting their exodus as the Sabbath or comfort in which they enjoyed freedom. The true Sabbath is therefore, to present to others the spirit of freedom, to spare their souls the feeling of humiliation. The Sabbath is for the soul to set forth with love toward all brethren, and even toward beasts and birds, longing for everyone to enjoy true comfort.

If the Sabbath was the exodus of man from the servitude of the devil, our Sabbath became on Sunday, the day of our exodus under the leadership of the Lord Christ, hidden in Him, to set forth from the servitude of the devil to the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

(B) Commandments concerning our relationship with our relatives in the lord:

5 **Honoring the parents**: (Commandment 5): Following the commandments concerning the relationship of the believer with God, Those concerning his relationship with man are given, starting with his relationship with his parents. If one does not know how to honor his parents whom he sees and touch, how could he honor

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[1] *The Author: Leviticus, chapter 23. (in Arabic)*
[2] *The Author: Christ in the Eucharist, Alexandria 1973, p. 125. (in Arabic)*
[3] *City of God, 22:30.*

God, his heavenly Father? In this commandment the prophet Moses added what the apostle Paul quoted in his epistle to the Ephesians (6:3): "*that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth"* (16).

The prolongation of life does not imply the literal meaning, but man's enjoyment of good things. The days that the fetus John the Baptist spent in his mother's womb, was filled with more fruits than those of the elders of Israel who denied faith and opposed the truth. That is why it is said, "*a single day for the Lord is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a single day"* (Cf. Ps. 90:4). God's counting is different from ours. The wise Solomon says: "*Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked, nor he will prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God"* (Ecclesiastes 8:12, 13).

C- Commandments concerning our relationship with the congregation in the Lord:

The final five commandments came together as one commandment:

"You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor; You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, his manservant, his maidservant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's" (Deut. 5:17-21).

By this, the prophet Moses confirmed the unity of the commandments. And as said by the apostle James: *"For whoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all*" (James 2:10)

6. "You shall not murder" (Commandment 6): The Lord Christ made it clear that man may murder by his tongue (Matthew 5:22).

7. "You shall not commit adultery" (Commandment 7). The Lord of glory commanded us to have the inner purity of heart (Matthew 5:28).

8. "You shall not steal" (Commandment 8).

*9. "**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor***" (Commandment 9).

10. "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, his house, or his field" (Commandment 10). When man's heart is preoccupied with God, he gets fulfilled, and would be overflowing with love, instead of coveting what is his neighbor's.

❖ Indeed, God's laws would loudly moan when seeing great corruption on earth[1].

St. Basil the Great

***"These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly, in the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and He added no more. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone, and gave them to me"* (Deut. 5:22).**

The prophet Moses moreover clarified that these commandments were given in the midst of an atmosphere of amazing awe. If fire in itself is horrible, its horror increases amid the darkness.

Saying: "*And He added no more;*" the prophet Moses means that God's commandments are complete, and do not need anything more.

"***Fire, cloud, and thick darkness***" (22): The people heard the thunder, but it was only Moses who heard the words (John 12:29; Acts 9:7). Moses was the

[1] *St. Basil the Great: Letters 46:1.*

intermediary between God and the people (Galatians 3:19), as a symbol of the Lord Christ.

"*He wrote the commandment on two tablets of stone, and gave them to me*" (22). The words were engraved on two tablets of stone, so that no one can change anything in them. The two tablets of stone refer to the heart of man that became like stone; and in need of the divine commandment to be engraved by the finger of God on it. The prophet Moses placed the two tablets in the Ark of the Covenant, which refers to the divine presence. St. John the beloved says: "*Then the temple of God was opened in heaven; and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightning, noises, thundering, an earthquake, and great hail"* (Revelation 11:19).

3. RECEIVING THE LAW

"So it was, when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, that you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes, and your elders, and you said: 'Surely the Lord our God has shown His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire. We have seen this day that God speaks with man; yet he still lives.

Now therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the Lord our God anymore, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? You go near and hear all that the Lord our God may say, and tell us all that the Lord our God says to you, and we will hear and do it.'

Then the Lord heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the Lord said to me: 'I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken. Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever. Go and say to them, Return to your tents. But as for you, stand here by Me, And I will speak to you all the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments which you shall teach them, that they may observe them in the land which I am giving them to possess.'

Therefore you shall be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land you shall possess" (Deut. 5:23-33).

The people, not bearing to see anymore of that fire on the mountain, or of that awesome divine voice coming out of the darkness, asked the prophet Moses to take upon himself receiving the Law on behalf of all of them. Out of fear of dying, together with a true longing to hear more and more, they asked Moses to consummate the path on their behalf. It is amazing, that their request was not much long after their recent intention to stone him to death (Exodus 17:4).

To show how God cared for them, and how much He was preoccupied by them, Moses said:: "*The Lord heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the Lord said to me, 'I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken*"(28).

Caring for them, God seeks that their hearts would be full of deity, to conform to what they uttered with their tongues, "*Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever*"(29). With their lips they reveal that they seek

more of the divine talks and laws that God gives via Moses on their behalf. But God seeks their hearts and not just their lips.

Their hearts here proclaim an obvious longing, a true desire, and a deep love, and demonstrate a free human will. Although their hearts have grown cold, yet God can turn them into a flaring divine fire. And although they have turned into solid stones, yet, on them, He can engrave His commandments with His divine finger, to make out of them, as though (two tablets of testimony), holy for the Lord, and witnesses to His divine word.

❖ To demonstrate His great longing for our salvation, hear what God promised the people, despite their numerous transgressions, if they would walk along the straight path, saying: *"Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever"* (29). And debating with them, Moses says: *"And now, Israel, What does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him?"*(Deut. 10:12).

He, who cares so much for our love, and does everything to this effect, did not have compassion on His own Only-Begotten Son for the sake of His love for us. Counting it His pleasure if we reconcile with Him anytime, how could He not welcome us and love us if we repent?[1]

St. John Chrysostom

God assigned the prophet Moses a messenger to receive the Law from His divine mouth, saying to him: "***As for you, stand here by Me, and I will speak to you all the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments which you shall teach them, that they may observe them in the land which I am giving them to possess" (*31).**

❖ It was said to Moses: "*For the place where you stand is a holy ground*" (Exodus 3:5). No one can stands on it, if not with faith, holding fast with his heart. In another location we read: "*As for you, stand here by Me*" (Deut. 5:31). Each of these expressions, God uttered to Moses with the meaning: Stand with Me. Stand fast in the Church, because the place itself is holy, the same ground is fruitful by holiness, and fertilized by the crops of virtues.

Stand then in the Church. Stand where I shall appear to you, and where I shall be with you. Wherever the Church is, there will be the greatest place set for the comfort of your mind, where you will find help for your soul; where I appear to you in the burning bush.

You are the bush and I am the fire, flaring in the bush; I am in the body; I am the fire; I grant you light; I consume your thorns; namely your sins; and grant you My grace.

Standing fast in your heart, I shall drive away the wolves seeking to find a prey[2].

St. Ambrose

"Therefore you shall be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left" (Deut. 5:32).

By saying that, he wants us to be careful to do as the Lord has commanded, namely to accept with joy His divine will to replace our own, or accept Him to conform our will to His will. If by this we would lose our own weak will, yet we would enjoy what is greater; to bear by our own free will, that of God working in us.

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[1] *Letters to the Fallen Theodore 1:15.*
[2] *St. Ambrose, Letter 63:41,42.*

The goal of this divine will is to walk along the way of truth and righteousness, being the straightforward way that will lead us to the bosom of God the Father, and will bring us to inner glories, together with a fellowship of heavenly glory. Who is this way but Him who says: "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*."

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 5)

I WILL NOT TURN ASIDE FROM YOU;
TO THE RIGHT OR TO THE LEFT

- You have granted me Your commandments, a way of truth.
  Your Spirit carries me along the royal way;
  Not to turn aside to the left by lusts and abominations,
  But to stick to the royal way to reach the bosom of Your Father.
  You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

- You presented to me the Ten Commandments from the midst of the fire;
  To make my heart a flaring fire that speaks inside me.
  To engrave on my heart Your divine commandments.
  And to make out of my depths, an ark of covenant for You.

- Let me keep Your commandments by Your fiery Spirit.
  Not to see any other god.
  Let my heart accommodate You, to bear in it the humanity beloved by You.
  Let me become for You a living icon;
  Let me be like You, who have no one like You.

CHAPTER 6

THE COMMANDMENT AND THE NEW LAND

The relationship of the people with God is set upon the foundation of accepting the covenant, in which God proclaims His perfect and exalted love for humanity; who, on its side, is committed to obedience to His voice, and to longing to His commandment, from the whole heart; and not just from the lips. That is why He clarified to them the necessity of preoccupation with the commandment, when they come to enjoy the new land. By that, the commandment would become a cause for remembering the work of God with them; instead of being preoccupied with the good things, and forgetting the commandment of God.

1. The commandment and the land flowing with milk and honey 1-3.
2. The commandment as a companion of the believer wherever he goes 4-9.
3. The commandment and the enjoyment of the blessings 10-19.
4. The commandment and remembering the liberation from servitude 20-25.

1. THE COMMANDMENT AND THE LAND FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY

As the people were about to enter into the land flowing with milk and honey, the prophet Moses feared lest they would become preoccupied with the land, away from the commandment, and with the temporal blessings of the Lord, away from His Person. That is why he intended to confirm, in any possible way, the following points:

(1) The commandments and judgments he is presenting to them, are not his own but are from the Lord Himself.

"Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the Lord has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess" (Deut. 6:1).

They are the Lord's commandments, and not Moses'. So it is fitting for the ministers of Christ to present His commandments, through which He transfigures to His listeners, and becomes present in the midst of His people. That is why the evangelist Matthew ends his gospel by the words of the Lord Christ: *"Teach them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of age"* (Matthew 28:20).

The book of Deuteronomy came to clarify the role of man, and that of God in the covenant made between them. The prophet Moses often repeats the words: "**Hear**," "**look**," "**keep**," and "**observe**," as the roles of the believer; whereas those of God is are: to "**grant**," to "**increase,'** and to "**bless**."

(2) To receive the commandment in our practical daily life: "**to observe,"** namely, to cross over the River Jordan with it, and to bring it into the new land, as a constitution for their practical life.

"That you may fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged" (Deut. 6:2).

Coming to possess the new land, they are committed to practice a new life,

with a new mind, and a new divine law.

(3) The believer receiving the commandment as a treasure to keep and to deliver to his children and grandchildren, it is fitting for him to turn the commandment into a "*fear of the Lord*" (2); and to keep" *all His statutes and judgments*." As teaching by the tongue, and not by the heart and behavior, would be like writing on water.

I already likened 'fearing God' in our study of the book of Proverbs, to the fear of the son, lest he may hurt the feelings of his father. This is the kind of fear that we should deliver to the coming generations, through the living practical tradition; in order to have prolongation of our days; on account of the fact that the holy days of our grandchildren are to be counted as though our own. As the corrupt son so kills the heart of his parents, that they count their days as lost and shortened. So the pious son or grandson brings joy to the heart of his parents and grandparents, and prolongs their life in the Lord.

(4) If the people are going to possess a land full of good things as a divine gift; there would be greater goodness and better sweetness, for the believers to find in the commandment; saying:

"Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord God of your fathers has promised you – 'a land flowing with milk and honey'" (Deut. 6:3).

As they enter into the land of Canaan, it is fitting for us to enter into the land of the commandment through the obedience to God, in order that our souls would be fulfilled with goodness, and would be in need of nothing more. By it, we would enter into heaven itself, and through it, the Creator of heaven Himself, would transfigure in us.

2. THE COMMANDMENT AS A COMPANION OF THE BELIEVER WHEREVER HE GOES

"Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is one!"

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:4-5).

The pious Jews consider the two verses 4 and 5, as the most wonderful in the Holy Scripture. Reciting them, together with Deut. 11:13-21; Numbers 15:37-41, at least three times per day, would bless him who utter them, and who practically consummates them. The two verses are known as 'Shima,' the first Hebrew word in them. The Lord Christ has quoted these two verses, as being the foremost and greatest commandments; with the addition of the words: "*and with all your mind*" (Mark 12:30).

The Hebrew word used here and translated as "**one**," is (ahad); which does not contradict the dogma of the 'Holy Trinity' in Christianity; namely, '**Trinity in Oneness.'** There is another Hebrew word that can be translated as 'one' – (Yaheed), designating absolute oneness, to which certain other religions hold fast; meaning the oneness of the one essence; namely the atomic oneness that is unbreakable; a word that is not the one used here. Here, we have the faith in the oneness of God, mixed with love, something not required by any other religion.

The Jews used to write down the last letter of the first and last word, in order to draw the attention of the reader to this phrase; being the greatest and most important of the commandments.

❖ He did not say "speak," but he said "*hear*" (4).

'Eve' fell because she spoke to her man with what she did not hear from her God.

The first word said to you by God is "*Hear.;"* If you do hear, you get aware of your way;

And if you fall, you can quickly mend it. As "*How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to the word of the Lord"* (Psalm 119:9).

That is why, and before anything else, keep quiet and hear, lest you fall by your tongue. It is such a great evil for man to be judged by his own mouth[1].

St. Ambrose

What does he mean by saying: "*Jehovah, our God (Eloheemnuw); Jehovah is one"* (4)?

a. The believer treasures the name "**Jehovah**," because it is the name designated to God, (**who dwells among His people)**; "Eloheem" the "**Almighty**" and the "**Creator**." But we treasure it more so, because of His dwelling among His people, in their hearts.

b. If He is the Almighty "Eloheem," He is our Lord; whose might or exalted possibilities are all on our account. We acquire Him to work in and with us.

c. The prophet Moses presented the dogma of the oneness of God, together with a hint to the '**Trinity**,' in a way appropriate to the Jews as infants in the spiritual and theological knowledge at that time. Together with confirming the oneness of God, in saying "*The Lord our God is one God"* (4), he repeats the name of the Lord three times; being a "Trinity."

The prophet Moses presents to us the One God, the spring which floods with what fulfills all the earthly and the heavenly creatures; instead of the belief in several gods, the dry springs, that are unable to go deep into the depths of the soul to quench its thirst.

- There is One God in One God; and not two gods. As it is written, there is One God; One Lord (Jehovah); and not two Lords[2].
- The Law confirms the oneness of the Godhead, speaking of One God. If, as the apostle Paul says about Christ: *"In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"* (Colossians 2:9), we are committed to confess that the Father and the Son are one Godhead[3].

St. Ambrose

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5).

These same words, were said by the Lord Christ, confirming that God will accept nothing but the whole heart, seeking all our love in exchange of all the love He is giving us. By entering into our depths, He makes the heart more straight, the soul more sweet, the love more pure, more giving, and undivided; and turns the inner being into a spring of living water that flows over everyone. Love would not be confined in the prison of the 'self,' but would always fly high in heaven to give generously and without measure, would fly with its two wings as though to heaven, to gain from it its pure and holy features, and then to return to earth to work with a new spirit.

In the last chapter he spoke of the pious man who fears God, the way a son fears his father. Here we see the Philanthropic God, presenting to us the commandment to love Him! We have no knowledge of a king, a ruler, or a leader,

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[1] *St. Ambrose: Duties of the Clergy, Book 1, ch. 2 (7).*
[2] *St. Ambrose: The Christian Fait, Book.1,3 (23).*
[3] *St. Ambrose: The Christian Fait, Book 3, 12 (102).*

who makes a law, and asks his subjects to love him in exchange of his love for them.

He asks us to love Him, being the Lord of all, and being God who makes a covenant with us. He seeks a love that comes from the whole heart, seeing our depths as His heavenly kingdom. He asks us to love Him with all our souls, namely to love Him, not just through the emotions and feelings of the heart, but through true understanding and comprehension. He asks us also to love Him with all our might, namely to use all our energies and talents to express this love.

❖ It always seems fitting to give God your mind, the greatest thing you have[1].

St. Ambrose

❖ We should incite the love of the bridegroom, namely the soul, according to the Scripture: "*You shall love the Lord your God*[2]*."*

St. Ambrose

❖ The expression "*from all…"* we may add that there should not be any division within[3].

St. Basil the Great

St. Gregory of Nyssa, in his talk '*On the Making of Man,*' says: [Human life constitutes a unit with three sides. Something similar is also taught by the apostle Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians, that he prays for them to have the complete grace for the body, the soul, and the Spirit, until the coming of the Lord. We use the term 'the body' to refer to the process of physical fulfillment; 'the soul' to refer to the biological aspect; and the 'spirit' to the mental dimension. In the same way, the Lord instructs the author of the gospel to write before each of the commandment, that the love for God has to be practiced from all the heart, the soul, and the mind (Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27), an expression that embraces the whole human being[4].]

Origen, **St. Augustine** and others, often spoke of the mystery of the figure 3 (from all your heart, from all your soul, and from all your might), as referring to the resurrection together with Christ on the third day. Worshipping God with all the risen heart, with all the soul, and with the entire mind, we proclaim the resurrection of Christ in us; and practice the new life in Him[5].

St. Basil the Great believes that man bears energy of love, either to edify, or to destroy him. That is why, when we love God, we are committed to translate this love into a power of work for edification[6].

"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart" (Deut. 6:6).

If the commandment is not in the heart, it does not exist. But if it occupies the heart, it sets forth to the mind to direct through it man's thoughts and concepts. From another aspect, he who loves God will love His words and commandments. When the commandment occupies the heart, this is a sign of God's possession of it.

The greatest memory is in the heart. When the commandment is stored in the heart, man will never forget it, but will always remember it. All his being will conform according to what is kept in his heart. God asks us to carry the commandment wherever we go. By keeping it in his heart, man will do just that.

"You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them

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[1] *St. Ambrose: Duties of the Clergy, Book 2, 50 (262).*
[2] *St. Ambrose: Concerning Virginity, Book 2:6 (40).*
[3] *Exegetic homilies, hom. 17.*
[4] *On the Making of Man, 8:5.*
[5] *St. Augustine: On Ps. 6.*
[6] *Exegetic Homilies, hom. 17.*

when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deut. 6:7).

When the commandment enters into the heart, the believer becomes able to teach his children and his grandchildren by the language of love and simplicity, together with a flaring zeal and faithfulness. Man, and in particular the children, love to be talked to through the heart; their hearts joyfully accepts what emerges from their parents' hearts.

He says, *"You shall teach them to your children, and shall talk of them"* (7). He asks us not just to recite the commandments, but also to diligently teach them to our children. A father should not take the role of a teacher who gives sermons and orders, but should speak with the language of love; *"to teach and talk."* Entering into the heart, the word of God becomes an integral part of our life, of which we talk by the spirit of love and the language of life.

When the heart of a true believer becomes spacious with love, he would bear a shadow of God's fatherhood. He would feel that all those around him are, as though, his own children. His teaching the commandment will not stop at his children according to the flesh, but will go further to every man, to bring everybody over to glory.

"You shall talk of them when you sit in your house" (7). When the believer sits in his house, with the spouse, the children, the servants, or the friends, he feels as though he is in the house of the Lord. His talk with his household will be in the Lord; what he utters will be what the Lord Himself does; namely, he will joyfully bear the words of the Lord to them; He will talk of nothing but the words of the Lord.

❖ When you get back from the house of the Lord to your house, discuss what you heard there with your household. Do like when you return from a garden with a rose or any kind of flower or fruit in your hand; or when you return from a banquet with some delicious food for those at home. What you bring back from the house of the Lord is of much greater and longer benefit, and will never wither or get corrupt[1].

St. John Chrysostom

"And when you walk by the way" (7): The believer will not be ashamed of talking about the commandment of the Lord even on the way, to strangers.

"When you lie down, and when you rise up" (7): The commandment preoccupies the believer's whole being all day long, until it is time for him to lie down to sleep, when it gets even to his dreams.

"You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes" (Deut. 6:8).

It was the custom in the old world, to bind the hand or the finger with a thread to remind one of something urgent and important.

If the word is to be stored in the heart, yet it should also be written on the hand, namely, to turn it into action. We should testify to the word both by our hearts and by our mouth and deeds; in order to let others feel, hear, and see them.

"They shall be as frontlets between your eyes" (8): so that the believer would meditate on it; and his mind would be preoccupied by it all the time.

"You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deut. 6:9).

It should reign on the heart, the tongue, the hands, the eyes, and the house; so

[1] *Concerning the Statues, hom. 6:18.*

as not to leave an opening through which the enemy can enter to occupy a place in man; whose senses and behavior should all be sanctified; to become a readable message of Christ to everyone.

Some consider the word "write" to be wrongly chosen, claiming that writing was not known at that time. But modern excavations proved that writing was known in the days of Moses,' in the cuneiforms (a language its alphabet is in the shape of nails) and Hebrew alphabets. Moses, and probably others, including Joshua, learned how to write in Egypt (Acts 7:22). Yet, as the majority were illiterate, it was common to use scribes to do the job.

The early Christians used to have certain verses of the Bible, written on the walls and gates of their churches as well as of their houses, to keep them all the time displayed before their eyes,

God has previously commanded the children of Israel to put blood of the Passover lamb on the two doorposts and on the lintel of their houses (Exodus 12:7). And now He commands them to write the commandment on the doorposts and the gates of their houses (Deut 6:9). Thus the blood of the Passover, which grants salvation, would be connected to the commandment. The blood saves us saved from death, to receive, through the commandment, the enjoyment of the union with the word of God, in the worthiness of His blood. In other words, faith in the blood is not to be isolated from the enjoyment of receiving the Holy Bible, and of entering into its depths, to encounter the slain Christ as a personal friend. Union between the blood and the commandment also means union between faith and the practical obedience to God through His commandment.

St. Athanasius the Apostolic believes that the faithful and righteous ministers of the Lord, have become disciples of the Kingdom of heaven, from which they deliver new and old products, and who contemplate on the word of God, while sitting in their houses, lying down, waking up, or walking by the way[1]. Through their enjoyment of the commandment, wherever they go, and under any circumstances, they realize that they are the children of the Kingdom of heaven.

Having talked to us about the commandment and its connection to setting a covenant with God, here, he reveals to us our commitment to enjoying the commandment in our inner life, as a living experience, together with testifying to it at home, among coworkers, and among strangers. This text conforms to the words of the Lord Christ to His disciples, concerning the preaching (Acts 19:8).

The commandment is actually a union with the word of God; who, alone, can take away from man his feeling of isolation; through dwelling in his heart (6); becoming the subject of his preoccupation in his family relationship (7); keeping him company on his way (7), when he lies down, when he rises up (7); during his daily work (8), and filling his whole mind and his inner insight (8).

With the same spirit, the Lord Christ commands His disciple to preach, first in Jerusalem, then in Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the world.

* **These words, which I command, you today shall be in your heart**… to witness to me in Jerusalem.

*** You shall teach them diligently to your children**… and in Judea.

*** And shall talk of them when you sit in your house…** and in Samaria.

*** When you walk by the way**… and to the end of the world.

The call is for a continuous testimony to the Lord and His commandment, but with the spirit of wisdom; in the right time, and in the fitting way.

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[1] *Paschal Epistles, 11:6*

❖ Although I confirm that it is fitting for us to think of God, even more often than we breathe, yet I hope you will do it prudently and within reason. Eating too much honey can cause vomiting, and according to the wise Solomon, there is time for everything. What is good can lose its goodness if not practiced in the right way[1].

St. Gregory of Nyssa

3. THE COMMANDMENT AND THE ENJOYMENT OF BLESSINGS

Having talked about the necessity for man to be bound to the divine commandment with his whole being, wherever he may be, and under all circumstances, the prophet Moses gave a special warning against disregarding the commandment when man enjoys the blessings and the good fortune. Those, although are gifts from God, yet if they occupy the place of the divine commandment in the heart, they will lose their goodness.

"And it shall be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land which he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of good things, which you did not fill, hewn out wells, which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees, which you did not plant – when you have eaten and are full – then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage" (Deut. 6:10-12).

It is God who got His people out of the house of bondage; granted them a flood of blessings, and brought them into the land, which He promised their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet He warns them against diverting from Him, once they get fulfilled and lead a life of pleasure. They should never forget the Lord, but should rather seek him, to join Him in a new heaven and a new land.

If He gave them great cities, which they did not build; instead of wandering in the wilderness carrying their tents like nomads, it is fitting for them to anticipate settling down in the bosom of God the Father, in the higher Jerusalem, with its exalted walls, and buildings which are not built by man.

Given houses full of good things, they should seek Him, the Giver of these good things. Having come to the Promised Land to find wells they did not labor to dig; they should seek the inexhaustible fountain of life. Having been brought into a land with vineyards and olive trees, which they did not plant, to eat and be fulfilled, they should seek the food of angels, the heavenly food that fulfills the heart.

As I enjoy the free gifts of the Lord, it is fitting for me to seek the Giver of these gifts; and not to become preoccupied by the gifts and forget their Giver "*lest I be full and deny you, and say, 'Who is the Lord?'"*(Proverbs 30:6).

❖ When Hezekiah was afflicted, he put on sackcloth and humbled himself before the Lord to save him. But once he was relieved of affliction, he fell through the haughtiness of his heart (2 Kings 30:9).

The children of Israel, when they were afflicted in bondage, they increased greatly in number. Yet once they were left to themselves, they were doomed to destruction[2].

St. John Chrysostom

❖ When you start to sink deep in the pleasures of abundance, remember the potential loss that is sure to follow; as man often spends much on things that would cause

[1] *A Preliminary Discourse Against the Eunomians, 5.*
[2] *In Acts, hom. 16.*

him much harm.

Remember those who brought evil on themselves because of them:

'**Noah**,' who got drunk and was disgracefully exposed; beside the evil things that came as a result of his act! (Genesis 9:20)

'**Esau**,' who lost his firstborn rights because of his greed; and ended up thinking of killing his own brother.

"***The children of Israel*** *sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play"*(Exodus 32:6).

That is why the Holy Bible says: "*When you have eaten and are full – then beware lest you forget the Lord your God"* (See Deut. 6:11, 12), as the people were on the verge of falling into the risks of abundance. It was said: "*But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives"* (1 Timothy 5:6)[1].

St. John Chrysostom

Antioch once faced eminent destruction when its people rebelled against Emperor Theodosius, and defaced his statues and those of the empress in the public place. When he sent his deputies to discipline the rebels, everyone cried out to the Lord seeking His mercy. Once the royal decree of amnesty came, **St. John Chrysostom** fearing that the people might forget their God through the ecstasy of their joy, said to them:

❖ As the catastrophe was eminent, I said it was not the time for preaching, but for praying. Now I say the same thing, even after the fire of fury was extinguished.

Now, and more than ever, it is time for praying, for the alert and cautious soul, it is the time for tears and regret.

When we were under the pressure of temptation, we were motivated to become more wise and religious. But now, when the cloud was lifted up, and scattered, and the judgment was (postponed), I fear that you may fell again in slothfulness, to hear the voice saying: "*When He slew them… they returned and sought diligently for God"* (Psalm 78:34). Your goodness will be proclaimed, if you continue practicing the same degree of piety[2].

St. John Chrysostom

"You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name" (Deut. 6:13).

He asks them to fear the Lord as a Law-Maker and a judge, to serve Him as a Creator, and to take oaths in His name as their only God. Taking oaths in the name of God have been a sign of trust, reverence, and close bond with Him, He went on to say:

"You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you" (Deut. 6:14).

"Taking oaths" in Hebrew (*Tishaabeea*), derived from '*shaaba*,' refers to the soul appealing to God to be a witness, and as a guarantee that a certain pledge uttered by somebody is going to be fully honored and realized. Therefore, he who takes oath is actually proclaiming his complete faith in God, who is capable of realizing what the believer promises his brethren[3].

"For the Lord your God is a jealous God among you; lest the anger of the Lord your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth" (Deut. 6:15).

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[1] *In Acts. hom. 27.*
[2] *Concerning the Statues, hom. 17:2.*
[3] *See Adam Clarke Commentary.*

Having betrothed your souls as a heavenly Groom, it is fitting for you as a betrothed bride, to be faithful to Him, lest His love, would transform into a fiery jealousy that would consume the betraying soul.

"You shall not tempt the Lord your God as you tempted Him in Massah" (Deut. 6:16).

'***Massah***' is a Hebrew word meaning "temptation," the name of a location in the wilderness called 'Meribah' or 'Rephidim;' where the people contended with the prophet Moses, and intended to stone him to death because of thirst (Exodus 17).

The Lord Christ quoted that same expression in His response to one of Satan's temptations (Matthew 4:7). And this principle was followed by **St. Athanasius the Apostolic**, when he fled from the face of the Arians; by the prophet Moses when he fled from Egypt to Median; by David when he hid himself in a cave from the face of Saul; and by Elijah and the prophets hid in their caves from the face of king Ahab[1].

The children of Israel tempted the Lord, saying: *"Is the Lord among us or not?"* (Exodus 17:7). They doubted God's compassion, love, care, and power; and even His presence among them, after all the exalted gifts He granted them; and the infinite love, which He proved by several ways.

❖ I wish we never tempt the Lord, and say: 'If we belong to You, grant us to perform a Miracle[2].'

St. Augustine

"You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, His testimonies, and His statutes which He commanded you" (Deut. 6:17).

He warns us against slothfulness; provoking us to diligently strive to keep the commandment, as the free gift of God does not work in the slothful and the lazy.

4- THE COMMANDMENT AND REMEMBERING THE LIBERATION FROM BONDAGE

"And when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the Lord our God has commanded you?' Then you shall say to your son: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand'" (Deut. 6:20, 21).

Here, the prophet Moses confirms two connected points:

(1) Remembering God's salvation working with us; to thank Him and obey Him without murmur; To remember how He gave us good and great cities we did not build (10); namely, sanctifying the soul, body, mind, feelings, and emotions; as though cities that we got into possession through the divine grace; How He granted us free fulfillment (houses full of good things, which we did not fill); a flood of the springs of the work of the inner Spirit of God (wells we did not dig), and the abundant fruits of the Spirit (vineyards and olive-trees which we did not plant, of which we ate and got fulfilled).

(2) Testifying to God's works, especially among the family (6:20-21); testifying that we were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out with a mighty hand. This testimony is tasted by the suckling infant, the little kid, the husband, the wife, and everyone we encounter; who gets in touch with the flaring of our inner heart with love, gratitude, and obedience; and not with the outer appearances of spiritless worship.

Here, the Holy Bible gives the new generation the right to enquire about the

[1] *Apologia De Fuga, 25.*
[2] *St. Augustine: On Ps. 91 (90).*

meanings of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments, namely, what is behind the divine commandment, the laws, and the religious rites. The believer receives everything divine, through tradition from previous generations, yet tradition does not imply vagueness and lack of knowledge. It is fitting for us to enter into the depths of the divine word, and to understand every evangelic law, and every worshipping rite, in order to hand it over to the next generation, to worship by both the spirit and the mind, according to the words of the apostle Paul: *"I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing also with the understanding"*(1 Corinthians 14:15). It is fitting for the believer to dedicate all his energies, including his mind, and understanding, on the account of the kingdom of God.

❖ When you cross over the Red Sea, when you are led away from your transgressions by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, you will understand secrets you did not know. That is what happened to 'Joseph,' when he came to Egypt and heard a language he did not know… You will realize where your heart should be (Matthew 6:21); something that, so far, when I speak, many understand and marvel; while others stand like idiots; hearing a strange language they do not understand; to hasten to cross over and learn[1].

St. Augustine

The prophet presents to us the secret behind every commandment, a statute, and a rite; which is the realization of God's exalted love, and His salvation work for man; in order to carry us over from bondage, and to bring us over to the freedom of the glory of the children of God; saying:

"Then you shall say to your son: 'we were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

And the Lord showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe against Egypt, Pharaoh, and his entire household.

Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. 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" (Deut. 6:21-25).

It is the right of the son to enquire, and to get the convincing and satisfactory answer, that comes from a practical experience; as is clear in the words of the prophet Moses. Let us tell our children how we lived for some time in bondage; and how the Lord set us free from its burden. Let us not justify ourselves, as though we are angels, who carry a different nature from that of the new generation. Let us in weakness, confirm to them that we have been captivated in the darkness of the devil, before the grace of God lifted us up and set us free. This way, we shall provide our children with the spirit of hope, and give ourselves true dignity in their eyes. We should be prepared to answer those who ask us about the secret of the hope we have. Our faith is not provided to irrational beings. God, who created the reason and granted it to us, would never ask us to disregard our reason, but to sanctify it and make it grow.

This way, our children would realize the secret of the strength in us, that it is not from us, but from God, who works in all generations, who wishes for all to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

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[1] *St. Augustine: On Ps. 81.*

It is therefore fitting for us to realize what is behind our faith dogmas and our worship practices, which are:

1. We have been slaves to the devil; and the Lord set us free of his bondage to be counted as the children of God (21).

2. Our philanthropic God performs great signs and wonders on account of those believing in Him, and presents His possibilities on account of our salvation.

3. His desire is to grant us the new land; namely, to bring us over to the new high heavenly Jerusalem.

4. That He might preserve us alive forever; that death would have no authority over us (24). The commandment and the worship are an encounter with the Lord, the Life and Grantor of life.

5. To bear His righteousness in us; to be justified before God the Father; hiding in His Holy and righteous Son (25).

Thus we may realize what is behind the words of the Lord our God; that they are for our benefit, our life, our glory, and our eternal sanctification. On another aspect, the concepts that we present to our children or to others should emerge from a practical taste of God's work with us.

The book of Deuteronomy often refers to "swearing" to their fathers to give them the Promised Land (23). God swears by His divine self to confirm the truth of His promises; as He did to Abraham after his consent to sacrifice his own son Isaac, saying: "*By Myself I have sworn; says the Lord"* (Genesis 24:2).

When Abraham asked his servant, who ruled over all that he had, to swear, he instructed him to put his hand under his thigh (Genesis 24:2), as a reference to the source of life.

The Hindus swear by the water of the River Ganges; the Hebrews by the five books of the prophet Moses; the Christian makes the sign of the cross on himself, and kiss the Holy Bible, to confirm the truth of a promise[1].

[1] *Adam Clarke Comm.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 6)

YOUR COMMANDMENT IS MY RICH COMPANION

❖ By Your love, You brought me over to the storehouses of Your goods
You care for me, to be in need of nothing.
To acquire You, and to hold fast to Your commandment, is better than anything.
It is my rich companion, who fulfills my whole being.

❖ Yes; Let Your commandment enter into my heart.
Let me keep it in my depths; to be my companion wherever I go.

❖ Let me set forth with it together with my children and grandchildren.
As, from what is in the heart, the tongue speaks.
I have no inheritance to offer my beloved, but Your commandment.

❖ Let me utter it on my way.
In both appropriate and inappropriate times; yet with fitting prudence.
Let me be preoccupied by it alone.

❖ Your commandment brings me over into the heavenly Canaan.
To enjoy a city that is not built by man.
And to quench my thirst by the water of living springs, those of Your Holy Spirit.
And to pluck the fruits of the Spirit; to bear Your features in myself.

❖ Your commandment sets me free from the bondage of the devil.
And brings me over to Your heavenly sanctuaries.
Great and rich is Your commandment.
Let it always be my companion while awake, and during my sleep.

CHAPTER 7
NO FELLOWSHIP WITH IDOLATRY

Having called His people to worship Him through getting into a covenant with Him, God commanded them to wipe out the inhabitants of that region. The divine commands here seem very strict, concerning the destruction of idolatry and everything related to it, including the idolaters themselves. The warning against having any connection to idolatry and idolaters was extremely firm.

1. No fellowship with idolaters 1 – 4.
2. A warning against idolatry 5 – 11.
3. Blessings for keeping the covenant 12 – 16.
4. A promise of conquest over evil 17 – 26.

1. NO FELLOWSHIP WITH IDOLATERS

Here, he gives a firm warning against any relationship with idolaters. Whoever sets a fellowship with the fruitless works of darkness, will not be able to enter into a fellowship with God. The goal of this warning is to avoid having snares of evil before them.

"When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them" (Deut. 7:1-2)

We have already dealt with the issue of war in the introduction. The goal of this commandment is to create a pure church, a holy family, and a righteous kingdom in the Lord, kept from the abominations of idolatry.

We often fall into an erroneous evaluation of what came in the Old Testament, disregarding the language of time and circumstances that prevailed around the people at that time, which were totally different from what are prevailing today in the era of grace; and their concepts were different from our concepts. That is why they were in need of strict commandments that support their salvation; and which could be understood in our present life as symbols in the following ways:

a. ***"You shall make no covenant with them"*** (2); means rejecting any compromise with sin, or initiating a debate with it.

b. ***"Nor shall you make marriages with them"*** (3). No fellowship should be between the believer and the non-believer in matrimony; nor between light and darkness. Union between them on the level of family relationship would be realized at the expense of the salvation of the soul, and the holiness of the family.

c. ***"You shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down the wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire"*** (5): means purifying the heart, the temple of the Lord, against setting other gods, like selfishness, vainglory, or fulfilling the lusts of the body.

d. ***"You shall show no mercy on them"*** (2). Let the word of God be like a two-edged sword (Hebrew 4:12); that utterly separates and plainly discerns between truth and vanity.

e. ***"You shall not be afraid of them"*** (18). A spiritual man is one with authority; who is not afraid of sin or of the devil; and trusts the Lord who gives victory (1 Corinthians 15:57).

On His side, God brings them over to the Promised Land, and casts away many bigger and stronger nations before them. God's might is unconquerable, and the realization of His promise is unquestionable. On His people's side, they should refrain of entering into any covenant or matrimonial relationships with them; and destroy them altogether.

As far as their number is concerned, Israel, as a nation, according to human reckoning, could not confront those nations, with their long military experience, and knowledge of the strategy of the land. But God can realize the impossible.

Sin seems strong; and man seems extremely weak before it. The devil, likewise, with his might, his evil experience, and wicked planning may seem to be such a serious foe for man to confront. But the believer, in whom God works with His Holy Spirit, and to whom He presents a union with God the Father in His Son Jesus Christ, bears heavenly possibilities, by which he can destroy all the energies of evil and the devil. By Jesus Christ, he can gain the spirit of conquest, can take away from Satan, his authority on the whole being of man; can deprive him of all his capabilities, and make a public spectacle of him by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:15).

In our study of the writings of **St. John Cassian**, we saw that **Origen** believes that there are eight main sins in the life of man. **St. Evigarus** adopted the same view that spread in the writings of the fathers of the east and west. The people of God conquered Pharaoh and his army or people; and conquered as well, the seven nations mentioned here. It is as though God grants His Church the spirit of conquest over the eight main sins.

God did not allow them to have any kind of relationship with the pagan nations: to have them as renters, as taxpayers, and not even as servants. He did not allow them to make a covenant with them, or to have mercy on them. Along several generations, He gave those nations enough chances to repent. Yet with the passing of time, as the successive generations came more corrupt than the ones before them, their cup of evil was completely full.

In the era of grace, it turned from sinners to sin. These commandments remain living and active; we should not let a single law of the beasts of sin in our land. It is fitting for us to crucify every lust in us, and bring it to death, in order to bear the life of the risen Christ in us.

No marriage with idolaters

"Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, not take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from Me, to serve their gods; so the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly" (Deut. 7:3, 4).

The goal of this commandment is purity. God's intention is not to discriminate between different nations, but He longs for all to become one in Him. He seeks a royal generation, a special people, and a renewed humanity under the leadership of the new Adam, as one head for all the believers of the world. And as humanity was not ready yet for this holy union, He separated the believers from the idolaters, and limited their freedom of marriage.

This divine law came for the sake of man's weakness and sin, together with his ignorance of the eternal plan of God. Because man has lost his concept of marriage, as the establishment of a holy Church, prepared for the eternal glory; He presented this commandment.

The law came harsh on idolatry and its abominations and wicked customs;

with the hope that the idolaters might reconsider themselves, and return to the worship of the true God. This is what verse 5 confirms; This commandment was not meant to favor one nation over another; as marriage of a believer to a non-believer, might draw the heart of the first toward idolatry, to fall under judgment. The judgment of the non-believing wife would also be double; as through her worship of idols, she would draw the children of God to evil. Banning her marriage to a believer might give her a chance to reconsider herself and her eternity.

Some, especially those of great wealth and high positions, might seek entrance into family relationship with beautiful idolater women whom the devil used through marriage, as it happened before, when "*the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. And the Lord said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh"* (Genesis 6:2, 3).

Many nowadays have lost their life in the Lord through their marriage with those who do not know the Lord. In his prayer and confession, Ezra the scribe, said: "*The holy seed is intermingled with the peoples of the lands"* (Ezra 9:2); "*Should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people of these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor?"*(Ezra 9:14)

The apostle Paul advises us, saying: "*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?"* (2 Corinthians 6:14-16) Because of the stronger influence of evil, the pagan spouse pushes the believer toward the wide road of evil, through persistent strong seductions; and not the other way round; because life with God is an entrance into the narrow road.

"For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; So the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly" (Deut. 7:4).

If God longs to shape His worshippers to conform to His image, and to become partners in the divine nature, the vain gods likewise, shape their worshippers to carry their nature, and become vain. Once man carries such a corrupt nature, he will not have peace until he manages to draw all around him toward vanity and corruption, and all of them will perish together. That is what is meant by saying, "*the anger of God will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly."* When God takes away His grace, care, and mercy, from him who persists on vanity, he, himself, will become vain.

On another aspect, the cup of evil of the Jews was almost full; and they came to have a last chance: either to receive and embrace God "the Truth" by their whole heart; or to condemn themselves by themselves, to be cut off, together with those nations, whom God commanded them to cut off. God has no partiality. Like those nations whose cup of evil was full; and who brought themselves to perdition, so will be the Jews who embrace them. They would be filling their own cup as well; and would end up having the same destiny as the pagan nations.

Those who marry idolaters are actually marrying their idols, and carrying their features, namely vanity, instead of the true God.

2. A WARNING AGAINST IDOLATRY

It did not stop at having no marriage relationship with idolaters, but the

believers are commanded to wipe out every trace of the idols.

"But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire" (Deut. 7:5).

This command was previously issued (Exodus 23:24). It was said about king Josiah that *"he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images. They broke down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and the incense altars which were above them he cut down; and the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images, he broke in pieces, and made dust of them, and scattered it on the graves of those who have sacrificed to them"* (2 Chronicles 34:3, 4). In a like way, this has been carried out in the early Church, when the books of magic were publicly burnt (Acts 19:19).

This command has been as though, for paving the way of the Lord Jesus; who, having no fellowship with the darkness. It had to be destroyed, so that men would receive the light in their life. It is indeed a very long way. Yet, our Christ, in every generation, seeks the souls that are ready to receive Him through their own will, to let Him enter and reign, and shine His light in them.

Although this applies to the pagan nations, as societies that persisted on opposing the worship of the true God, and on spreading the worship of idols, yet, it was a different situation for the few individuals who came to receive faith, rejected idolatry, and got purified of all its abominations; those called 'Proselytes' by the Jews.

To commit the people of God to respond to this warning, he gave them the following justifications:

(1) **God has chosen them for Himself:**

"For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a treasured possession above all the peoples on the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6).

"A holy people": this was repeated in Deuteronomy 14:2, 21; 26:19; 28:9. The word ***"holy"*** has two meanings in the New Testament: the first dedicated to the service of God; and the second pure and splendid. The word **"holy"** refers to the dedication of man's heart and his whole being to God; to become His own; separated from all evil. However, some believe the word to imply that man would become wholly pure from everything earthly; his being would be drawn to a holy heavenly life, to live in a fellowship with the Holy One. These two features should be combined in the people as a whole, and in every believer who enjoy the divine call.

If God has granted them the honor of choosing them over all the peoples on the face of the earth, how could they offend Him by choosing the idols instead of Him?! After God intended to lift them up above all the peoples; are they willing to get themselves down to the level of joining the idolatrous nations?! After God intended for them to become His own?! Wouldn't they intend for Him to be His own as well; with no one beside Him?!

Saying *"a treasured possession"* implies that they would become God's own; and they have no more right to act on their own, but according to the will of Him, who acquired them. The apostle Peter quoted this phrase from the Septuagint version, saying: *"You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people"* (1 Peter 2:9).

(2) **Choosing them was through His free grace; with nothing in them to make them worthy of this choice**.

If *"In a multitude of people is a king's glory"* (Proverb 14:28); yet God the King of kings did not care for such multitude.

"The Lord did not set His love on you nor chose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples" (Deut. 7:7).

When God chose them, He actually chose one person – Abraham; and when they started as a nation in the land of Egypt, they were about 70 souls.

❖ After saying, *"Of His fullness we have all received,"* he added, *"and grace upon grace"* (John 1:16), as by grace, the Jews were saved. The Lord chose them, not because of their great number, but for the sake of their fathers (Deut. 7:7). They were not chosen because of their good works, but by God's grace, they got that honor. We, as well, will be saved by grace; yet not in that same way, nor for those same goals; but for what is greater and more exalted. The grace in us is not like that in them. We were not just given the forgiveness of sins (as like them, we have all sinned); but we have also been granted righteousness, holiness, adoption to God, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, in a more glorified and abundant way[1].

St. John Chrysostom

St. Ambrose wrote to Emperor Theodosius pleading to him to submit to God, his Creator, and to become like Him. God, in His love, and with His free grace, forgives the sinners and extends to them his blessings; not for the sake of their worthiness, but for the riches of His grace. The emperor should likewise, wash the feet of others, in order to become the subject of God's pleasure and the joy of the heavenly creatures.

❖ Therefore, O Emperor, I address my words, not only about you, but also to you. As much as you became glorified, it is fitting for you to submit completely to your Creator. It is written: 'When the Lord your God brings you to a foreign land, and eats the fruits of others, do not say: It is because of my strength and righteousness, that God granted me this; but it is the Lord your God who did.'

As it is the Lord Christ, with His mercies, who granted you all this, for the love of His body; namely the church, offer water for His feet; Kiss His feet!

It is not enough to forgive him who committed a sin, but, for the sake of your love for peace, try to mend them and give them comfort.

Pour oil over Christ's feet, in order that the whole house where He dwells, would be filled with your sweet fragrance, which will give pleasure to all present, namely, you should honor those humiliated, so that there would be joy for the angels of God over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10), for the apostles and for the prophets[2].

St. Ambrose

(3) **He chose them out of His faithfulness to His covenant with their fathers**; saying:

"But because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments" (Deut. 7:8, 9).

"But because the Lord loves you": His divine love is free. According to the

[1] *In John hom. 14:2.*
[2] *St. Ambrose: Letter 50:26.*

prophet Hosea: *"I will love them freely"* (Hosea 14:4). He loves because He so desires.

"Because He would keep the oath": He Keeps His word, which carried exalted covenants; counting Himself in debt for everything He promised and swore to consummate. He has actually realized this by bringing them out of Egypt, despite their unworthiness.

This exodus was realized ***"with a mighty hand;"*** demonstrating here the role of the Word of God, the second Person, called 'the divine Hand.' **St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says: [Just as the hand is in the bosom, so is the Son, is in the bosom. The Son is the Hand, and the Hand is the Son, by whom everything was done, according to the Scripture: *"For all those things, My hand has made"* (Isaiah 66:2). He brought His people by His hand (Deut. 7:8); namely by His Son[1].]

The Son, who brought the people out of Egypt through Moses, the leader of His people, is He who incarnated to bring by Himself, His believers out of the bondage of Satan.

As God is faithful to His promises, it is fitting for His own, to be faithful to Him; not by writing poetry, filled with vain eloquence; but through faithfulness in keeping His commandments; not glorifying Him by words, but by illuminating works.

"For a thousand generations:" He is the faithful fountain of love through the generations.

(4) **He allowed for the chastisement that seems harsh, for the sake of the faithful few; God does not desire the perdition of anyone; but He is faithful and loving.**

"And He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face.

Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them" (Deut. 7:10, 11).

It is the love outpouring along the generations; Yet, those who persist on rejecting it; those who hate the truth; they actually hate themselves; as they lose love; and become submitted to the divine wrath; which is, unlike the human reactionary anger, is actually a deprivation of the soul of her enjoyment of the source of her life and peace; casting herself by herself into eternal perdition.

He is the Keeper of the covenant, the Faithful and the True in His promises; the Grantor of life to those who attach themselves to Him; whereas those who give Him their backs and not their faces, they are getting themselves into perdition and death instead of life.

The idolaters and God-haters are incapable of causing God any harm; but are bringing it upon them; as, according to the Psalmist: *"Your hand will find all your enemies; Your right hand will find those who hate you. You shall make them as a fiery oven in the time of your anger. The Lord shall swallow them up in His wrath. And the fire shall devour them. Their offspring You shall destroy from the earth; And their descendants from among the sons of men. For they intended evil against You. They devised a plot, which they are not able to perform. Therefore You will make them turn their back; You will make ready their arrows on Your string toward their faces"* (Psalm 21:8-12).

God often allows the wicked to taste the bitterness of their transgression; as "*For the wicked there is no peace; so my God says."* And the wise Solomon says: "*If*

[1] *Discourses Against the Arians, 4:26.*

the righteous will be recompensed on the earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner?" (Proverb 11:31)

We do not deny that God may allow some wicked to attain authority, power, riches, or temporal success etc. God may grant them these things in this world; either for the sake of justice, because of their temporal strife; or for the sake of provoking them to repentance. Yet they will never enjoy the inner peace or the true joy; the pledge of heaven, as long as they walk in their evil ways and their rebellion.

Having referred to God's care for His people; presenting to them and their fathers true divine promises; yet this divine discretion does not imply licentiousness; as, according to the apostle: "*Do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh"* (Galatians 5:13). This is what the book of Deuteronomy confirms whenever it refers to the choice of God of His people.

3. THE BLESSINGS OF KEEPING THE COVENANT

Having called them first to keep the covenant, as a positive reaction to His keeping His covenant with them, despite their unworthiness, revealing to them the serious consequences of breaking it and diverting to idolatry and its abominations; He does not stop there; but He also presents to them the positive blessings of faithfulness in keeping the covenant.

"Then it shall come to pass, because you listen to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the Lord Your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers.

And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb, and the fruit of your land, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flock, in the land of which He swore to your fathers to give you" (Deut. 7:12, 13).

Together with God's choice of us, out of His exalted divine love, He gives us complete freedom, to receive or to reject His righteousness; to keep or to reject His commandment. And in case we chose to keep it, He would grant us the possibility of execution if we ask for His help.

God, the Merciful, on His side, initiated to proclaim the covenant, to give the promises, and to present His exalted grace, it remains, on our side to respond to Him, in order to enjoy the continuation of His pouring graces and gifts.

(1) The first blessing of keeping the covenant is our realization of His love. ***"He will love you"*** (13); namely, our entrance into the circle of the divine love, which fulfills the soul, not as something He has not previously done, but which He will reveal to us and will let us enjoy more. "*In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation of our sins"* (1 John 4:13). He loved us first, but we shall not realize this love, and He shall not reveal Himself to us, unless we practically respond to His love. "*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me, will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him"* (John 14:21).

(2) ***"And bless you"*** (13); As a fruit of the mutual love between God and man, the believer will enjoy fellowship in the blessed life; namely, he will experience the heavenly life that knows nothing, but the perpetual joy in the Lord. This blessing, the believer enjoys in the present life as a pledge for the coming life. ***"Your grain, your new wine, and your oil"*** (13), which was repeated in 11:14; 12:17; 14:23; and 23:51, These are the main crops of Palestine; referring to abundance, joy, and spiritual success (Genesis 22:17).

(3) ***"And multiply you"***(13). The increase in the fruit of the womb, in crops,

and in possessions (Genesis 1:28; 9:1), were of the divine promises to men of the Old Testament, corresponding to the stature of the believer at that time.

(4) **"You shall be blessed above all peoples"** (14). When man separates himself from the world to become God's own; dedicated to His service; he would bear features, different from those of others. God would lift him up to enjoy what others do not, to become "*above all the peoples*." That is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, as well as in the life of everyone of its members; setting out of the church a congregation as though of angels; with special spiritual possibilities; Their law of life becomes the Law of Christ, which seems to others as something humanly. Impossible! The spiritual man, in his meekness and humility, becomes great, awesome, and one of inner authority.

(5**) Perpetually spiritually productive**, in his inner life and in drawing others to faith; as it is said, "***There shall not be a male or female barren among you** (namely, bears the fruit of the Spirit**) or among your livestock** (namely, bears the spiritual fruit of the body) "* (14). He who is faithful in his covenant with God, will not know barrenness; but will become like a productive mother who gives birth to many with the Spirit of the Lord. He enjoys adoption to God; and catches many souls for the Lord, by sanctifying the soul and also the body (the cattle).

(6) The **well being of the soul, the mind, and the body**. When man's heart and mind are purified from every worship foreign from the Lord, the Lord purifies his whole being – even his body – of every possible ailment.

"And the Lord will take away from you all sickness, and will afflict you with none of the terrible diseases of Egypt which you have known, but will lay them on all those who hate you" (Deut. 7:15).

Notice here how Moses quotes his memories of his experiences in Egypt.

(7) **A master and not a slave**: as when man bows to sin for the sake of its pleasure, he would become its slave, and would not practice the right of authority granted to him by God; who says to him: ***"You shall destroy all the peoples whom the Lord your God delivers over to you; your eye shall have no pity on them; nor shall you serve their gods; for that will be a snare to you" (Deut. 7:16).***

Thus God provided man with everything to have authority on, and to eat, not to be enslaved and be eaten. Although God set man a master upon everything, yet he worshipped the stones, the wood, and the evil spirits that became snares to him. He became a slave to those over whom he was meant to have authority.

4. A PROMISE OF CONQUEST OVER EVIL

When God called Joshua to take over the leadership as a successor of the prophet Moses, to cross with the people over the River Jordan, and to bring them into the Promised Land, His commandment to him was always, "*Do not be afraid"* (Joshua 1). Fear is a denial of faith in the Lord; of His care and love; and a disregard of the Almighty God. If the believer looks back at the past history of the church, as well as at his personal life, he will find continuous confirmation and practical experience of God's care, might, fatherhood, and wisdom.

"You shall not be afraid of them; but you shall remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt; the great trials which your eyes saw; the signs and the wonders; the mighty hand and the outstretched arm, by which the Lord your God brought you out. So shall the Lord your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid" (Deut. 17:17-19).

It is fitting for the believer not to fear; He should not say: 'My enemy is stronger than I am; How can I overcome him?' but he should say, together with the

prophet Elisha: "*Those who are with us are more than those who are with them"* (2 Kings 6:16); and as it was said: "*Let the weak say: 'I am strong'"*(Joel 3:10). As through our Lord Jesus, a believer gets the spirit of strength, not that of defeat and failure, we should not get disturbed before trials, afflictions, and sins.

The sources of his conquest are:

(1) The believer does not depend upon his own energy in his spiritual war, but upon God who fights on his behalf. It is said: ***"Moreover the Lord your God will send the hornets among them, until those who are left, who hide themselves from you, are destroyed"*** (20). The Lord fights on our behalf in our spiritual war. Yet, for the sake of our spiritual peace, He will not end the battle instantly, lest we fall victims to pride; and the beasts of the field (haughtiness – selfishness – pride) would attack us: "***And the Lord your God will drive out these nations before you little by little; you will be unable to destroy them at once; lest the beasts of the field become too numerous for you"*** (22).

(2) God does not just support His believers, but He defends them through His presence among them:

"You shall not be terrified of them; for the Lord your God, the great and awesome God, is among you" (Deut. 7:21).

The greatest thing that the believer enjoys in his spiritual battle, is not gaining conquests from the hand of the Lord, as much as feeling His presence in his depths.

(3) God's wisdom and His plan for His people. Although He promised them a complete conquest, yet He grants it to them gradually, lest they may fall in pride, or because what is easily gained, may be lost through the spirit of haughtiness; that is why it is said:

"The Lord your God will drive out those nations before you little by little; you will be unable to destroy them at once, lest the fields of the field become too numerous for you.

But the Lord your God will deliver them to you, and will inflict defeat upon them until they are destroyed" (Deut. 7:22, 23).

It is not difficult for God to wipe out those nations, all at once, to let his people take over the land. But, in this case the Promised Land would probably turn into a wilderness in which the beasts roam, and the fertile field would become barren. So it is fitting for us in our spiritual life, as well as in church ministry, to have faith in God's wisdom, who always works in the fullness of time, in the right time, and with the way He sees fitting.

(4) Salvation will be final and definite:

"And He will deliver their kings into your hand, and you will destroy their name from under heaven; no one shall be able to stand against you until you have destroyed them" (Deut. 7:24).

If the main issue of the whole book is the divine covenant, the book concentrated on the Person of God as its center, "*The Lord your God is a consuming fire; a jealous God."*

(5) It is a conquest of holiness and not out of greed. The goal of our struggle is to live holy like the Holy One*;* to be purified of every uncleanness, to enjoy the righteous of Christ and the sanctification by the Holy Spirit, and not to have a material goal.

"You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold that is upon them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be

snared by it; for it is an abomination to the Lord your God.

Nor shall you bring an abomination into your house, lest you be doomed to destruction like it; but you shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it is an accursed thing" (Deut. 7:25, 26).

He warns them against the spirit of greed and every abomination, because the inner enemy is far more dangerous than the outer one. He intends to grant them authority to reign in place of the nations. He seeks from them to bear authority in their depths, that of being liberated of every inner abomination and evil lust.

"You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire" (25). This commandment, like other commandments, remained alive in spirit in the New Testament, as we are committed to destroy every source of sin without delay or slothfulness. And as the Lord Christ says: *"If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell"* (Matthew 5:29-30).

God does not accept half solutions, but seeks complete sanctification, that is why the commandment came repeating: "*Do not touch; Do not taste anything unclean."*

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 7)

HOW COULD I FEAR AN ENEMY?

❖ You have granted your people conquest over Pharaoh and his hosts.
And now, You long to grant me conquest over Satan and his angels.
You have fought with and by them seven nations.
Grant me strength to conquer all sins.

❖ I made a covenant with You.
How can I make a covenant with any sin?!
You have received me a member in the heavenly family.
How can I unite with any evil?
You have set an altar in my depths.
How can I leave an altar for the idol in my heart?!
You made me a soldier in Your salvation army.
How can I fear or be terrified of an enemy?!

❖ I will not cease to strive by Your grace.
For You counted me as your own son.
A member in Your holy congregation.
Who has the right to enjoy Your true and faithful promises.

❖ You loved me before I know You.
Let me pay You back by my love and obedience.
Grant me to keep Your covenant.
You are amazing; O Keeper of the promise.
Let me keep it, in order to enjoy the blessed life.
To bear the fruit of a spirit that will never dry up.
To enjoy the peace of the soul, the mind and the body.
To enjoy persistent conquests.

CHAPTER 8

THE AFFLICTIONS AND BLESSINGS OF THE WILDERNESS

Because the pagan peoples in Canaan cared for gods, especially those which they thought were the source of fertility, growth, and reproduction, the prophet Moses confirmed that it is the grace of God that is the source of all blessings. In this chapter Moses reveals to his people that the secret behind the wandering in the wilderness, is that, although God allows His people to enter into affliction, yet His eyes are compassionate to them in the midst of their affliction, until He brings them out of it, to thank God, and to realize His exalted goodness toward them.

God in His love for man, while He grants him His life-giving commandment to give him Himself, to enter with him into a relationship of love and to present to him blessings in abundance, with the same love, He brings him into the narrow road; Why?

a. **For justification**: "*To humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not*" (2).

b. **For crowning**: Having been justified by being brought to death through affliction, we prove worthy of getting greater blessings; "*For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs…*" (7).

c. **For chastisement**: "*As a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you*" (5).

d. **To keep you from falling into pride or self- righteousness**: "*not to say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth'*" (17).

e. **To give us the chance to see God,** to get in touch with Him, and to enjoy His works in new experiences: "*He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know*" (3). In the midst of the furnace of fire, the three young men gained a new experience, when the Son of God appeared among them to turn the fire into dew. So, together with the fire of affliction, the believer will experience a new vision of God, and a heavenly taste of food, counted as new to him.

f. **Transforming the energies from evil, to new energies of edification:** "*Who brought water for you out of the rock of flint*" (15). If our senses and our energies became hard as flint, God will bring from them fountains of water that quench the thirsty souls; and turn the wilderness into a divine paradise.

1. Keeping the commandment is the goal of the wilderness 1-2.
2. The compassionate eyes of God amid the wilderness 3-4.
3. A fatherly chastisement 5.
4. An abundance after the wilderness 6-9.
5. Thanksgiving and remembrance of God's blessings 11-16.
6. Not leaning upon oneself 17-18.
7. Not leaning upon foreign gods 19-20.

1- KEEPING THE COMMANDMENT IS THE GOAL OF THE WILDERNESS

We have seen how the encounter with the Person of God Himself, is connected to keeping His commandment. The goal of the commandment He presents, is for man to conform to the Spirit of God, to get back to his origin – the image and the likeness of God. By that the image is drawn to the origin, and the origin will find pleasure in

His living image proclaimed in man. If God has not allowed His people to cross over from Egypt to Canaan in a short time, but let them make it in years, that was to test their depths, in order that they may keep His commandment, to enjoy it, to live by it, and to inherit the heavenly Canaan.

"Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers.

And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you keep His commandment or not" (Deut. 8:1, 2).

It is obvious that the issue of obedience; namely, the enjoyment of the commandment of the Lord, was the goal of those forty years in the wilderness. If those years refer to our temporal life, which is just like a perpetual journey, during which we cross over from the land of bondage to enter into the heavenly Canaan, it is fitting for us to concentrate on the word of God, enjoy His commandment, and strive by His Holy Spirit, to practice obedience to it; and that through our union with the incarnate Word, who, "though He was the Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (Hebrew 5:5). By our union with Him, we enjoy the Word; and gain the honor of fellowship with Him in His nature; namely, the honor of the perfect obedience to God the Father.

What is our commitment, as far as the commandment is concerned?

(1) **Accepting all the commandments**. As the commandments are one integral unit, either we accept them as a whole, or be counted as though rejecting them all. Accepting the commandments in their depth, is an acceptance of the Person of the divine Word working in us. Either we accept Him, to dwell in Him, and to let Him abide in us; or to become outside Him, and not enjoy Him. The Word of God cannot be divided!

(2) **Saying "be careful,"** this implies getting preoccupied with, and caring for the commandments; to let them draw our hearts and minds, and occupy our whole being. He, who accepts the incarnate Word of God, will praise by his whole being, and not just by his tongue, saying: "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine" (Songs 6:3).

(3) **Saying "to observe,"** the prophet proclaims that the commandment is not merely a theoretical thought to be preoccupied with; nor a philosophy that we embrace; nor a principle of which we talk; but a life we practice.

The goal of the commandment is to bring man back, as though to the paradisiacal life, to hear what was said to his parents Adam and Eve, to live, to multiply, and to have authority over the earth. The prophet says: "*that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess*." By the commandment we would acquire the Word of God, the Giver of life, live, produce many fruits, have children in the Lord, enter into the heavenly life, and possess, to say together wit St. John the Theologian: "He has made us kings and priests to His God and Father" (Revelation 1:6).

Of the blessings of the commandment, is to remember God's dealings with us; as He brings us into the wilderness to let us discover our humility and weakness; then to proclaim to Him either our observance of the commandment or our rejection of it. To make us realize that all what take place around us, are not, as some assume, mere coincidence, but happen through a divine wisdom and according to an exalted plan, to let us enjoy divine blessings amid the wilderness.

In the epistle of James it is said: "God tempts no one" (James 1:13); whereas

here he says: "He tests you"(3). **St. Augustine** says: [We have to understand that there are two kinds of temptations. A temptation that deceives, and another that justifies. Concerning the one that deceives, it is said, "God tempts no one;" whereas, concerning the one which justifies, it is said, "He tests you[1]."]

This chapter reveals the shortest and safest road that leads to the heavenly Canaan; namely, the discovery of God's plan through the past events. The historical events seem to some as being temporal and human. But, the pure heart feels through these events the proclamations of God. The journey of life, although including several events; yet all of them are like threads interwoven together to proclaim the unbroken twine of God's care.

2- THE COMPASSIONATE EYES OF GOD AMID THE WILDERNESS

"So, He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna, which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years" (Deut. 8:3,4).

"**He humbled you**": The wandering in the wilderness was a punishment, which came on the previous generation, in order to motivate the present generation toward humility and submission.

Having reached the outskirts of Canaan, it is fitting for them not to forget the long period of the wilderness; as it was for them like a school where they learned that man is a hungry being who needs a kind of food he, or his fathers did not knew; the manna that came down from heaven (Exodus 16:28); namely, the Word of God, the Giver of life.

The believer realizes that God cares for all his needs, grants him garments that do not wear out and keeps his feet from swelling. God cares for his food, drink, clothing and his health. God supports and fulfills his life, in His own divine way – by the heavenly manna. God who grants man the bread to fulfill his body, is Himself who grants his soul His divine mysteries, "the spiritual manna," to fulfill its needs. Whoever concentrates his sight on the material bread, would become indebted to the dust for what it presents to him; whereas he, who concentrates his sight on the living knowledge of God, would become indebted to Him with his life.

He allows temptations, to make us feel humility, yet He allows it within the limits of our benefit and edification, so that we do not come out of it hungry or naked or ill; but victorious, grown-ups, and crowned with glory. He allows temptations, for us to discover the true God, His care, mercies, and love!

If He allowed them to wander in the wilderness, yet there, they did not need to plow the earth, to plant and water it, to gather the crops, to grind the grains, to bake the bread, or to cook the food. They did not need someone to weave fabrics for them, to sew garments, or to make sandals or shoes. They did not need physicians, medications, or hospitals. The garments and footwear of their children did not wear out; but grew bigger, with the continuous growth of their bodies.

The Lord Christ quoted verse 4, when He responded to Satan, who asked him to turn the stones into bread (Matthew 4:3, 4).

In the midst of the wilderness, the people kept on eating the same food, morning, noon, and evening, all along the years. Likewise, they did not change their

[1] *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tract. 43:5.*

clothes. Although they walked through a dry and barren wilderness, yet they were fulfilled by God's exalted care, to confirm to them, that their true fulfillment is not in food, drink, clothing, adornments, or luxurious life, but in God's love, and the enjoyment of His exalted fatherhood. And as the Lord Christ commands us: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). He commands His disciples as well, saying: "I say to you, 'Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?'" (Matthew 6:25); and from His apostles, He enquired: "When I sent you without money bag, sack, and sandals, did you lack anything?" (Luke 22:35)

As far as the believer is concerned, although the road may be like a wilderness, yet it is safe, and will not harm his feet, as it is said: "He will guard the feet of His saints" (1 Samuel 2:9), and about the wicked, it is said: "The way of the unfaithful is hard" (Proverb 13:15).

Man often preoccupies himself with filling his belly with the corruptible bread; but not caring for fulfilling his soul with the eternal spiritual manna; the Word of God, the life-Giver. That is why the Church cares for practicing long periods of fasting, not to humble the body with hunger, but to lift the soul up to heaven, to seek a heavenly meal, as is fitting for it.

❖ Blessed is he, who knows how to be fulfilled in Christ, not bodily, but spiritually, the fulfillment provided by knowledge[1].

St. Ambrose

❖ You should know for sure that the enemy attacks the heart through the way of the full belly.

Fr John of Cronstadt

❖ Be the master of your belly, before it becomes your master. Whoever cares for his gluttony, while hoping for conquering the spirit of corruption in himself, is like him, who tries to quench the fire with oil[2].

St. John Climacus

❖ They despised the food of the angels, moaning for the meat of Egypt. The prophet Moses fasted for 40 days and forty nights on the Mount of Sinai, demonstrating that "*man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord*." With an empty stomach he received the Law written by the finger of God; whereas his people ate, drank, then got up to play, and made for themselves a golden calf; preferring it to the glory of God. The labor of several years was lost through a single hour of fulfillment! Moses broke the two stone tablets, realizing that the drunken people could not hear the Word of God[3].

❖ When the first man obeyed his belly and not the Lord, he was driven out of paradise to the valley of tears[4].

❖ After giving great care to your thoughts, it is fitting for you to arm yourselves with the weapon of fasting; saying together with David: "I chastened my soul with fasting" (Psalm 69:10); and, "I have eaten ashes like bread" (Psalm 102:9); and, "But as for me, when they were sick, I wore sackcloth" (Psalm 35:13).

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[1] *St. Ambrose: The Duties of the Clergy, Book X, 17 (92).*
[2] *Ladder, step 14.*
[3] *St. Jerome: Against Jovinianus, Book 2:15.*
[4] *St. Jerome: Ep. 22:10.*

Eve was driven out of Paradise because she ate the forbidden fruit; whereas Elijah after fasting for 40 days, was carried by a chariot of fire up to heaven.

For duration of 40 days and 40 nights, Moses lived an intimate encounter with God, confirming the truth of the words: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord" (3).

The Savior of the world, by whose virtues and the example of His life, He left us a role model to follow (John 13:15; 1 Peter 2:21)), directly after His Baptism, was taken up by the Spirit to wrestle with Satan (Matthew 4:1). And once He conquered him, He delivered him to His disciples to trample with their feet, as expressed by the apostle Paul, saying: "God will crush Satan under your feet shortly" (Romans 16:20). After the Savior fasted for 40 days, Satan tried to set a trap for Him through food, saying to Him: "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread" (Matthew 4:3).

According to the Law, on the tenth day of the seventh month, after the blowing of the trumpet, a fast is proclaimed for the entire Jewish people; and "Any person who is not afflicted of soul, he shall be cut off from his people" (Leviticus 23:27-29).

In the book of 'Job,' it is written about Behemoth, that "his strength is in his hips, and his power is in his stomach muscles" (Job 40:16)[1].

St. Jerome

3- A FATHERLY CHASTISEMENT

The wilderness was not merely a school by which man discovers his weaknesses, to see God as his only Mster; but it is a school of God's love. In the wilderness, the believer enters under the fatherly chastisement, in order to gain new experiences, and growth in wisdom and understanding.

"So you should know in your heart, that as a man chastens his son, so the lord your God chastens you" (Deut. 8:5).

And as the Psalmist says: "Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O Lord, and teach out of Your law" (Psalm 94:12).

❖ God rebukes in order to correct; and corrects in order to keep us for Himself[2].

St. Cyprian

Together with the good things that God provides His people, he also provides them with eternal chastisements to keep them by the spirit of adoption (4,5). Chastisement, as far as the believer is concerned, is not punishment he fears and of which he gets terrified, but it is a school, where he enjoys knowledge and continuous growth. It is the door of fervent prayer, which brings man up to the bosom of his heavenly Father.

Chastisement is the beginning of the way, for God to proclaim Himself to the chastised, who realizes the truth of himself, and by which he realizes God; because he, who realizes himself, realizes God. That is why the early fathers, like **St. Clement of Alexandria**, and **St. Anthony the Great**, concentrate on how man can realize his own depths. Through chastisement, man realizes that, by himself, he is nothing, whereas by God, he can do anything.

It can be said that chastisement through affliction has a double goal:

a. For man to recognize himself; and accordingly, to recognize God, working in man's heart and in his inner man.

b. For man to withdraw from the way of sin, to receive the righteousness of Christ in him; and to bear the obedience of sonhood, which is of the Lord Christ

[1] *St. Jerome: Letter 130:10.*
[2] *Epistle 7:5.*

toward His Father, the One with Him in essence.

This is God's plan in chastisement: To let us recognize God; to enjoy the Lord Christ in Him, and to share His features.

4. AN ABUNDANCE AFTER THE WILDERNESS

"Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and fear Him.

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs that flow out of valleys and hills.

A land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive and honey; a land in which you eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper" (Deut. 8:6-9).

In the Old Testament, God presents the good land, a land of brooks, where fountains and springs flow out of valleys and hills, that provide man with all his needs of fruits and crops (7). Whereas in the New Testament, the Lord Christ presents the bosom of God the Father as an inheritance for us, in which we settle down forever, safely, with no war or enemy; where the fountains of the Holy Spirit flow in us, to conform us to the icon of Christ, and to make us like Him. It was not possible for the Israelites to realize the exalted secret of God, nor to experience the exalted heavenly life; they could only realize the good land, the brooks, the fountains, the grains, the barley, the vineyards, the figs, the pomegranates, the olives, and the honey.

"**A good land**" (7): Travelers through the wilderness on their way from Egypt, tell how, once they reach Palestine, they welcome the sight of its flowery plains, its green hills; and the temperate crops that its high altitude provides.

"**Whose stones are iron**" (9) and "**copper**": In the mountains, south of Lebanon, the eastern region of the sea of Galilee, and south of the Dead Sea, there is iron. The region of 'Arabah,' south of the Dead Sea is rich in iron and copper; and some copper mines go back to the days of king Solomon, in the region of 'Zarethan (1 Kings 7:45-46); and even before the days of Solomon in 'Temnah' in the region of 'Negev.'

When He brings us into the wilderness for chastisement; if we proclaim our observation of the commandments of the Lord, and our enjoyment of fearing Him; He will then bring us forth from affliction to abundance.

- ❖ Instead of the barren land, He will bring us forth to the good land.
- ❖ Instead of draught, we would enjoy brooks of living water and inexhaustible fountains.
- ❖ Instead of the dry wilderness, we would enjoy fields loaded with crops and fruits.
- ❖ Instead of great need, we would be in need of nothing.
- ❖ Instead of hills and mountains of stones, we would find mines of iron and copper.

It will be as though, through the affliction of the wilderness, man would enter into what is like the paradise of Eden, to live and work good lands, watered by brooks and fountains; and would get inexhaustible crops and precious resources.

He presented to them these gifts for the following reasons:

1. To realize God's exalted care. After a long life in the wilderness, they get an abundance that they did not expect.

2. To realize the blessings of keeping the commandments of God, who grants the obedient, heavenly and temporal blessings.

3. God transforms the labor of others into comfort for His believers; they shall find fields, they did not plant; wells, they did not dig; and rich resources, for which they did not labor.

4. What they gain now is a symbol of what they are going to gain, by entering into the higher Jerusalem, and enjoying the heavenly Canaan.

5. He did not refer to all the crops and fruits of Canaan; but chose only the following:

- **Wheat and barley**: Wheat as food for man; and barley for beasts and birds. God fulfills the need of man, and that of his beasts and birds.
- **Vines**: The juice of grapes, or the wine, refers to the spiritual joy, which is the food of the soul. As He cares for their bodies, He also cares for their souls, fulfilling them with heavenly joy.
- **Figs**: referring to the Church, each of its individual seeds carries no taste, but when the seeds assemble together within a cover, that would give them sweetness. So is the believer; whatever his position in the church may be, would be tasteless and valueless, unless he unites with his brothers within the cover of unity and love. God cares for the congregation as a whole, as well as for every member.
- **Pomegranates**: Its juice is used in the hot countries in summer, as a cool drink. God cares for our comfort, granting us coolness amid the afflictions.
- **Olives**: Its oil is used as a healthy food, for illumination purposes and as a medication. God cares for the well being of His people, as well as for their enlightenment.
- **Honey**: The believers experience the sweetness of intimacy with God.

5. THANKSGIVING AND REMEMBRANCE OF GOD'S BLESSINGS

"When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes, which I command you today.

Lest – when you have eaten, and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied;

When your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the rock of flint;

Who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you, and that He might test you, to do you good in the end" (Deut. 8:10-16).

God granted His people a good land, to let them eat, be fulfilled, and bless the Lord; then to be in their turn a good land which bears the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, and perpetual thanksgiving to the Giver of blessings.

The life of thanksgiving reveals holy hearts that get in touch with God's love, to realize the secrets of His love, and respond to Him.

Whereas the souls that forget God's care and blessings; fall in pride, and disregard God's work with them; He, who brought them over from the wilderness, the dwelling place of fiery serpents and scorpions; the thirsty land where there is no

water; to a good land flooding with good natural resources. Instead of the wilderness with its deadly serpents, He gave them pastures with cattle and sheep; and, instead of a desert, He granted them land rich in silver and gold.

Amid the barren wilderness, He brought for them water out of the rock of flint; a fountain that kept accompanying them all the way, until they crossed over to a land rich in rain and profuse springs. Prophets of the Old Testaments often concentrated on the presence of rain in the Promised Land, as a sign of the gifts of heaven in the new Testament; calling the Messianic era, 'the era of water.'

St Jerome noticed the connection between the fiery serpents and scorpions, and the thirst for water. In a letter to 'Oceanus,' noble Roman, with a zealous faith, he wrote about the blessings of water and baptism, saying[1]:

- At the beginning of creation, the Spirit of God hovered over the face of water; out of which, He brought the little world; a symbol of the Christian infant who is plunged in the water of baptism.
- The word 'heaven' in Hebrew (*shamyim*) means "he who comes out of water."
- The living heavenly creatures seen by the prophet Ezekiel in his vision, with the likeness of the firmament above their heads, with the color of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads (Ezekiel 1:22), like very compressed water.
- In the middle of the Garden of Eden, there was a river with four heads watering it (Genesis 2:10).
- In the vision of Ezekiel about the new house of the Lord, he saw water flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east. The water healed and granted life to the dead souls (Ezekiel 47:1-9).
- When the world fell into sin, it was not possible to purify it except by the great flood. After the unclean bird got out, the dove of the Holy Spirit returned to 'Noah,' then came back later to Christ in the River Jordan, and carried in its beak the branch preaching peace to the entire world.
- In the water of the Red Sea, Pharaoh and his soldiers, who refused to allow the people of God to depart from the land of Egypt, drowned. By that, the sea became a symbol of our baptism. In the book of Psalms, the perdition of Pharaoh was so described: "You divided the sea by your strength. You broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters. You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces" (Psalm 74:13, 14 LXX).
- Like when the tree cast into the bitter water, made it sweet, to water seventy palm trees. So did the cross with the life-giving water of the Law to the seventy disciples of Christ (Exodus 15:23-27; Luke 10:1).
- Abraham and Isaac dug wells; and the Philistines tried to stop them (Genesis 26:15, 18).
- Beersheba, the city of the oath (Genesis 21:31), and Gihon, where Solomon was a king, got their names after springs (1 kings 1:38; 2 Chronicles 32:30).
- Eleazar, the servant of Abraham, met Rebecca near a well of water (Genesis 24:15, 16).
- Where Rachel was drawing water from a well, she got a kiss from Jacob (Genesis

[1] *St. Jerome: Letter 69:6.*

29:11).

- ❖ While the daughters of the priest of Median were on their way to a well; and were afflicted by shepherds; they were helped by Moses who drove away the intruders (Exodus 2:16, 17).
- ❖ The predecessor of the Lord (St. John the Baptist) in Salim (namely, peace) prepared the people for Christ by a fountain of water (John 3:23).
- ❖ The Lord Himself preached the Kingdom of heaven, only after He purified the Jordan through being baptized by plunging in it (Matthew 3:13, 14).
- ❖ The Savior told Nicodemus in a secret way: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of heaven" (John 3:5).
- ❖ As the ministry of Christ started by water, it ended in the same way; when, out of his side, pierced by a spear; water and blood flowed; as symbols of Baptism and martyrdom (John 9:34).
- ❖ After His resurrection, He sent His apostles to the Gentiles, and commanded them to baptize them by the sacrament of the Trinity (Matthew 28:19).
- ❖ When the Jews repented their evil ways, St. Peter sent them to get baptized (Acts 2:38).
- ❖ Paul, the persecutor of the church; the ravenous wolf of Benjamin (Genesis 49:27); bowed his head before Ananias, one of the herd of Christ; and did not regain his insight before he received the balm of Baptism (Acts 9:17, 18,).
- ❖ By the reading of the prophet, the eunuch under Candace the queen of Ethiopia, got prepared for the Baptism of Christ (acts 8:27-38); and, contrary to nature, the Ethiopian changed his skin, and the leopard its spots (Jeremiah 13:23).
- ❖ "The voice of the Lord is over the waters… The Lord is over many waters (Psalm 29:3). "Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep; which have come up from the washing, everyone of which bears twins, and none is barren among them" (Songs 4:2).
- ❖ The prophet Micah referring to the grace of Baptism, says, "He will again have compassion on us; and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19).

Some may wonder: 'Knowing that there are deadly serpents and scorpions, and no water, in the wilderness; why did He allow His people to go through that narrow way?'

1. In order that the believer would discover his inner depths. In the midst of affliction, it is easier for the believer to have his sight withdraw to his depths to see it. God led His people along the wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions, where He has been their Guard and Support, until they crossed over to the good safe land. So it is fitting for us to realize that God brings us down to our depths, to realize how they are full of deadly serpents that crept into us, either by our own will, or through our slothfulness, to see how He will transform our barren nature into a new one, and how He will transform our spiritual dryness into the fellowship of the divine nature, to become as though in the new Canaan.

God's love is behind that transformation of man, whom sin corrupted, into incorruption. Because man, by his complete freedom, chose sin, affliction became necessary, to take him away from its course.

❖ The human nature is just as barren and fruitless as that wilderness; and just as filled with serpents and scorpions; with broods of vipers (Matthew 3:7)… Yet, we should not fear; because the leader of our path is not Moses but Jesus[1].

St. John Chrysostom

2- Bringing us over into affliction, and realizing how helpless human hands are to support us, we would look toward God, as the only One who can transform the affliction into a way for our salvation, our inner happiness, and our glory.

The Holy Bible confirms everywhere the need of man, after his fall into sin, for affliction. The whole book, especially this present book, confirms the fact, that affliction is the way of entry into real happiness.

6. NOT LEANING UPON ONE-SELF

The foremost of sins and its head, that crept, even to heavenly creatures, and brought down Satan and his hosts, is pride, or selfishness. The enemy aimed this same arrow to the hearts of our parents Adam and Eve, when he said to Eve: "You will become like God" (Genesis 3:5). And he still is aiming it to humanity; to let us assume that we are gods, and it is by our power and the might of our hand, that we have achieved all these material, social, and spiritual gains. The cure for this would be to recall God's dealings with us, His exalted care, and His perpetual gifts. He says:

"Then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.'

And you shall remember the Lord Your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:17, 18).

7. NOT LEANING ON FOREIGN GODS

Not remembering God's gifts, and forgetting His exalted care, would not only lead us to pride, to set gods out of ourselves, but would also divert us, like idolaters, to set for ourselves gods, other than the true God, by leaning upon human arms, human experiences; possibilities, knowledge, or social positions; several gods, before which man bows, disregarding the true God. In other words, instead of resorting to God, who granted us all these blessings with His hands; we transform them into a call for idolatry.

"Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the Lord your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish.

As the nations which the Lord destroys before you, you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the Lord your God" (Deut. 8:19, 20).

God has no partiality; Whoever leans upon Him and obeys Him, will enjoy the reward; Whereas he, who resort to other gods, disregarding His care, and disobeying His commandments, will lose His blessings. He gives man complete freedom to choose his own way.

[1] *In Ephes. Hom. 23.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 8)

LET ME CROSS OVER THE WILDERNESS OF MY LIFE

❖ Accompany me, O my God, with Your amazing care.
By Your exalted fatherhood, support me, in the wilderness.
You transform the wilderness of my life into a Paradise.
You walk with me to train me amid the sufferings.
You keep and support my heart; to let it become wholly Yours.

❖ In the middle of the wilderness, I feel a severe thirst.
What will quench my thirst, but the fountain emerging from your side,
O the rock that accompanies me?!

❖ In the middle of the wilderness, I feel a deadly hunger'
Send me the heavenly manna.
Grant me Your life-giving word, the heavenly bread.
Grant me Your knowledge; the eternal food.
I cry out to You:
Until when shall I only care to fulfill my belly?!
And not be preoccupied with fulfilling my soul?!

❖ By my own will, the fiery serpents got into my nature.
The scorpions found a place for themselves.
I came into a deadly thirst.
By Your cross, You kill every serpent.
And trample over the scorpions under my feet.
And let the fountain of Your Holy Spirit flow inside me.
You, amazingly, transform the wilderness of my nature.
Into the fellowship of Your divine nature.

❖ What should I offer You in the middle of this wilderness?
I have nothing to offer You, O the rich God!
Accept my thanksgiving as a sacrifice of love.
I remember Your exalted care.
I remember Your amazing practical love.
I remember Your daily dealings with me with Your exalted love!

CHAPTER 9
HOW WOULD THE PEOPLE BE JUSTIFIED?

In the last chapter, the prophet Moses concentrated on the confirmation that the blessings which the people enjoy, are not the fruit of their own righteousness, but are a free gift from God, who desires to enter with them into a covenant. He brings them into a wilderness, to let them realize the wilderness of the inner nature, and gives them Moses as a leader, to proclaim that He cares for them. He is faithful to His promises, despite their unfaithfulness.

In the present chapter he made it clear that God sets His covenant with His people to pour His abundant blessings, not for the sake of man's own righteousness (1-6), but for the sake of God's faithfulness in His promises, by which He presented the Law to His people, while they worshipped the golden calf (7-21). The prophet Moses did not stand negatively before such great crime, but interceded on behalf of the people of God, reminding them of the divine promises (22-29).

It is to be noticed that parading the events of Horeb in Chapters 9:7–10:11, with all the details concerning their time and place, demonstrates the extent of the deep impact of those events on Moses' mind, something that constitute a definite and indisputable proof of Moses' authorship of this book.

1. God is the Leader of the battle 1–3.
2. The conquest is not because of their own righteousness 4.
3. The defeat of the nations is because of their wickedness 4–5.
4. God's faithfulness in His promises to their fathers 5–6.
5. A rebellious people since the beginning 7.
6. A people worshipping the calf while the Law was being delivered 8–15.
7. The prophet Moses' anger, and breaking the two tablets of the covenant 16–19.
8. The high priest took part in their transgression 20.
9. Acceptance of crushing the golden calf instead of crushing them 21.
10. A continuous series of murmur and rebellion 22–24.
11. The prophet Moses intercedes on their behalf 25–29.

1. GOD IS THE LEADER OF THE BATTLE:

"Hear, O Israel: You are to cross over the Jordan today, and go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourself, cities great and fortified up to heaven; a people great and tall, the descendants of Anakim, whom you know, and of whom you heard it is said, 'Who can stand before the descendants of Anak?'

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" (Deut. 9:1-3).

Some believe that saying, "Hear, O Israel," means that it is a new sermon presented by Moses, probably on the Sabbath following the previous sermon[1].

Thirty-eight years before that, they were close to the Promised Land, yet the time was not full for entering into it, because of the nature of rebellion that prevailed upon their hearts. Now, on the tenth month of the fortieth year of the journey, the command was issued: "You are to cross over the Jordan today." And on the first day

[1] *Matthew Henry Commentary.*

of the new year, they crossed over to the Promised Land, and during that same month, the prophet Moses died.

The words uttered by the prophet Moses in this sermon, might be similar to those uttered by the spies who were sent into Canaan (Numbers 13:28, 33). But there is a great difference between the spirit with which Moses uttered his words, to proclaim God's faithfulness in the realization of His promises to His people; to go over before them as a consuming fire, to destroy all opponents; and that of the spies that destroys faith and deprives souls of hope in enjoying the divine promises.

He confirms that Israel confronts nations and peoples of greater number, might, and experience in war, and not like the primitive, simple, and undisciplined peoples that were dwelling in America and Australia. However, God Himself is the Leader, and His divine presence is the secret of conquest.

It is fitting for the people to strive and to fight, depending on the divine promise, "as the Lord has said to you" (3). The Conquest that the people enjoy is a divine gift, and not because of human capability. According to human logic, this people would not be able to conquer and possess, yet the conquest is a gift presented by the God of the impossible, the wonder-Giver. He brings us into Baptism (the Jordan), to reign together with Him (Revelation 5:10); destroying every power of the enemy (the descendants of Anak).

The source of power is "God, who goes over before you, is a consuming fire" (3). If the darts of the enemy are fiery (Ephesians 6:16), the Lord will be a wall of fire all around you (Zechariah 2:5), to destroy all those darts before reaching you.

2. THE CONQUEST IS NOT BECAUSE OF THEIR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS:

The prophet Moses warns them against pride and haughtiness; the conquest is not because of their righteousness, but because of God's faithfulness.

"Do not think in your heart, after the Lord your God has cast them out before you, saying, 'Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land" (Deut 9:4).

If we refer the conquest to God, He would glorify and crown us, whereas if we refer it to our self-righteousness, He would withdraw His free grace, deprive us of the conquest, and we would come to be in shame and disgrace. On account of human nature, they are "a stiff-necked people" (6), but on account of the divine promise, and the covenant between God and man, to fulfill the word, which He swore to their fathers (5), they will reign and possess. Let us hold fast to the divine promise, which will transform the stiffness of our hearts into the righteousness of Christ.

3. THE DEFEAT OF THE NATIONS IS BECAUSE OF THEIR WICKEDNESS:

If, because of the riches of God's mercies, He grants His believers strength and conquest; the destruction and perdition of the wicked is a natural fruit of their evil and corruption. God is not unjust.

"It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God drives them out from before you" (Deut. 9:4, 5).

God is glorified in His believers by His free gifts; and is glorified in the wicked, who persist on their evil and rebellion, by their destruction. Those rejected by the Lord are worthy of rejection, whereas those whom He receives, are not received because of their self-righteousness, but because of His exalted free mercies.

God, in His love for man, confirms that what befall the wicked nations, is not

out of God's practicing His authority, but because of their wickedness. In this, he presents a lesson to His people, that, although He granted them the land free, for the sake of the riches of His grace, and not because of any righteousness in them, yet, if they go on doing evil, they would get the same portion of the nations before them. Their evil would drive them out as well.

We should not marvel, that God – in the fullness of time – has cut off the natural branches, namely, the Jews, because of their denial of faith in the Savior Messiah; and has connected the wild branches, to bring on the fruit of the Spirit, yet with the spirit of humility and not of haughtiness over the cut-off branches.

4. GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN HIS PROMISES TO THEIR FATHERS

"That He may fulfill the word which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Therefore understand that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people" (Deut. 9:5, 6).

He swore to their fathers who loved Him; and gave inheritance to their children, not on account of their self-righteousness, but of God's faithfulness. Choosing Eleazar, the son of Aaron, as a high priest, hints to the forgiveness of Aaron's sin, and a proof of the continuation of the high priesthood.

5. A REBELLIOUS PEOPLE SINCE THE BEGINNING

"Remember and do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness; from the day that you departed from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord" (Deut 9:7).

After confirming that it was not because of their self-righteousness, but because of God's faithfulness to His promises, that He is giving them the inheritance, He made it clear to them that they did not practice righteousness, but were full of murmur and rebellion from the day they departed from the land of Egypt; and remained as such all along their journey in the wilderness. They practiced their nature of rebellion from the beginning until the end of their journey.

Here, the prophet Moses records his bitter experience with his people, whom he called "stiff-necked" (6), always bearing the spirit of opposition against the Lord.

6. A PEOPLE WHO WORSHIPPED THE CALF WHILE THE LAW WAS BEING DELIVERED:

We have already dealt with this topic of setting the golden calf, in our study of the book of Exodus, chapter 32. And we quoted the words of **St. Ephraim the Syrian**, saying: [The prophet Moses was taken away from them for a while, in order to reveal the golden calf, to worship in public; what they have been worshipping secretly in their hearts[1].]

What grieved the heart of Moses, was that, while God was talking to Moses, presenting to him His Law, in which He strictly warns against idolatry, when Moses was fasting forty days and forty nights, not eating bread and not drinking water, and the mountain of Horeb was smoking with fire. During those most sacred moments, the people were going astray from the truth; and in stubbornness and stiffness of neck, were making for themselves a golden, calf to worship it.

At the same location where they were given the Law, and during the same

[1] *Hom. 2, On Our Lord 1:17.*

moments they got it, while their eyes were beholding the mountain burning with fire, they broke it.

"And in Horeb you provoked the Lord to wrath, so that the Lord was angry enough with you to have destroyed you" (Deut. 9:8).

Moses expressed how their sin was so horrible, that God intended to destroy them, at the same moments He intended to present to them His love and mercy.

"When I went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the Lord made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights, I neither ate bread nor drank water. Then the Lord delivered to me two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them were all the words, which the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly.

And it came to pass, at the end of the forty days and forty nights, that the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant

Then the Lord said to me, 'Arise, go down quickly from here, for your people whom you brought out of Egypt have acted corruptly; they have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them; they have made themselves a molded image.

Furthermore the Lord spoke to me, saying, I have seen this people, and indeed they are a stiff-necked people. Let Me alone, that I may destroy them, and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make you a nation mightier and greater than they.

So I turned down from the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire; and the two tablets of the covenant were in my hands" (Deut. 9:9-15).

Moses was living through the most glorified moments of his life, having been on the top of the mountain enjoying the vision of the shadow of the glory of God, and receiving the Law, that God wrote on two tablets, with His divine finger, while the whole mountain trembled and was filled with smoke and mist. While getting down, he expected to see the entire congregation; men, women, children, and elders, preoccupied with nothing but receiving the Law, he expected to see their eyes fixed upon the summit of the mountain, forgetting their food, drink, and sleep, amid that great glory. But his soul got completely shattered; when he realized that, instead of the divine fire, they sought from the high priest to build a fire in which they cast their golden jewelry, to make for them a molded calf, to become their god.

The gold, which God allowed them to take from the Egyptians, to make up for the years of their humiliation and bondage, they offered to idol worship, to provoke God their Savior.

They abused the gift of God. It was fitting for those golden earrings He allowed them to take, to be used by their women and girls, and not by their sons. Aaron said to them: "*Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me*" (Exodus 32:2). That corruption led them to idolatry; and the blessings became for them a curse, according to the words of the prophet: "*I will curse your blessings; Yes, I have cursed them already, because you do not take them to heart*" (Malachi 2:2).

The solid stony mountain burned with fire to proclaim the divine presence, whereas the hearts of God's people turned into stone, to build a human fire to mould an idol according to their corrupt hearts.

"**The assembly**" (10): It came as "*Ecclesia*," meaning "a church, or a congregation," which was quoted by St. Stephens in his final speech (Acts 7:38). The word means assembling together in a certain place.

7. THE PROPHET MOSES' ANGER, AND BREAKING THE TWO TABLETS OF THE COVENANT

"And I looked, and there, you had sinned against the Lord your God, and had made for yourselves a molded calf! You had turned aside quickly from the way, which the Lord had commanded you.

Then I took the two tablets and threw them out of my two hands and broke them before your eyes. And I fell before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights, I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you committed in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger.

For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the Lord was angry with you, to destroy you. But the Lord listened to me at that time also" (Deut. 9:16-19).

As though he was saying to them: What righteousness you are going to boast when you enter the Promised Land, and what worthiness? You have caused me to lose my consciousness, when I saw what I did not expect.

❖ We read that the Law was written by the finger of God; and was given through Moses, His faithful servant. Many believe that the finger of God is His Holy Spirit[1].

St. Augustine

The prophet Moses broke the two stone tablets before the eyes of the people to proclaim to them that they had broken the Law, and came to be under the curse of rebellion. Now, the Lord Christ has come to present, not two tablets of stone, but His fiery Holy Spirit, to engrave the new covenant over the heart, in the inner depths. And as the Evangelist says: "*The Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*" (John 1:17).

While God was giving Moses the two tablets of the covenant; and while Moses was fasting for the sake of the people's sins (18), and the mountain was burning with fire (15), namely, while God, His prophet, and the nature, were all working on account of the people, the people were sinfully forcing Aaron to make for them a golden calf.

Moses was passing through the happiest moments of his life, while being in the presence of the Lord, receiving on behalf of the whole people, and even on behalf of humanity, the Law of God. In that most awesome atmosphere, he stood fasting, not eating any bread, and not drinking any water, for forty days and forty nights; in complete seclusion from the entire world, on the mountain burning with fire, before the Creator of heaven and earth, while He was writing the Law with His divine finger, on two tablets of stone. Moses, looking forward to go down to present to the people, the two tablets, as a covenant between God and man, to find out that that covenant was broken, unexpectedly quickly, threw the two tablet out of his hands, and broke them; to proclaim to the people that they had broken the covenant through provoking God to anger.

Moses showed his great terror, not because of his encounter with the Lord in the middle of the fire, but for he realized the extent of God's wrath, and His intention to destroy the people completely.

Then he fasted again, forty days and forty nights, and supplicated to God on behalf of his people, and God again, listened to him. Therefore, where is that righteousness they are boasting?!

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[1] *St. Augustine: On Ps. 8.*

8. THE HIGH PRIEST TAKES PART IN THEIR TRANSGRESSION

The high priest shared their sin by molding the golden calf for the people to worship. It was fitting for him, he who used to put on his forehead a golden plate, on which was written: 'Holy to the Lord,' to resist the transgression of the people, but, instead of sanctifying them, to lift up God's wrath from them, he himself, fell under the divine wrath.

"And the Lord was very angry with Aaron, and would have destroyed him" (Deut. 9:20).

When the prophet Moses spoke of God's anger with the people, he did not say, "The Lord was very angry," but said it when speaking of God's anger with the high priest. God has no partiality. The more one knows, the more severe would be his punishment when he does wrong. Because the shepherd's transgression is more serious than that of his flock; God tends to punish him more severely.

- Great is the honor of the clergy; Yet, if they err, their perdition is greater.
- God does not save the priest because of his honor, but if he acts as is fitting to his honor[1].

St. Jerome

- I fear that when I receive my flock in a good condition; and then, out of my incompetence, I cause them to go astray; I would provoke the Lord to anger. He who, because He so loved that flock, He delivered Himself for the sake of their salvation and redemption[2].
- The laic, if he errs, he would be easily corrected; whereas the cleric, if he errs, he would be difficult to Correct[3].

St. John Chrysostom

The high priest, instead of interceding on behalf of the people, he came to be in need of someone to intercede on his behalf.

"So I prayed for Aaron also at the same time" (Deut. 9:20).

Who can utter such words but Moses, as, even Aaron did not keep the commandment concerning refraining from idolatry!

9. THE LORD MERCIFULLY ACCEPTS CRUSHING THE GOLDEN CALF INSTEAD OF CRUSHING THE SINFUL PEOPLE

The people were worthy of being crushed because of their terrible sin, location - and time - wise. But the Lord mercifully accepted burning the golden calf with fire, crushing and grinding it to dust, and throwing the dust into the brook, instead of doing the same to the sinful people. Because the people came to be like the image of the idol, which they worshipped; the Lord accepted crushing the image, and forgiving them.

"Then I took your sin, the calf which you had made, and burned it with fire, and crushed it, and ground it very small, until it was as fine as dust, and I threw its dust into the brook that descended from the mountain" (Deut. 9:21).

10. A CONTINUOUS SERIES OF MURMUR AND REBELLION

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[1] *The Author: The Pastoral Love, Alexandria 1965, p. 147 (in Arabic).*
[2] *The Author: The Pastoral Love, Alexandria 1965, p. 160 (in Arabic).*
[3] *The Author: The Pastoral Love, Alexandria 1965, p. 164 (in Arabic).*

The people started murmuring even before they departed from the land of Egypt; and continued to do that in the wilderness, to reach the maximum in Horeb, at the time Moses was receiving the Law. Although Moses fasted and interceded on their behalf, yet their nature did not change, their life turned into a consistent series of murmur and rebellion; as for example:

"Also at Taberah and Massah and Kibroth Hattaaavah you provoked the Lord to wrath. Likewise when the Lord sent you from Kadesh Bernea, saying, 'Go up and possess the land which I have given you,' then you rebelled against the commandment of the Lord your God, and you did not believe Him nor obey His voice. (Deut. 9:22-24)

You have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you" (Deut. 9:22-24; and see also Number 13; and 32:8).

11. MOSES INTERCEDES FOR THEM

"Thus I prostrated myself before the Lord; forty days and forty nights I kept prostrating myself, because the Lord had said He would destroy you. Therefore I prayed to the Lord, and said,

'O Lord God, do not destroy Your people and Your inheritance whom You have redeemed through Your greatness; whom You have brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; do not look on the stubbornness of this people, or on their wickedness or their sin. Lest the land from which You brought us should say, 'Because the Lord was not able to bring them to the land which He promised them, and because He hated them, He has brought them out to kill them in the wilderness. Yet they are Your people and Your inheritance, whom You brought out by Your mighty power and by Your outstretched arm'" (Deut. 9:25-29).

The situation was very serious. Moses prostrated himself before the Lord to pray day and night for his people. Some believe that he fasted for the second time, when the Lord rewrote the Law on two tablets of stone, while others believe that it was that same forty days period.

Moses prayed to the Lord, reminding Him of His promises to their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and asking Him not to look at their stubbornness, their transgressions, and their sins; but to remember that they are His people for whom He did miracles to save.

Adam Clark states that God often grants many blessings to persons who are relatively unworthy; either for the sake of their pious ancestors; or for that of some others who are related to them. That is why uniting with the church of God is a great blessing.

Moses did not justify himself; but in love he fasted and prayed; seeking from God to have mercy, for the sake of His covenant with their blessed ancestors.

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 9)
WHO WILL INTERCEDE FOR ME: I AM A REBEL?

❖ How can I be justified before You, O, exalted One?
With my consistent murmur?
I have this character in common with Your ancient people!
They murmured while departing from the land of Egypt!
Instead of glorifying You, O Grantor of the conquest.
They persisted on murmuring even in the best situations!
The mountain was still burning with fire for their sake!
And Moses was carrying the two tablets of stone with the Law written by Your finger!
Heaven and nature; and even the stones, testify to Your love!
Despite that, they broke Your covenant, before receiving the two tablets of stone.
Aaron, the great high priest came to be in need of someone to intercede for him.
Who will save me from my sins but You, o maker of wonders!

❖ They replaced You by a golden calf; You who moved all nature on their account!
Instead of holiness, they practiced abominations to provoke You to anger.
Who will renew my mind, heart, and will, but You?!

❖ My soul is bitter within me.
With my corruption, I often refer Your blessings to my self-righteousness.
You are alone the secret of every true blessing'
You are the Grantor of holiness and the Giver of blessings.

CHAPTER 10
THE ABUNDANCE OF GOD'S GIFTS FOR THEM

The prophet Moses did not stop at the negatives, attacking the people for their self-righteousness, but he asked them to act with a positive spirit. It was fitting for them to contemplate on the abundance of God's grace and the riches of His gifts, as, even after their fall to idolatry, and their resorting to the golden calf, God consented to forgive them, and intended to grant them gifts with no limit; four of which are: re-writing the two tablets of the law, holding the Levite priesthood after the terrible fall of Aaron the first high priest, separating the tribe of Levi to minister to Him and accepting Moses' intercession on their behalf.

1. Re-writing the two tablets of the Law 1–5.
2. Holding the Levite priesthood 6–7.
3. Separating the tribe of Levi to minister to Him 8–9.
4. Accepting Moses' intercession on their behalf 12–22.

1. RE-WRITING THE TWO TABLETS OF THE LAW

How amazing is God's love for man, and his longing to connect to him. After the terrible act of corruption that the people did in the most critical moments, as we saw in the last chapter, God intended to re-write on two other tablets of stone, with His finger anew, the same commandments, to be placed in the ark of the covenant, proclaiming His desire for reconciliation, and for setting the covenant anew.

"At that time the Lord said to me, 'Hew for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and come up to Me on the mountain and make for yourself an ark of wood. And I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke, and you shall put them in the ark" (Deut. 10:1-2).

What did the Lord ask from Moses?

1. To hew for himself two tablets of stone. If our hearts have turned into stones because of sin; they have to be struck by sharp tools; namely by the work of the fiery Holy Spirit, who convicts for sin, and grants humility and contrition to the heart, to receive the new commandment. Instead of leaning upon self-righteousness, it is fitting for us to seek from the Lord to grant us the spirit of humility; and to stretch His finger to engrave His commandment in our depths.

2. To come up to Him on the mountain. The Lord speaks to the multitudes at the foot of the mountain, but He presents His exalted mysteries on the high mountains, to the souls that depart from the foot of the mountain, and ascend by the Spirit of the Lord, as though with the Lord Christ Himself, to see Him transfigured on the top of the mountain of Tabor. The Psalmist cries out, saying, "*I will lift up my eyes to the hills – from whence comes my help*"(Psalm 121:1).

Let us flee to the mountains, as the Lord Christ taught us (Mark 13:14). And as **Origen** says: [It is fitting for him who intends to flee, to know where he is heading[1].] Let us forsake all our daily engagements, our pleasures and our troubles, to go up to encounter the Lord, and to enjoy the touches of His fiery hand, engraving on our hearts the commandment of His fiery divine love.

3. To make for himself an ark of acacia wood. The first thing that God commanded Moses to make in the tabernacle of the meeting was the Ark of the

[1] *Origen: Commentary on Matthew, 41.*

Covenant. And here He commands him to make a wooden ark overlaid with pure gold inside and outside (Exodus 25:10; 37:1). Is it another ark?

It was not possible for Moses to present the two tablets of stone to God to write on them with His finger, unless he makes the wooden ark to put them in it. What is this wooden ark, but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, in which the commandment is kept without breaking. Whoever attaches himself to the cross of Christ, and partakes of His crucifixion, has to observe the commandment and keep it in his heart.

4. To receive from God the two tablets and to put them in the ark. This is the exalted gift of God, to receive His covenant, and to bear His commandment with great care in our hearts, partaking of the cross of Christ, as a living storehouse for it.

5. In complete obedience to God, and great love for the people, Moses placed the two tablets in the ark, and presented them to the congregation**:**

"So I made an ark of acacia wood, hewed two tablets of stone like the first, and went up the mountain, having the two tablets in my hand; and He wrote on the tablets according to the first writing, the ten commandment, which the Lord had spoken to you in the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly; and the Lord gave them to me.

Then I turned and came down from the mountain, and put the tablets in the ark which I had made; and there they are, just as the Lord commanded me" (Deut. 10:3-5).

The gifts that Moses enjoyed being on the account of the people, He came down to present to them what the Lord delivered to him. So, it is fitting for us to covet the entrance of every soul into the experience of the new life, which came to be ours in Christ Jesus. The loving minister is he, who presents to others, not what is his, but what he is given by the Lord.

What were written on the two tablets were the same words written on the previous tablets. The words of God do not need correction or alteration, but is abiding forever.

He wrote Ten Commandments or words; and not ten books; It is not by plenty of words that humanity is saved, but by the word of God mingled with His practical love.

6. Once the people got the two tablets of the covenant, they could move toward Canaan "***Now the children of Israel journeyed from the wells of Bene Jaakan to Moserah***" (6). Together with the commandment, they enjoyed the wells of water, and then they moved on.

So, we receive the commandment of the Lord, and enjoy the water of the Holy Spirit, who leads us toward the heavenly Canaan. It is fitting for us to start our journey from the wells where the water of baptism is, and the enjoyment of adoption to God; and keep on enjoying those wells.

"From there they journeyed to Gudgodah, and from Gudgodah to Jotbathah, a land of rivers of water" (7).

Bene Jaakan: A Hebrew name, meaning "the children of Jaakan," the name of a tribe, probably descendants of Sier the Horites; the name was given to the wells by the Israelites, having been called before, Jetheroth. It is believed to be 'Petren' nowadays, six miles south of Oga (Numbers 33:31, 32).

Moser or **Moseroth**: A Hebrew name, meaning, (a bond); close to the mountain of Hur (Numbers 33:30, 31).

Gudgodah or **Hur of Gudgad**: A Hebrew name, meaning "the cave of Gudgadah" (Numbers 33:32); probably located in the valley of Gudgodah; a part of the valley of Jeraphe, north of Contila Jeraphe, north-west of the Gulf of Aqaba.

Jotbathah: A Hebrew name, meaning, "Thebes," a location west of the wilderness (Numbers 33:32); believed to be 'Taba,' 22 miles north of Aqaba.

2. HOLDING THE LEVITE PRIESTHOOD

God was very angry with Aaron and would have destroyed him (9:20), then forgave him when his brother Moses prayed for his sake; and let him consummate his priestly work, then delivered it to his son after him.

"That was the place where Aaron died later, and where he was buried; and Eleazar his son ministered as priest in his stead" (Deut. 10:6).

Instead of Aaron, Eleazar the new high priest set forth with the people toward Canaan, "*to a land of rivers of water*" (7). The work of the high priest is to bring the people of God over to the fountains of water of the Holy Spirit, that turns their barren wilderness into a heavenly paradise, carrying the fruits of the Spirit.

3. SEPARATING THE TRIBE OF LEVI TO MINISTER TO HIM

Following the people's fall into idolatry, and Moses' prayer for their sake, God revealed His compassion on them, by re-confirming the separation of the tribe of Levi, and that He is Himself their portion, and not the land.

"At that time the Lord separated the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister to Him and to bless in His name, to this day. Therefore, Levi has no portion or inheritance, just as the Lord your God promised" (Deut. 10:8, 9).

God's choice of Aaron and his sons to be priests, and to be Himself their portion, is a living portrait of giving Himself a free gift, and not because of their self-righteousness.

The tribe of Levi bore the Ark of the Covenant, which keeps the two tablets of the Law, as though they were bearing the holy divine commandment, as a secret of life and a blessing for everyone receiving it, working in his life, and dwelling in his heart.

4. ACCEPTING MOSES' INTERCESSION ON THEIR BEHALF

Because of their fall in idolatry, the procession was delayed; as Moses stayed in the mountain, fasting and praying forty days and forty nights, interceding on behalf of his people to spare them from perdition. The Lord received his prayer, and commanded him to resume going before the people, to enter and possess the land.

"As at the first time, I stayed in the mountain forty days and forty nights; the Lord also heard me at that time, and the Lord chose not to destroy you. Then the Lord said to me, 'Arise, begin your journey before the people, that they may go in and possess the land which I swore to your fathers to give them" (Deut. 10:10, 11).

Moses was a symbol of the Lord Christ who fasted on our behalf, and gave Himself up to reconcile us with His Father, spare us perdition, and to enter through Him into the bosom of the Father, and to inherit together with Christ the eternal glory.

❖ Although there are many things to love in the world, yet it is far better to love them through the relationship with Him who created them.

The world is beautiful, yet He, who created it, is more beautiful.

The world is glorified, yet He, who founded it, is more glorified.

That is why, beloved brethren, let use love the world, without being swallowed by it, and let us not love the creation more than the Creator. God grants us earthly possessions, to love Him with all our hearts and souls. Yet we sometimes, provoke God to wrath, when we love His gifts more than God Himself.

The same thing sometimes occur in human relationships, when someone gives

a special gift to another who is under his guardianship, who, not only starts to love the gift and disregard its giver; but even to look at him as an enemy and not a friend! God is known to love those who love Him more than their love for the earthly gifts that He grants them[1].

Fr. Caesarius of Arles

5. A CALL TO FEAR GOD AND TO BE ATTACHED TO HIM

In the last chapter, Moses bitterly parades the horrible acts of Israel, since their call to exodus, until the moment he was talking to them, concentrating on their fall into the worship of the golden calf; with the participation of the high priest himself. And on their consistent murmur, which became for them, as though a second nature. He is now, with a joyful spirit of hope, provoking them to piety, to enjoy the fear of God, and the attachment to Him, demonstrating the following points:

1. God is in no need of man's ministry nor for his gifts, but asks for his pure heart and love.

"And now, Israel, What does the Lord your God require of you, but 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 which I command you today for your good?

Indeed the heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the Lord your God; also the earth with all that is in it" (Deut 10:12-14).

What did he mean by '**the heaven and the heaven of heavens**"? Some believe that the first term implies the firmament and the space with all the stars, whereas the second implies the place in eternity, where the saints, together with the heavenly hosts, are.

❖ Although He is in no need for what we would give Him, as a proof of His pure love, He does everything for the sake of having our love. That is why Moses says: "*What does the Lord your God requires of you; but to walk in all His ways and to love Him"* (12).

When He commands you to love Him; He shows above everything that He loves you. There is nothing to guarantee our salvation more than to love Him[2].

St. John Chrysostom

What does the Lord requires of you?

This question that the prophet Moses presents to his people, at the last days of his life on earth; every believer should contemplate on within his heart and mind; and answer it with all honesty!

God commanded Moses to hew for himself two tablets of stones like the first, on which God re-wrote His commandments; and to make an ark of wood (1). What did the Lord require of the people?

He did not ask them to offer animal sacrifices, nor reminded them of the statutes concerning the purification; although they were important! He has already set Eleazar the son of Aaron a priest (6), and confirmed the separation of the tribe of Levi to minister to Him (8). But, knowing how the people respond well to the statutes concerning the rites, and fearing that they would become preoccupied with formalities, and lose the inner depths concerning the fellowship with God. the divine commandments in the farewell talks to the prophet Moses, came to confirm that the believers should love God and fear Him from all their hearts and souls, and obey His

[1] *Sermons 159:6.*
[2] *In 2 Cor. hom. 30:4.*

commandment, and to concentrate as well on that they should love their neighbors, and in particular the orphans, the widows, and the strangers, by which He would make them as the stars of heaven in multitude (22).

Thus, the answer to the question: **What does the Lord require of you?** would be:

a. **He requires nothing for Himself**; as He has the heaven, the heaven of heavens, the earth, and everything in it; according to the words of the Psalmist: "I say to the Lord, 'You are my Lord; My goodness is nothing apart from You" (Psalm 16:2).

❖ God is not in need of our goods; we are in need of His goods[1].

St. Gregory of Nyssa

❖ For say, what advantage is it to God, that I am just, or what injury, that I am unjust? Is not His nature incorruptible, incapable of injury, superior to all suffering? Servants having nothing of their own, all is their masters[2].

St. John Chrysostom

b. **He requires of you to be pious**; namely to enjoy fearing Him, which is the beginning of wisdom and would guide you in your life. Fear that is bound to love; like the fear of a son who is keen on not wounding the feelings of his father.

In this book, the prophet Moses often talks of fear, combined with love. And according **to Fr. Martyrus**: [It is fitting for you to stand before God, not lacking in diligence, fervent in spirit, rejoicing in hope and deep love" (Romans 12:11, 12)[3].]

The spiritual man, full of love for God, also bears a holy fear that grants him seriousness in his life, mixed with peace. And according to **St. John Chrysostom**, [He, who deals in jests is not a saint; wherever there is uncleanness, there is also a lack of seriousness. Listen to the words of the Psalmist: "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling" (Psalm 2:11). Lack of seriousness delivers the soul to slothfulness; and often leads to violence and fights[4].]

c. To "**walk in all His ways**;" not to go right or left; enjoy the royal path. Not to walk according to your whims, or to those of other people who may lead you astray; but you should bear the will of God working in you.

d. To "**love Him**;" in order to realize His love for you; and to experience the true warmth of His fatherhood and friendship.

e. To "**serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul**;" to gain the dignity of standing before Him; of fellowship with the heavenly creatures in their heavenly life; and of His statutes, being the source of life, fulfillment, pleasure, and enlightenment.

2. God desires to attach Himself to us; to let us enjoy Him, being our life.

"The Lord delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day" (Deut. 10:15).

His choice of us is only because He seeks our life, presenting Himself as a Source of life. It is clear that the commandments in this chapter start with man's commitments toward God: his love, piety, and worship; followed by his commitments toward his neighbors, and in particular the orphans, the widows, and the strangers; and finally by his commitments towards himself; in order to be counted among the twinkling stars of heaven.

In more than one place, He confirms that the Lord is the portion of His people;

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[1] *Comm. On Canticle , sermon 4.*
[2] *In 1 Tim. Hom. 16.*
[3] *Book of Perfection, 2.*
[4] *In Eph. Hom., 17.*

and in this chapter He confirms that He is the portion of His ministers, the Levites; not that He needs them, as "*heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to Him; also the earth with all that is in it*" (14); but in order for them to get attached to Him to live, to possess, and to have, as their own, the Lord of the heaven, the heaven of heavens, and all the earth.

3. God seeks the circumcision of the heart.

"Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your hearts, and be stiff-necked no longer" (Deut. 10:16).

It is clear that God since the Old Testament does not seek with His commandments and statutes, pure carnal practices; but seeks what concern our inner being. Therefore, if He has set the circumcision of the flesh as a sign of the acceptance of the covenant with God; what He truly seeks is the circumcision of the heart and the soul. He does not seek from us to cut a part of our flesh, but to cut the roots of corruption and sin in the depths of our soul. Through the circumcision of the heart, the believer can consummate the great commandment; namely, to listen to Him, and to love Him from all the heart, all the soul, and all the strength; by which the whole Law is consummated. And, according to the apostle Paul: "For he is not a Jew who is not one outwardly; nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter" (Romans 2:28, 29).

The prophet combines between the circumcision of the heart and not being stiff-necked; as he, who accepts the spiritual circumcision, and practices by the spirit, death to carnal lusts, will have his depths bow in obedience before God, in immense joy; and will be internally prepared to bear the yoke of Christ, with pleasure and longing.

4. He invites us to be referred to the Lord Himself, our God, the great, mighty and awesome God, who desires that we also become lords and gods, to bear His image, and to be living icons of Him; so He would become God of gods and Lord of lords. In this He longs that everyone to be referred to Him, without partiality, nor through a bribe; ; but He would be referred to us if our depths are sanctified.

"For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe" (Deut. 10:17).

Notice how the exalted view of "God's oneness" in verse 17; prevails through the whole book, being the cornerstone of its teaching. He is God, the Mighty; before whom no pagan idol or vain gods can stand. He longs to be referred to the humble man, not out of weakness, nor helplessness or need, but through love.

5. He calls us to care for the castaway, the cast-off, the needy, and the stranger, following His example.

"He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.

Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:18, 19).

Experiencing God's mercies and care for him, especially when he was in need and afflicted; he is committed to pay back this love with love toward those who are in need and afflicted. By this, the prophet binds our love of our brothers to our love of God Himself..

6. A call to fear God, to attach to Him, and to be proud of being referred to Him; as we remember His perpetual wonders with us.

"You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in His name. He is your praise, and He is your God,

who has done for you these great and awesome things, which your eyes have seen. Your fathers went down to Egypt with seventy persons, and now the Lord has made you as the stars of heaven in multitude" (Deut. 10:20-22).

We should praise God, not as One, of whom we heard; nor He, who has done awesome things for our fathers; but we should enjoy the experience of life with Him. And as St. John the beloved says: " *We declare to you what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life*" (1 John 1:1).

It is amazing how many of the wicked are proud to be referred to the devil; while some of the believers are ashamed to proclaim their faith in God and to speak of Him.

"*Your fathers went down to Egypt with seventy souls, and now the Lord has made you as the stars of heaven in multitude*" (22). **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says that those who went down to Egypt were 75 souls (Acts 7:14; Genesis 46:27; Deuteronomy 10:22). From this we understand that those were not mere souls, but persons with bodies. Likewise, when we hear that Christ has become in flesh, or has taken up flesh; we understand that He has taken over the whole human nature[1].

[1] *See St. Gregory of Nyssa: Against Eunomius, Book 2: 13.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY (Chapter 10)'

SET ME A PRIEST, O YOU, THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST

❖ By my uncleanness I broke my covenant with You.
Yet You ask me to join Moses in hewing two tablets of stone.
My heart has turned completely into stone.
Who can engrave Your Law on it, but Your fiery Spirit!
Turn my heart into two tablets of covenant, to be kept in Your ark of covenant.
Let me join the priests in carrying the ark, by sanctifying my whole being.

❖ I erred with Aaron Your high priest; and molded for myself an idol!
Restore to me the dignity of my priesthood.
By forgiving me, and sanctifying my heart.

❖ I corrupted the work of priesthood.
Come back and work in me.
Remember how You are my portion, O the Fulfiller of my depths.

❖ Moses interceded for Aaron and all the people.
Your blood intercedes for me; and restores Your righteousness to me.
In my shame I confess to you:
How often I have broken Your covenant!
How often I have corrupted the beauty of Your work in me!
How often I have forgotten my priesthood!
But now, I return to You, in the divine spirit of fear.
Restore me to You; You are everything to me.

CHAPTER 11
OUR DAYS ARE LIKE THOSE OF HEAVEN

In the last chapter, he spoke of the blessings and gifts of the Lord; and of what God requires from His people, not referring to animal sacrifices and rites, but to the necessity of getting attached to Him and listening to His words. Then he ended it by referring to the exalted gift of the Lord; in that, the seventy persons who went down to Egypt, came out of it as the stars of heaven in multitude.

In this chapter, he clarifies God's reward to the faithful, to make their days, like the days of heavens above the earth ((21). That would motivate us to love God and to keep His commandments; to lay them in our hearts and souls, and bind them as a sign on our hands, in order to enjoy the blessings of obedience, namely, to enjoy the days of heavens on earth, instead of falling under the curse of rebellion, namely, going down to the days of hell.

If the Israelites have been known for their rebellion (1-7), it is fitting for them to translate love into the language of obedience to God, the whole goodness and giving (8-25); in order to experience the heavenly life. Now, being about to enter the Promised Land, they have the chance to express their faithfulness to God, and to their covenant with Him (26-32).

1. You shall love the Lord whom You behold 1–7.

2. You shall keep His commandments, that you may prolong your days 8–12.

3. Worship Him with all your heart that you may be fulfilled 13–17.

4. You shall nail His commandments on your heart, to experience the days of heaven 18–25.

5. Enjoy the blessings of obedience, and avoid the curse of rebellion 26–32.

1. YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD WHOM YOU BEHOLD

The last chapter ended with the words. *"God has made you as the stars of heaven in multitude"* (Deut. 10:22). And the Lord has previously said to Abraham: *"I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore"* (Genesis 22:17). Here, He did not say *"as the sand that is on the seashore,"* but only, *"as the stars of heaven;"* He intended to set them like the luminous stars of heaven. As a reaction to this, the believers are committed to:

"You shall love the Lord your God, therefore, and keep His charge, His decrees, His ordinances, and His commandments always" (Deut. 11:1)

Looking at their congregation to see, how they increased from seventy persons when they came down into Egypt, to uncountable multitudes. And how they became, in the sight of God, twinkling like the stars of heaven, bearing the reflections of God's splendor; The children of Israel are committed to pay the Lord back, love for His love; and diligently keep His commandments and ordinance, with the spirit of perfect obedience.

I say the same thing concerning our families: If they grew in grace; and bore a splendid heavenly life, in which our Christ is transfigured, the new generations would be filled with love and obedience to God and His commandments. We often put the blame on the new generations; characterizing them as rebellious, murmurers, corrupt, and with dry feelings, whereas we should blame ourselves instead. The new generation, having been deprived of having us as role models, for the enjoyment of

the true heavenly church life in us; How could they be capable of giving love? And how can we expect them to acquire the spirit of obedience?!

He sought from them to have love, before keeping His commandments or obeying His ordinances. He who loves, would find pleasure in obeying his beloved, whereas for him, who does not love, the commandment would become a burden, and even impossible to obey.

The prophet Moses, in his farewell talks, concentrates on our love for God; saying: *"**You shall love the Lord your God**"* (1). Keeping the commandments of the Lord by heart, and testifying to the straightforward faith by the mouth, without love, is of no benefit to us, as even the demons, know God and confess His name, but with no love, so they were rebuked by the Lord Christ (Mark 1:25). **St. John Chrysostom**, **St. Ambrose**, and **St. Augustine**, express the same view[1].

Love is what makes our faith in God a living faith; by which we can keep the commandments. Without love, faith would be for judgment; the commandment would become impossible to observe; and we would benefit nothing.

❖ Compare between Peter's confession in Matthew 16:16, with the almost identical words uttered by the demons in Matthew 8:29; Mark 1:24; and Luke 8:28… The difference is that Peter spoke with love; whereas the demons spoke out of fear… How could we recognize the true faith; if even the demons can believe and get terrified? It is only faith working in love, which is the (true) faith[2].

St. Augustine

❖ Faith is capable; Yet without love, it is of no benefit. The demons' confession of Christ, because it is without love, gave them no gain… Therefore do not boast faith that makes you on the same level of the demons[3].

St. Augustine

❖ Both the demons and the believers confess Christ: "*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God"* (Matthew 16:16; Mark 3:11)… Yet, in one confession, there is love; whereas in the other, there is only fear. Christ is beloved by the children, but is feared by others[4].

St. Augustine

There is no word more favorite for Moses like '**love**.' The essence of his message, delivered to him by God, is to receive the love of God, through our response to Him, with love.

"Remember today that it was not your children (who have not known or seen the discipline of the Lord your God), but it is you who must acknowledge His greatness, His mighty hand,

And His outstretched arm, His signs and His deeds that He did in Egypt to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and to all his land;

What He did to the Egyptian army, to their horses and chariots, how He made the water of the Red Sea flow over them as they pursued you, so that the Lord has destroyed them to this day;

What He did to you in the wilderness, until you came to this place;

And what He did to Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, sons of Reuben, how in the midst of all Israel the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, along with their households, their tents, and every living being in their company; for it is

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[1] *Ancient Christian Comm. On Scripture, Mark, p. 21.*
[2] *Sermons on the N.T. Lessons. 40:8.*
[3] *On the Gospel of St. John, 6:21.*
[4] *On the Psalms, 50:2.*

your own eyes that have seen every great deed that the Lord did" (Deut. 11:2-7)

Here, he demonstrates the extent of God's care for the salvation of His people, and for their sanctification; presenting examples of His dealings, both with those outside, and those inside.

Concerning those outside, God allowed for the destruction of some of the beautiful cities of Egypt, rich in their fruits, scientific and artistic possibilities; through the ten plagues; and allowed for the Pharaoh of Egypt to drown together with all his capable hosts; in order to save His beloved people from the bitter bondage.

As for those inside, He allowed for the perdition of Dathan, Abiram, and others (Numbers 16:41); who acted with a spirit of rebellion against God and His prophet Moses, through using a strange fire. He is a loving, yet a firm God, who seeks the purity and the sanctity of His people; takes away the corruption, for the sake of the edification of the holy congregation.

The extent of God's care for sanctity, is revealed by what He did to the demon who truthfully testified to Him, saying: "*What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?... I know who You are, the Holy One of God,'* Yet Jesus rebuked him, saying, "*Be silent, and come out of him*"" (Mark 1:24). This is also revealed by what the apostle Paul did with the slave girl who had a spirit of divination, followed him, and kept crying out for many days, saying: "'*These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.' Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, 'I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her*'" (Acts 16:17, 18). What the Lord Christ and His apostles want, is the sanctity of creation.

❖ The Lord Christ put a rein on the mouths of the demons, who cried out at Him from the graves. For although they uttered the truth, and did not lie when they said, *"You are the Son of God;" "You are the Holy One of God"* (Matthew 8:29; Mark 1:24; Luke 8:28); yet He did not wish the truth to be uttered by an unclean mouth; especially from those who, under the pretence of truth, mix between deceit and truth[1].

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

2. YOU SHALL KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS: THAT YOU MAY PROLONG YOUR DAYS:

The repeated commandment to the people; on entering the Promised Land, was not to be preoccupied by the new land, the gift of God, over the enjoyment of the divine commandment; presenting to them the following blessings of keeping the commandment:

(1) "**To possess**": ***"Keep then, this entire commandment that I am commanding you today, so that you may have the strength to go in and possess the land that you are crossing over to possess" (Deut. 11:8).***

They were entering into a series of wars against strong nations with military experience, fortified cities, and mighty possibilities, all of which they lacked. God's work was to lead them, grant them strength, and conquest, in order to possess. He did not promise to give them military experience to use swords and arrows; but presented to them His divine presence, as the secret of their conquest and the enjoyment of possession. Keeping the divine commandment prepares them for the divine presence, and grants them every true success. God wishes us to possess, and even to become kings with authority.

(2) "**To live long**": ***"And so that you may live long in the land that the Lord***

[1] *To the Bishops of Egypt, 3.*

swore to your ancestors to give them and to their descendents, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Deut. 11:9).

We have previously seen this reward given to him who honors his father and mother. And here, he, who honors God as his heavenly Father, and the Church as his spiritual mother, would enjoy the same reward.

We spoke before, about prolonging our days on earth; and how many; although having died young, yet their life in the sight of God, is still on earth, testifying to the work of God, and producing fruits in the life of many. As an example, we have the children of Bethlehem who were martyred following the birth of the Lord Christ; whose memory is still living here on earth; and they became a glorified procession that brings pleasure to God, to the heavenly creatures, and to all believers. **Whoever honors the divine commandment through keeping it, will be glorified eternally.**

Some elders who lived long on earth; If their life is evaluated, it would not be worth a few days, probably few hours or minutes, or even nothing at all. The work of sin is to make man's life shorter; or to turn it into death; whereas his keeping of the divine commandment, would make out of his days on earth, a pledge of the joyful and fruitful eternal life.

(3) **To have God's blessing dwell in them**: Some believe that the Egyptians having dwelt in the valley, close to the river Nile, do not depend upon the blessing of heaven, like those in the land of Canaan, who depend entirely on the rain water, which otherwise, is very rare in Egypt.

"For the land that you are about to enter to occupy is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you sow your seed and irrigate by foot like a vegetable garden. But the land that you are crossing over to occupy is a land of hills and valleys, watered by the rain of the sky, a land that the Lord your God looks after. The eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year" (Deut. 11:10-12)

God talks to His people, as though to little children who have not reached maturity yet, to whom He presents His blessings of fertile land, early and late rain, and divine care for all their worldly needs. All these bear symbolic concepts, enjoyed by the spiritually mature. Instead of the earth they see heaven within their hands. Instead of the rain, they receive the Holy Spirit of God to dwell in them. And instead of taking care of their material needs, God presents to them, Himself as a gift.

The prophet Moses makes a comparison between the land of Egypt and that of Canaan. The land of Egypt, the land of bondage for the Jews, depends upon the Nile water and underground springs; whereas that of Canaan, the Promised Land, depends upon rainwater. The first is irrigated by water from underground, whereas the other is irrigated by water from the sky above. And as **St. Jerome** says: [Abraham made all those journeys to dwell in the Promised Land that are watered from above; and not like the land of Egypt that are watered from below… It is a land of hills and plains, elevated above the sea; with entirely no worldly pleasures; but great spiritual pleasures. St. Mary, the mother of God, forsook the lower land, and, once she received the message of the angel, and realized that she bore the Son of God inside her, she set forth to the higher hills (John 1:26-31, 39)[1].]

In Egypt, irrigation is the main problem; as canals and drains have to be prepared beforehand, for receiving the water of the Nile. Whereas in Canaan, irrigation is done through the grace of God; rain come down with no human labor. In

[1] *St. Jerome: Letters 46:2.*

autumn, the early rain come down at the time of sowing the seeds; and in spring, the late rain come down at the harvest time (James 5:7). Irrigation in Canaan reminds us all the time of God's ordained care; and gives an example of the life of the Christian whom God freely grants, what others labor hard to get. In the book of Zechariah, It is said:: *"If any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain on them. And if the family of Egypt do not go up and present themselves, then on them shall come the plague that the Lord inflicts on the nations that do not go up to keep the festival of booths"* (Zechariah 14:17, 18).

The expression, "***irrigate by foot***" (10), is understood by the primitive farmers in Egypt, who use their bare foot to move silt to let the water pour from a canal to another, to irrigate the land; then use it again to block it to protect the little plants from being over-flooded. This expression also bears the meaning that irrigation is wholly under human control. Whereas in Canaan, they stay at home, while God takes over the task of watering their land by the rainwater, known as "*the rivers of God;*" as according to the Psalmist: *"You visit the earth and water it, You greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water"* (Psalm 65:9).

Thus God directs our sight, not toward the earth (the River Nile), but toward heaven (the rainwater), to water our souls and bodies by the water of His heavenly Holy Spirit; realizing the divine promise to us: *"I will be like dew to Israel:"* (Hosea 14:5); and as said by Barnabas and Paul: *"God has not left himself without a witness in doing good – giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy"* (Acts 14:15).

The greatest gift given to them is probably: ***"The eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year"*** (Deut. 11:12). As we depend on God's care; and direct our sight toward heaven, to anticipate the water of His love, we see His eyes on us from the beginning of the year to its end. God, in His love for His people, wishes them to lift their eyes toward Him, to encounter His own eyes.

3. "YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART THAT YOU MAY BE FULFILLED"

Whoever desires by love to keep the commandment, will have his eyes lifted toward God, to see Him looking at him with exalted love, and to have fountains of water of the Holy Spirit flood over him to water the garden of his inner love.

"If you will only heed His every commandment that I am commanding you today – loving the Lord your God, and serving Him with all your heart and with all your soul – then He will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain" (Deut. 11:13, 14)

What is the early rain, but the Holy Spirit who worked early in the Old Testament, when the seeds of the word of God were planted in the soil of man. Whereas, the later rain is the gift of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, that is why, after talking about the work of the resurrection of Christ in us, the prophet Hosea referred to the gift of the Holy Spirit as the later rain; saying: *"After two days He will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before Him. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; His appearing is as sure as the dawn; He will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains (the later rain) that waters the earth"* (Hosea 6; 2, 3). He grants man His Spirit; as a city enjoying rain, the gift of God; "*I would send rain on one city, and send no rain on another city"* (Amos 4:7).

In the region of Judea, the early rain falls in November after preparing the

ground and putting the seeds in the soil. Whereas the later rain falls in April, when the wheat ripens and need the water to fill the heads of the grains. Without the early rain, it would not be possible to start agriculture; and without the later rain, it would not produce the proper crop.

The soil that enjoys both the early and the later rain will produce the following crops:

Crops for man: *"**You will gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil**"* (14); and as the Psalmist says: *"You cause… plants for the people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart"* (Psalm 104:14, 15).

By the Holy Spirit working in us, we would gather from the earth of our hearts, that is sanctified by Him, wheat to feed on the food of angels, would drink a spiritual wine to rejoice in the Lord, and would gain oil to be anointed kings and priests for the Lord. We would enjoy inner fulfillment, spiritual joy, and holy honor in the Lord.

2. **Food for the livestock**: *"**And He will give you grass in your fields for your livestock, and you will eat your fill**"* (15). God cares for the beasts and birds for the sake of man. The Psalmist says: *"The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that He planted. In them the birds build their nests; the stork has its home in the fir trees. The high mountains are for the wild goats; the rocks are a refuge for the conies"* (Psalm 104:16-18).

If God grants the soul fulfillment, joy, and honor (wheat, wine, and oil); He also satisfies the needs of the body; giving grass to the livestock. Whereas, he who diverts from love, and rejects the commandment, his life would become a wilderness, not a garden, and he would lose his life.

"Take care, or you will be seduced into turning away, serving other gods and worshipping them, for then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you and He will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain and the land will yield no fruit, then you will perish quickly off the land that the Lord is giving you" (Deut. 11:16, 17)

It is fitting for believers to be alert, lest they may be deceived by anyone, and their hearts may be diverted from the Lord their God; The fruit of this diversion would be:

A. **The wrath of God** would befell them; and instead of having their eyes encounter those of the Lord, they would be deprived of having His compassionate eyes, look on them day and night, and of His presence that grants them all blessings. When the believer looks at the face of God; he would be attracted to His eyes; and would sing: *"His eyes are like doves beside springs of water, bathed in milk, fitly set"* (Song of Solomon); Whereas the wicked, on the other hand, would cry out and say: *"His eyes were like a flame of fire"* (Revelation 1:14).

B. **The sky would close its gates before them**, and would be like bronze that offers no rain. The wicked, deprived of the rain of the Holy Spirit; their depths would turn into wilderness, and a dwelling place for the evil spirits and the sins, being like wild and fierce beasts.

C. **Their land would cease to produce fruit**; and would find in it no trace of the fruits of the Holy Spirit; namely, love, joy, peace etc. It would become filled with nothing but thorns.

D. **They would soon perish**, and would be deprived of life on the new land. After having gained the new life, and the possibilities of enjoying the heavenliness, they would be denied the enjoyment of all these divine graces

4. YOU SHALL NAIL HIS COMMANDMENTS ON YOUR HEART TO EXPERIENCE THE DAYS OF HEAVEN

Granting us His Holy spirit, as the early and later rain, God turns our depths into a paradise filled with the fruits of the Spirit. From our side, by the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, we would sanctify everything we have, the account of the divine commandment: our heart, soul, senses; and even our lying down, and our rising up.

a. **Dedication of the heart to the divine commandment**; "***You shall put these words of Mine in your hearts"*** (18). As they are a precious treasure, dear to us, we would not trust to put them in outer stores, other than our hearts, with all the energies of love they embrace. There, we shall hide the commandment, and keep it safe with all our feelings and emotions; and be kept by it.

b. **Dedication of the soul to the divine commandment**: "*and soul*" (18). Our dealing with it, would not be on the level of mere outer appearances. As, when the commandment become hidden in the soul, all our behavior would appear as natural fruit, and a reaction, of its dwelling in the soul; As it dwells in us, We would also dwell in it.

c. **Dedication of all our works** and the touches of our hands to the commandment: "***You shall bind them as a sign on your hand"*** (18). If we inscribe the commandment on our hands, God would inscribe our names on His hands: "*See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands"* (Isaiah 49:16). As we previously said, we still have the custom of putting a sign on the hand or the finger, to remind us of something important we should do. Likewise, if we do the same thing with the commandment, we would not forget our commitment to God, to pay Him back His love with our love.

d. **Dedication of our sight to the commandment**: "***and fix them as an emblem on your forehead***" (18). So, as not to see anyone or anything, except through it. By the commandment we would have a new sight of God, man, the world, the body, time, and everything around or inside us.

e. Dedication of the tongue to the commandment: "***Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home, and when you are away"*** (19). With those related and unrelated to us, we should not talk except the Word of God.

f. **Dedication of the time of sleep and awakening** to the commandment: "***When you lie down and when you rise"*** (19).

a. **Dedication of the dwelling place to the commandment**: "***Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates"*** (20).

Then he reconfirms the blessings that would come over them through keeping the commandment:

a. **A fruitful, long, and blessed life:** "***So that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the Lord swore to your ancestors to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth***" (Deut. 11:21)

The commandment turns our days on earth into heavenly days. Every moment would have its value in the sight of God. As true believers, we are committed:

To bear the heavenly Lord Jesus Christ, so that heaven would not be far from us, but would become nearer than anything around us.

To bear Jesus Christ together with Simon the elder, on our inner arms, and go around the altar set by God inside us – the new heaven. Then, our heart would flare with longing for eternities, to sing saying: *"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation"* (Luke 2:29);

To ascend together with Peter, James, and John, in the company of the Lord

Christ, on the Mount of transfiguration; to behold the heavenly glory of the Lord, and cry out saying: *"Lord, it is good to be here."*

To walk together with our heavenly Christ, risen from the dead, all along our life, and say together with the two disciples of Emaus, saying: *"Were not our hearts burning within us, while He was talking to us on the road?"* (Luke 24:32)

And to have our life turning into an enjoyable debate with the heavenly One; to enjoy what the Samaritan woman, who forsook all what she possessed, her water jar, that symbolize everything temporal, to set forth to her people, to invite them to an encounter with the Heavenly One who told her everything she has ever done (John 4:29).

In short, everything would be centered on the presence of the heavenly Christ, risen from the dead, in our world, who grants us His Holy Spirit to conform us into an icon of the Heavenly; and turns our heart of dust into a new heaven. Eternity would then become something to taste its pledge, and to touch in our actual life. And as **St. Clement of Alexandria** states that for the Gnostic (who seeks the spiritual knowledge), earth would be transformed into heaven[1].

❖ You should seek heaven, and heavenly things, even before reaching there; He commands us to turn earth into heaven; and to act and to talk as though we are there, while being on earth.

This should also be the goal of our prayers that we raise to the Lord. Even if we are still on earth; yet nothing can hinder our reaching the perfection of the higher powers. We can do everything here as though we are already dwelling up there[2].

❖ He does everything possible to set us free of the un-necessary things; and of our emotions toward the earth. That is why He referred to the pagans, saying: *"It is the Gentiles who strive for all these things"* (Matthew 6:31); those who dedicate all their labor for the sake of the present life; and do not care for things to come, nor for any heavenly thought[3].

St. John Chrysostom

❖ When the will of God is realized by us, who are on earth; like it is, by those who are in heaven; we would become like them, *"bearing the image of the man of heaven"* (1 Corinthians 15:49). And we would inherit the kingdom of heavens (Matthew 25:34). And when we depart to be in heaven (in Paradise), those who will come after us, while still on earth, would pray to be like us[4].

Origen

❖ The Creator Himself is where man should be; yet not as a material place. He created him to make Himself a dwelling place for him. But, when man gave his ear to the tempter, he deserted his dwelling place; he deserted the love of his Creator. So, in order to save us, the Mighty One came to us by His incarnation; and I can say that He came after man who has deserted him, to get him back to Him as his own dwelling place[5].

Pope Gregory (the Great)

b. A life of conquest, and an enjoyment of a greater inheritance: *"If you will diligently observe this entire commandment that I am commanding you, loving*

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[1] *Cf the author: the Christian and passing to Heaven, Alexandria 1998, p. 19-20 (in Arabic).*
[2] *In Matt. hom., 19:7.*
[3] *In Matt. hom., 22:4.*
[4] *On Prayer 26:1.*
[5] *Morals on Job 7:9,10.*

the Lord your God, walking in all His ways, and holding fast to Him, then the Lord will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and mightier than yourselves" (Deut. 11:22, 23).

Over the enemy, despite their superiority in number, possibilities, and military might, God grants His children who observe, and actually practice all His commandments, the spirit of conquest and victory. He grants them many blessings, when they proclaim their love for the Lord. He seeks from them to attach themselves to Him, being His very dearly beloved children; or the heavenly bride to be united with Him as a heavenly Groom. The goal of the commandment is love that presents an exalted and amazing union between God and man.

❖ The Word of God counts Himself, as having become one body with the soul, more so than that between man and his own wife (Genesis 2:24). Who is more fitting to become one spirit with God, but the human soul, that unites with God, by love, to be said that it became with God as one Spirit[1].

Origen

c. **A life of perpetual growth**: ***"Every place on which you set foot shall be yours. Your territory shall extend from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River to the river Euphrates, to the Western Sea"*** (Deut. 11:24).

This was literally realized in the days of king Solomon (2 Chronicles 9:26); and is still being spiritually realized in the life of every believer. Whoever tread with the foot of his heart over love of the world, would enslave the world. Whereas he, who bows himself before the world, coveting its pleasures, riches, and dignities, the world would tread with its foot over him and enslave him. When we tread with our feet over love of the world, we shall have the barren wilderness and the fertile lands, full of fruits, submit to us; our authority would extend from east to west; and our territory would be so spacious to embrace, if possible, everyone.

d. **A life of honor and respect**: *"**No one will be able to stand against you; the Lord your God will put the fear and dread of you on all the land on which you set foot, as He promised you**"* (Deut. 11:25).

Whoever honors the commandment, and practices the fear of God, will get honor, and will be dreaded by all.

5. AN ENJOYMENT OF THE BLESSINGS OF OBEDIENCE, AND NOT THE CURSE OF REBELLION

The prophet Moses summarized all his talks concerning keeping the divine commandment, obeying it and rebelling against it, in two words: "*Bless and curse*":

"See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse" (Deut. 11:26)

God granted us the free will, to receive the blessing or the curse. It is within our authority to use this free will, either to get this or that,; through obeying God or rebelling against Him. We are not irrational creatures, to be moved by God against their will. But the Mighty One gave us the perfection of freedom; that if we, by His grace, walk in obedience, we would be crowned; and if we reject His work in us, we would be judged.

"The blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, that I am commanding you today; and the curse if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn from the way that I am commanding you today, to follow other gods that you have not known" (Deut. 11:27, 28)

God presents both promises and threats. By the promises He does not acquire

[1] *De Principiis 2:6:3.*

anything for Himself, but grants what He has to man. And His threats, harbor no emotion of revenge; but a loving advice against the natural fruit of rebellion, and what it might do to human life.

The blessings He promises, and the curses He threats, are nothing hidden, but are serious things that He proclaimed before the congregation on Mounts Gerzim and Ebal, before they crossed over the Jordan (Deuteronomy 27:11); and after they have crossed over it (Joshua 8:33).

"When the Lord your God has brought you into the land that you are entering to occupy, you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerzim, and the curse on Mount Ebal" (Deut. 11:29)

This was realized at the first regions into which 'Abraham' entered in Canaan, where he received a divine promise (Genesis 12:6, 7).

It was realized before they entered into Canaan, to encourage them to have faith to enjoy the divine promises; and was also realized after they did enter into Canaan, to let them persist on obeying the commandment.

Why did He choose Mount Gerzim and Mount Ebal?

The word 'Gerzim' is derived from the Hebrew verb '*gaaraz*,' meaning 'to cut or to crop;' as this mountain was rich in trees and fruits; hence was convenient when talking about blessing. Whereas 'Ebal' is most probably derived from the Hebrew word '*Ebala*,' meaning 'rough' or 'rejoicing[1].' Or probably from the word ' *abalo*,' meaning white rocks, as this mountain is barren with no vegetation.

"As you know, they are beyond the Jordan, some distance to the west, in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, beside the Oak of Moreh.

When you cross the Jordan to go in to occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and when you occupy it, you must diligently observe all the statutes and ordinances that I am setting before you today" (Deut. 11:30-32)

All people together with the ministers proclaimed their acceptance of the divine covenant, to earn the divine blessings proclaimed on Mount Gerzim, and to avoid the curses proclaimed on Mount Ebal, and that by practically observing the divine commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances.

Now they are looking straight ahead toward the Promised Land to cross over to the Gilgal, where they intended to set an altar, and the tabernacle to accommodate the Ark of the Covenant, to cross over and enter into the Promised Land, to occupy the land given to them by the Lord their God. So, it is also fitting for us to cross over, through observing the commandment, into the heavenly Canaan; not to set there an altar of stone, nor a tabernacle, or an ark of covenant, but to enjoy the exalted divine presence; and to dwell as kings, together with the King of kings, with the spirit of conquest and victory.

[1] *Adam Clarke Commentary.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 11)

GRANT ME AND MY CHILDREN
THE DAYS OF HEAVEN, HERE ON EARTH

❖ You brought Your people up to the Promised Land,
A land that flows with milk and honey.
That does not need the water of the Nile to irrigate it.
As You irrigate it by the rain of heaven.
How amazing is your care for your people!
Your eyes are on them from the beginning of the year to its end.

❖ Grant me to experience the days of heaven, here on earth.
Irrigate me with the rain of your exalted care.
Your hands present me with the sweetness of heaven.
I can then, present the new generations with it as an experience of life.

❖ To carry to them your words those are in my heart.
My heart deposits them in theirs.
Together with me, they would experience the blessings of the commandment.
And would enjoy the blessed divine life.

❖ My sin deprived me of beholding Your eyes
My sin closed before me the gates of heaven.
That turned into bronze before my prayers.
My sin made me loose the rains of your exalted love.

❖ Let your words work in my heart.
Let its sight be lifted up to you.
Let my eyes encounter your eyes.
To make my heart dissolve with love.
By Your word, my heart and soul are sanctified.
By Your commandment, my hands and all my senses are sanctified.
By Your commandment I become completely yours.
Tasting the sweetness of your heavens; and turn into heaven for you to dwell in.

THE SECOND SERMON
SUB-DIVISION (2)

THE SPECIAL COMMANDMENTS AND STATUTES
(CHAPTERS 12 to 26)

THE BOOK OF THE LAW

This part is considered as the main body of the book as a whole; presenting statutes and ordinances that touch the worship and daily life of the people, and of each of its members living in the cities or villages. It represents the thread that connects between the era of the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and the New Testament. It prepares the way, through the prophecies and the law. Hence – by its spiritual concept – it is considered as the foundation of our Christian faith. In the era of the Patriarchs, we felt the love of God, and His care for His elects as individuals. Now, the Lord translates His love and care, through statutes that touch the life of the congregation, as well as of the daily life of the individual; for all to experience God's care for our life with all its details; through our obedience by the divine commandment.

Through this constitution, God reveals Himself, being the Holy One, who does not stand sin; and the Merciful, at the same time. The Holy One, does not stand diversion toward idolatry, and its abominations. And by His mercy, He reveals the animal sacrifice as a symbol of the unique and joyful sacrifice of Christ.

Some believe that chapters 12 to 26 should be separated from the rest of the book of Deuteronomy, under the name "**Code of Deuteronomy**." But these chapters are a continuation of the previous talk by Moses, in which he presented to the people the commandments and the religious, civil, social, and family statutes for life in Canaan, together with encouragements and warnings.

CHAPTER 12
THE TEMPLE AND DEMOLISHING EVERY TRACE OF IDOL WORSHIP

This chapter carries two distinct trends:

(1) If God has granted them the land as a free divine gift. They, on their part, are committed to demolish every trace of corruption, in order to enjoy the holy life. Israel was then one of the newest developing nations. As the people who were about to enter into the Promised Land, were all born in the wilderness; with no experience of the old nations, there was a great probability for them to be influenced by what they see in the Promised Land, of cultures and achievements. That is why the divine command was firm, to demolish everything related to idolatry.

(2) God has granted them the holy land. At the same time, requested from them to build for Him a house sanctified for Him; at the location He chooses. He gives plenty, and requests a few of what He gave, in order to confirm the mutual love between Himself and them.

After speaking about the blessings of observing and responding to the divine command; and the curses of rebelling against it; the prophet Moses speaks about the importance of demolishing every trace of idolatry. Any compromise with the sin, or neglect of its traces, would draw the heart of the believer gradually away from the love of God, would corrupt his depths, and would deny him the pleasure and sweetness of the divine commandment. He warned them against offering sacrifices outside the location chosen by God to set a holy worship, in order not to create any chance to offer a sacrifice to any other but the true God; or to worship God in a way that is similar to idolatry. He also warned them against drinking blood, as was the custom of pagans; and against inquiring about their vain practices of worship, to protect His people, whom He has chosen, against having anything of the abominations of idolatry that might corrupt their thoughts.

The Canaanites used to worship several gods, for whom they set altars at different locations. Here He inspired the idea of "Oneness" in the people's minds, to ban offering sacrifice in any location other than the one place chosen by God as His temple (1-14); where the name of God dwells (11). Before the temple of Jerusalem, the Lord's sanctuary was the tabernacle of meeting or the Ark of the Covenant.

God alone chooses the place of His sanctuary; and chooses the way He should be worshipped. He would not let His people adopt the ways of the Canaanites (31), or their custom of drinking the blood (15-28), or offering human sacrifices (29-31).

1. Demolishing any trace of idolatry 1-4.
2. Setting a house for the Lord 5-15.
3. Refraining from drinking blood 16.
4. Eating before God 17-18.
5. Taking care not to neglect the Levites 19.
6. Refraining from eating blood 20-28.
7. Refraining from inquiring about the practices of vain worship 29-32.

1. DEMOLISHING ANY TRACE OF IDOL WORSHIP

Once man finds comfort from his temptations, he often forgets God and disregards His commandment. That is why the prophet Moses confirms to His people, that when they inherit the land according to the promise of God, they should observe

the divine commandment.

"These are the statutes and the ordinances that you must diligently observe in the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has given you to occupy all the days that you live on the earth" (Deut. 12:1)

Saying: *"**in the land**,"* it is obvious that the author feels that the entry of Israel into the Promised Land have become close. This is what prevails on the whole book.

He confirms to them that man is committed to observe the commandment as long as he lives on earth. It was not given to him to observe, only during his affliction in the wilderness, but also in Canaan. Man should strive to observe it until his last breath.

The greatest commandment openly came, that there is no god to worship, among the other vain, so-called gods, but One God. That is why, once they enter into the Promised Land, they should demolish any trace of idolatry.

"You must demolish completely all the places where the nations whom you are about to dispossess served their gods, on the mountain heights, on the hills, and under every leafy tree. Break down their altars, smash their pillars, burn their sacred poles with fire, and hew down the idols of their gods, and thus blot out their name from their places" (Deut. 12:2, 3)

"Their sacred poles" (*asherahs*) are wooden poles on which they used to set the idols for worship.

It is amazing to hear him say to the new generation who enter Canaan for the first time: "*the nations who you are about to dispossess"* (2); (namely the land you are about to inherit), as though they were to inherit a land that belonged to their ancestors. Having promised Abraham to give this land to his children; God counted it as theirs, even though they have not yet come to possess. Now this generation came to possess and to inherit what belonged to their ancestors.

By saying, "***their gods, on the mountain heights, on the hills, and under every leafy tree****"* (2), he proclaims, as though those pagan gods, by spreading their altars everywhere, have occupied the places that were supposed to be sanctified for God, the Creator of the world. They have occupied the mountain heights and the hills, as steadfast and high gods that no one could demolish; and under every leafy tree; having been considered as the source of fertility and fruition. Every trace of idolatry at all those locations should be demolished, to proclaim to the people that God alone is the Stronghold of His people, who lifts them up to the heavens, and grants them, not just the fertility of animals and plants, but also the increasing fruition of the spirit.

(1) God commanded every trace of idolatry to be demolished, for the land has become holy for the Lord. It is impossible to combine between the divine sanctuaries and the unclean traces that carry the smell of abominations. He did not approve using the sites of idolatry for worshipping the living God, to avoid any probable source of confusion between them. Whoever encounter the Holy God, would hate "even the garment defiled by the body."

(2) Having chosen them as His own loved and honored them; it is fitting for them to chose God alone, to despise, hate, and completely reject idolatry.

(3) He did not allow for any trace of idolatry to remain; to protect the souls from getting swept by them in their moments of weakness.

(4) By proclaiming the kingdom of God in the life of people, as well as in the holy place, sanctifying man should not be separated from sanctifying the place where His God is worshipped.

(5) He warned them against adopting the pagan customs in worshipping God: "***You shall not worship the Lord your God in such ways****"* (4). He did not wish His

people to offer their sacrifices to God on the mountain heights, on the hills, under every leafy tree, the way the pagans did. God does not seek these things, but seeks obedience to Him. It is not fitting for us to honor Him according to our human mind, but according to His.

(6) He presents us with an important principle that touches our spiritual life, which is not to confuse between the truth and vanity, and between darkness and light. It is fitting for the believer who longs for a fellowship with God – the Light – to reject all works of darkness. He is committed to take off all the works of the old man, and to be clothed with the new man, with all his works and thoughts. He should not get slothful with any evil thought, but should demolish it completely, recalling the words of St. John, the beloved: *"If we say that we have fellowship with Him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true"* (1 John 1:6).

Is the commandment concerning demolishing idolatry still valid today?

Every one of us is in need of demolishing the idols set inside him. Any confusion or preoccupation that would separate us from God, and make us lose the vision of the heavenliness is an idol that should be demolished. It is not the matter or the actual work, nor the joyful or the sad events, that constitutes an idol, but it is the preoccupation of the heart and mind, and their diversion from the salvation of man, that is an idol.

2. SETTING A HOUSE FOR GOD

The Lord, is God of the whole earth; yet he chose for Himself a special place to put His name on it: *"The place of the name of the Lord of hosts"* (Isaiah 18:7); *"the place where your glory abides"* (Psalm 26:8). He committed them to a certain place chosen by Him to dwell in, where they can worship and offer their sacrifices, but He did not fix its exact location, but left it to the future, when they get the Promised Land, He gives the commandment at the right time.

It is obvious that the author did not know the location of the future temple at the time he wrote this book, an indication, that it was the prophet Moses (or someone right after his departure) who has written it, long before the building of the temple of Jerusalem.

Some may probably believe that the book of the Law began by a negative tone, proclaiming the demolition of everything related to the nations. But, it is clear that its goal has been the positive side; namely, confirming the role of the sacrifice and the blood in their life, which was not to be realized while idolatry still remained.

He combines the demolition of everything related to the Gentiles, especially idolatry, with setting a dwelling place for God in their midst. The land that was previously used for abominations it is sanctified to be counted as a dwelling place for God. God does not wish for demolition, as much as for building, for transferring our energies from evil to goodness.

As the temple would be the place of the sacrifice, and the center of life for the people of God, entering into a covenant with God; its one and particular location had to be chosen by God Himself (5, 11, 18). It is true that there is a multitude of animal sacrifices to reveal the many aspects of the cross. But they are all offered in one temple, being a non-repeated sacrifice.

God did not allow His people to offer sacrifices in any place, but the place He has chosen to be His own dwelling place, where an altar for Him is set, in order to keep them from falling into offering sacrifices to idols, or on idol altars.

"But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes as His habitation to put His name there. You shall go there, bringing there your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and your donations, your votive gifts, your free-will offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and flocks" (Deut. 12:5, 6)

The Ark of the Covenant, including the two tablets of the testimony represented the divine presence; and wherever it was, God referred the place to Him, and counted it as His holy house. No one got a blessing, except through the Ark of the Covenant, that used to represent the Law or the word of God, as though from the mouth of God Himself.

During their journey in the wilderness, the tabernacle of meeting was not always set; and it was not possible to designate a fixed place for worship, or to practice all the rites according to the law. But after the temple was built at the location chosen by the Lord, the situation became completely different

The Ark of the Covenant settled down first in Shiloh; but because of the evil done by the people, and God's wrath that came down on that location, the ark was moved from one place to another, until it settled down in Jerusalem in the days of the prophet David, and the temple was built by his son king Solomon, to whom the Lord appeared in the night and said to him, "*I have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice"* (2 Chronicles 7:12). And Solomon said: "*I have built You an exalted house, a place for you to reside in forever"* (2 Chronicles 6:2); "*Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who with His hand has fulfilled what He promised with His mouth to my father David, saying: 'Since the day that I brought my people out of the land of Egypt, I have not chosen a city from any of the tribes of Israel in which to build a house, so that my name might be there, and I chose no one as ruler over my people Israel; but I have chosen Jerusalem in order that my name may be there"* (2 Chronicles 6:4-6).

In the Old Testament, sacrifices were offered in only one house of God; whereas in the New Testament, the whole earth came to be for the Lord and His Christ; and the incense is offered to the Lord everywhere (Malachi 1:11); according to what the Lord Christ proclaimed to the Samaritan woman, that the true worship will not be bound to this mountain, nor to Jerusalem, but to the spirit and the truth wherever the true worshipers are found (John 4:23).

What are they to do in the house of the Lord?

1. Bring there their burnt offerings, their sacrifices, and their donations (6, 11). It is fitting for the Christian to offer sacrifices of love to God.

2. Eat there before the Lord: "***You shall eat there in the presence of the Lord their God***" (7). He does not only request from them to offer their gifts, which are actually of what He gave them, but also to proceed to eat a holy food. He wishes to fulfill their depths; seeks what is theirs, not what is His. He needs nothing, but longs to sit with us, to eat with us and we with Him, on the level of friendship and love, saying: "*I am standing at the door, knocking; If you hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to you, and eat with you, and you with me"* (Revelation 3:20).

He wants us to eat before Him, to fill our hearts with His love, our minds with His knowledge, and our senses with His holiness; granting us a satisfaction for our depths.

3. Practice joy in the Lord in this house; confirming the commitment to rejoice (7, 12, 18). In this book, He keeps on repeating His invitation to rejoice together before the Lord (14:26; 16:11, 14; 26:11; 27:7).

And you shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your households together, rejoicing in all your undertakings in which the Lord your God has blessed you" (Deut. 12:7)

Here, He probably means the celebration of the main feasts during which certain sacrifices were offered. He wishes to make out of His house '*a house of rejoicing,'* where the believers get together to celebrate the feasts.

Joy was one of the features of Jewish worship and life (Deuteronomy 12:7, 18). Nothing would bring joy to the heart of the Lord, like seeing His children rejoice in His house. That is why He was not pleased when they covered His altar with tears, weeping, and groaning (Malachi 2:13).

The believer rejoices in the Lord, and draws the hearts of his household, his servants, and those around him, to rejoice in the Lord together with him. Faith is a call to enjoy the heavenly inner joy, in the midst of the sufferings, and to live it even in the moments of weeping, and through the tears of repentance. Together with the bitterness of repentance, the soul experiences the joy of spirit and the peace of heart. By joy, the believer accepts all the troubles, and crosses over the tribulations, enjoying the fellowship together with his Christ, the Grantor of true joy.

❖ The sweetness of apples makes up for the bitterness of its roots. The hope for gaining a profit brings joy during the dangers of the sea. Looking forward to getting healthy would make it easier to take the disgusting medication. Who likes to eat nuts, would have first to break down its hard shell. So also he, who wishes to rejoice in the holy conscience, would easily bear the bitterness of repentance[1].

St. Jerome

St. Augustine believes that the source of rejoicing of the believers, is their enjoyment of the beauty of the divine truth, saying:

❖ Now, O blessed Jesus, Look down from Your holy mountain, on Your true believers among the multitudes, finding no joy except to be contradicted and debated all the time by others.

Open up their eyes, O Lord, to behold You, and be amazed by the beauty of Your truth, to hasten to run and worship You[2].

St. Augustine

4.To let the Levite who resides in their town also rejoice together with them (12)

"And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you together with your sons, and your daughters, your male and female slaves, and the Levites who reside in your towns, since they have no allotment or inheritance with you." (Deut. 12:12)

If the males alone were probably committed to come over to the house of the Lord to celebrate the feast (Exodus 23:17), women were also allowed to accompany them (1 Samuel 1:3-23).

The Levites helped the priests in executing their ritual tasks, and used to go around the cities to teach the people the Law of God. It is fitting for us to invite the Levites to come to our houses, to hear from their mouths the Law of God, and to bring pleasure to their hearts by responding to the word of God.

According to the Law of God, tithes, and firstlings were offered to the Levites for the services of the temple, and for their own subsistence.

Why were they committed to centralized worship, especially as far as

[1] *Comm. On th Gospels.*
[2] *Sermons, 234.*

offering sacrifices are concerned?

1. To protect them against the seduction to offer sacrifices to idols, or on idol altars. As seductions were all around them, the possibility of falling was imminent.

2. To keep the spirit of unity among the congregation, to get together in one house, and by one heart. The temple represented the center of unity. In the Old Testament the people were commanded to worship the Lord in one place, especially for celebrating the feasts, in order to realize their unity as one nation, worshipping One God, away from idolatry. Whereas in the New Testament, instead of the one place, we have come to have the encounter of One Person, that of our Lord Jesus Christ; in whom we come together from different nations, peoples, and tongues, as members in one body, who carries us into the bosom of His Father, and sets from us a glorified blameless Church.

3. To confirm the Oneness of God; having one God, and one Mediator between God and mankind (Timothy 2:5); and there is only one way by which we encounter with God, our Father – the Person of the Lord Christ.

4. That it is not up to them to choose the location of worship, but it is God who chooses it.

> ***"You shall not act as we are acting here today, all of us according to our own desires; for you have not yet come into the rest and the possession that the Lord your God is giving you. When you cross over the Jordan and live in the land that the Lord your God is allotting to you, and when He gives you rest from your enemies all around that you live in safety, then you shall bring everything that I command you to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for His name; your burnt offerings and your sacrifices; your tithes and your donations, and all your choice votive gifts that you vow to the Lord" (Deut. 12:7-11)***

> ***"Take care that you do not offer your burnt offerings at any place you happen to see. But only at the place that the Lord will choose in one of your tribes – there you shall offer your burnt offerings and there you shall do everything I command you" (Deut. 12:13-14)***

Commanding that everyone should not act according to his personal desires, in this chapter he repeats the expression: "Take care" three times (13, 19, 30). He exhorts everyone to take care, not by holding fast to his personal views, but by examining his inner depths. In the same way, the apostle Paul exhorts his disciple Timothy; saying: "Pay close attention to yourself" (1 Timothy 4:16); and likewise exhorts the Corinthians, saying: "Examine yourselves" (1 Corinthians 11:28).

Both the prophet Moses and the apostle Paul advise every one of us to pay attention to himself, namely, it is fitting for the mind to take the royal path, examining his inner heart, lest he might have diverted thousands of miles away from the way of God. He should not examine others and judge them, but examine himself as though by fire, lest while being preoccupied with examining others and criticizing them, he may go astray from truth. Our task is to love others and seek their salvation to share with us the eternal glory, and not to judge and criticize them.

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic believes that God commanded that no sacrifices should be offered out of the place chosen by Him in the city of Jerusalem: that when the time comes and the city is destroyed, all would realize that the shadows came to an end, and there is no more need for the symbolic animal sacrifices1.

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[1] *Cf. Paschal Letters, 1:7f.*

❖ Now, What is the spiritual burnt offering? "*the sacrifice of thanksgiving"* (Psalm 50:14 *LXX*). Where should we offer it? In the Holy Spirit. How did we learn this? From the words said by the Lord Himself, "*The true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth"* (John 4:23)[1].

St. Basil the Great

"Whenever you desire you may slaughter and eat meat within any of your towns, according to the blessing that the Lord your God has given you; the unclean and the clean may eat of it as they would of Gazelle and deer" (Deut 12:15)

Meat was not a customary food for daily consumption by the people, but was eaten from the offerings and during feasts.

During the journey in the wilderness, beasts, slaughtered for food like oxen, goats, and lambs, were offered as a sacrifice of peace at the tent of meeting; its blood dashed, and its fat burnt on the altar. That was for fear, lest anyone would offer sacrifices to idols. But after entering the Promised Land, and the tribes spread on such vast areas, they were given the right to slaughter beasts for food within their towns and their houses. They were allowed to slaughter certain animals, that are not fit to be offered as sacrifices to the Lord (Leviticus 17:3); in their houses for food; as for instance the Gazelles and deer; on condition that this should be "*according to the blessing of the Lord."*

3. REFRAINING FROM DRINKING BLOOD

"The blood, however, you must not eat; you shall pour it out on the ground like water" (Deut. 12:16).

Why, in both the Old and the New Testament, the commandment came not to drink blood?

1. Some believe that pagans were bloodthirsty; and assume that their gods were likewise. They used to drink blood as a necessary rite in worshiping, in order to please the demons. And as said by the Psalmist David: "*Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips"* (Psalm 16; 4). Drinking blood was therefore considered as a fellowship with the demons[2].

Together with every meal, it is fitting for us to feel the divine presence, and the hunger for it.

2. That task bore a symbol of the salvation role of the Lord Christ, who came to destroy the kingdom of the devil completely.

3. Blood was believed to be bearing the life of man. So shedding or eating the blood was considered a sacrifice that should not be offered to any human being.

4. Until recently, man in his violence; especially in cases of revenge, used to kill and then drinks from the blood of his victim, as a kind of malice. That is why the commandment came to ban drinking the blood as a general rule.

❖ The reason for banning the drinking of blood, is that it was dedicated to be offered to God alone; or because God intended to keep men from shedding human blood… We previously said that we often hear someone threatening to kill his adversary, saying: 'I shall kill you and drink from your blood![3]'

St. John Chrysostom

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[1] *St. Basil: On the Spirit, 62.*

[2] *Matthew Henry Commentary.*

[3] منشورات النور: مجموعة الشرع الكنسي، لبنان 1975م، ص865.

4. EATING BEFORE THE LORD

"Nor may you eat within your towns the tithes of your grain, your wine, and your oil, the firstlings of your herds and your flocks, any of your votive gifts that you vow, your freewill offerings, or your donations; these you shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God at the place that the Lord your God will choose, you together with your son and your daughter, your male and female slaves, and the Levites resident in your towns, rejoicing in the presence of the Lord your God in all your undertakings" (Deut. 12:17-18)

In the wilderness, before the Ark of the Covenant came to settle down in a permanent place, the people were allowed to offer sacrifices to the Lord, and to eat of them wherever they happened to be, as there was no probability of partaking of the sacrifices for idols. But once they settled down in the Promised Land, because that probability was there, the commandment came firm, that they should never slaughter for the Lord except in the house of the Lord; nor to eat of those sacrifices in their own houses.

Yet, they were allowed to slaughter, as they desire, and to eat meat in their houses, of other than the sacrifices of the Lord.

Servants – even foreign slaves – had many rights and privileges among the Israeli people, of which was to enjoy, and partake of the grand feasts (Deut. 16:11).

5. TAKING CARE OF THE LEVITE:

"Take care that you do not neglect the Levite as long as you live in your land" (Deut. 12:19)

Because Levites do not get a portion or inheritance in the Promised Land; as God is their portion and their inheritance; it is fitting for believers to give their tithes, their firstlings, and their vows for the Lord to His ministers. As the ministers of the word dedicate themselves to the ministry and the spiritual work, it is not much to satisfy their material needs.

6. REFRAINING FROM EATING THE BLOOD

We have already dealt with this in our comment on verse 16.

"When the Lord your God enlarges your territory, as he has promised you, and you say,' I am going to eat meat,' because you wish to eat meat, you may eat meat whenever you have the desire. If the place where the Lord your God will choose to put His name is too far from you; and you slaughter as I have commanded you any of your herd or flock that the Lord has given you, then you may eat within your towns whenever you desire. Indeed just as Gazelle or deer is eaten, so you may eat it; the unclean and the clean alike may eat it. Only be sure that you do not eat the blood; for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the meat. Do not eat it; you shall pour it out on the ground like water. Do not eat it, so that all may go well with you and your children after you, because you do what is right in the sight of the Lord. But the sacred donations that are due from you, and your votive gifts, you shall bring to the place that the Lord will choose. You shall present your burnt offerings, both the meat and the blood, on the altar of the Lord your God; the blood of your other sacrifices shall be poured out beside the altar of the Lord your God, but the meat you may eat.

Be careful to obey all these words that I command you today, so that it may go well with you and with your children after you forever, because you will be doing what is good and right in the sight of the Lord your God" (Deut. 12:20-28)

*"**When the Lord your God enlarges your territory**"* (20): God has promised

His believers to enlarge their territory (Genesis 15:18; Exodus 23; 27-31); to enjoy the goods of the earth, and to eat everything they desire. Now, God is realizing this divine promise in His sacred land; in the new man, whose heart becomes more spacious to feed on the fruits of the Spirit; namely, love, joy, peace, and goodness… The work of His Holy Spirit is to make man's heart more spacious, to find pleasure, and to embrace, if possible, all mankind, even his adversaries; partaking by this of the features of Christ, the Philanthropist. This is the food we desire to eat, by the work of the grace of God in us.

People, especially those dwelling in remote mountainous regions, are given the right to hunt, slaughter, and eat the beasts of the field, like the gazelle and the deer, wherever they are.

There is difference between *"the sacred donations"* (26), dedicated to the religious offerings, and those that they slaughter just for food (15, 20, 21).

*"**The gazelle and the deer**"* (15) are two swift-moving animals that dwell on the mountains, which have been at that time very numerous, yet have become, later on, a rare luxury in the cities (1 kings 4:23).

7. REFRAINING FROM INQUIRING ABOUT VAIN WORSHIP

"When the Lord your God has cut off before you the nations whom you are about to enter to dispossess them, when you have dispossessed them and live in their land, take care that you are not snared into imitating them, after they have been destroyed before you; do not inquire concerning their gods, saying, 'How did these nations worship their gods? I also want to do the same.' You must not do the same for the Lord your God, because every abhorrent thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods. They would even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods. You must diligently observe everything that I command you; do not add to it or take anything from it" (Deut. 29-32)

In order not to mix between the sacred sacrifice to the Lord, and the idol sacrifices, He warned them even against inquiring about the idolatry practices of the pagan nations; whose corruption and violence reached the extent of offering their own sons and daughters as sacrifices to the idols.

God chose His people, and demolished the pagan nations before them. So, it is not fitting for them to adopt their practices, that were abomination in the sight of God. Yes, the situation becomes extremely serious when the sacrifice, which is meant to be for the sake of man's sanctity, turns to become abomination and uncleanness (Proverb 15:8).

Why did God allow for those nations to be killed? Having reached the extent of burning even their sons and daughters in fire for their gods, (12:31), there was no other way to put things right, other than demolishing those whose hearts have hardened, altogether! The pagan nations at that time were connected to idolatry, abominations, and violence.

This chapter presents the following broad lines for proper worship:

1. Where to worship the Lord? God chooses the location.

2. What is the essence of worship? The divine presence, and God's dwelling among His people (5-11).

3. How to worship the Lord? According to the divine thought; and not to the human.

4. Who will worship the Lord? The whole family, even the little children.

5. How should be the atmosphere of worship? Joy in the Lord.

6. How is worship related to salvation? The need to sanctify the blood, as

without blood, there would be no forgiveness.

7. How is worship related to life? Even in our regular meals, we should eat in the presence of the Lord.

8. What is the role of believers? To be positive in everything! They should participate in the material giving, and in fulfilling the expenses of God’s house and of His ministers.

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 12)

LET ME REJOICE BEFORE YOU

❖ You long to carry me to You,
To let me eat and rejoice before you.
To destroy every idol, and to demolish every corrupt temple.
And to set out of my depths a holy temple, chosen for Yourself.
Accept the burnt offering of my love, and the sacrifice of my thanksgiving to You.
To receive my offerings that are actually from You.

❖ Grant me not to mix my worship with the worship of an idol.
But my heart should be wholly yours.
Where would You choose for me to worship You? But at the 'Golgotha'!
To bind my worship to Your cross;
To pour Your love in my heart, and to fill my soul with joy and rejoice.
To make the "territory" of my heart more spacious, and to embrace in it all mankind.

❖ Let me escape from every abominable place.
Set me free from every unclean habit and from every idol abomination.
To refrain from drinking blood and from harboring a hard heart or an unclean soul.
Sanctify me completely, You, the only Holy One.

CHAPTER 13
ENTICEMENT TO IDOL WORSHIP

In the previous chapter he spoke firmly and openly against those who persist on idolatry. Now, being impartial, God speaks against the Israelites who entice their brethren to idolatry.

The prophet Mosses deals with this negative aspect of the first commandment, concerning demolishing every trace of idolatry. If it seems too harsh, let us remember that the earth, to be purified, Canaanite idolaters had to be utterly destroyed. And every Israeli, who falls into the same transgression had to meet the same destiny.

The Canaanite worship was based upon divination, magic etc., things that were utterly banned by God. That is why, having spoken of demolishing every trace of idolatry, to prepare the atmosphere for worshipping the living God alone; he deals with the subject of false prophets, and those who entice others toward idolatry, whether those who performed signs and miracles, or were close relatives or even represented a whole city.

After concentrating on the holy sacrifice in the temple of the one Lord, he warns us against the sources of diversion, as it is fitting for us to bear the spirit of discernment that keeps us from being deceived by them. These sources are:

1. **False prophecy** (1-6): In every era there are false prophets who deceive the simple people by performing signs and wonders, like what the magicians in the days of Moses did (see 2 Thessalonians 2:9; Matthew 24:23-25; Revelation 13:13-14).

2. **Family or blood-relatives** (7-11): Like what happened with king Solomon, who followed the gods of his foreign wives. We should, without hesitation, cut off any relationship that may interfere with our eternity.

3. **Collective diversion** (12-18): Many among us, may tend to be diverted under collective pressure, so as not to be accused of being odd. **St. Athanasius the Apostolic**, believing that he was doing the work of God, strongly proclaimed: [I am against the world.] Although we should love everyone, and be compassionate to all, yet we should not let ourselves be swept by any current; but should keep committed to walk according to the principles of our holy mission.

1. The false prophet 1–5.
2. The enticing relative 6–11.
3. The enticing town 12–18.

Ways of enticement:

Some believe that the prophet Moses, in this chapter, presents the following three ways of enticement that work in every era to destroy faith:

a. **The philosophies of atheists**: The atheist philosophers, like the false prophets, present their philosophies in attractive and sweet ways, which are similar to the signs and wonders that deceive the simple.

b. **The corrupt social and family atmosphere** draw man away from the living fellowship with God.

c. **The public opinion**: When man bows before the prevailing view, to spare himself from being counted as an odd member of the society; even when this view is destructive to his eternity.

1. THE FALSE PROPHET

"If prophets or those who divine by dreams appear among you and promise you omens or portents; and the omens and the portents declared by them take place,

and they say, 'Let us follow other gods' (whom you have not known) 'and let us serve them,' you must not heed the words of those prophets or those who divine by dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you indeed love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul" (Deut. 13:1-3)

The false prophet was a familiar character in the Old Testament, and is still familiar in the New Testament, serving the devil, enticing men toward evil (Matthew 24:24; Revelation 19:20); claiming to receive divine proclamations in some way or another; like through dreams; and confirming his claim by doing signs and deceiving wonders.

Having received the Law, it was not difficult for the people to expose the false prophets. The word of God is capable of distinguishing between the true prophet and the false one. Whereas, doing signs and wonders are not the right measures of their authenticity, as they are often deceiving.

Do not marvel at the possibility of having some persons among the people who claim to be prophets, and are capable of performing signs and wonders, to divert believers away from the truth. That is why the prophet Paul warns us, saying: *"If we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed"* (Galatians 1:8). *"For false Messiahs and false prophets will appear and will produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect"* (Matthew 24:24). And *"Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light"* (2 Corinthians 11:14), to deceive the believers.

The Lord Christ Himself warns us, saying: *"Then, if anyone says to you, 'look! Here is the Messiah,' or, 'There he is!' – do not believe it. For false Messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Take note, I have told you beforehand"* (Matthew 24:23-25).

St John Chrysostom says: [He is speaking here about the antichrist, the false Messiahs and prophets, who appeared even in the days of the apostles, and will appear more often before the second coming of the Lord Christ.]

The antichrist and his followers use every deceitful way possible, producing signs and omens. The life of virtue in the Lord, and not the signs, distinguishes between those who are with Christ and who are against Him. And according to **St. Augustine**: [The Lord warns us that the wicked can produce certain miracles that even the saints cannot produce. And yet, it is not because of them that they are counted better before the Lord.]

God allows for the appearance of false prophets to test the believers, in order to be justified, and be crowned, for loving Him from their whole heart and their whole soul.

He warns us against following the false prophets and the diviners with false dreams, and against giving them our ears: *"You must not heed their words;"* in order to avoid the fall of our mother Eve, who gave her ears to the serpent. In time of temptations, it is fitting for us to say together with the Lord Christ: *"Away with you Satan!"*

God seems here like an able Physician who, realizing that a false prophet is like a cancer cell that, if left in the body would completely destroy it; He takes the decision to cut it off. King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, because they were left among their people, they ended up drawing thousands of them to idolatry, to fall under the divine verdict; to be killed, or to become humble slaves to the Assyrians, who treated them like animals. Was it not better to stone those false prophets to spare the people all that destruction?!

❖ Somebody may say: 'what should we do? These diviners and magicians often

reveal to us real signs concerning the future! The Holy Bible warns us against such people, and advices us saying: 'You must not heed these prophets, even if they seem as though they tell the truth,' *"for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you indeed love the Lord your God"* (3)[1].

Fr. Caesarius of Arles

❖ Many refer the name of Christ to themselves, to deceive, if possible, even the believers.

Fr. Theophlactius

❖ Then, the devil will act with his full might through the antichrist, in an amazingly vain way… deceiving the dead senses by performing actual wonders, to lead people astray from the truth, counting them as divine works.

St. Augustine

❖ Christ is the Truth; and the antichrist is against it. Christ is the Wisdom, whereas the antichrist, efficiently, bears the appearance of wisdom. All the excellent things apply to Christ, whereas all the deceitful virtues, apply to the antichrist. Every kind of goodness expressed by Christ for the edification of believers, the devil will find some fooling way to imitate it to deceive them[2].

Origen

The antichrist (and the false prophets) corrupts the concepts of the Holy Bibles, to make the desolating sacrilege stand in the holy place of the Lord (Matthew 24:15).

❖ By the 'holy place' is meant, everything written in the Holy Bible, spoken by the prophets from Moses to the evangelists and the apostles. In this holy place of the Holy Bibles, the antichrist mostly stands; the vain word is 'the desolating sacrilege[3]'.

Origen.

Saying *"God Himself tempts no one"* (James 1:13) does not imply that God tempts no one by all kinds of temptations; but He does not by certain kinds. It is written, *"The Lord is testing you"* (Deut. 13:3); but not by the kind of temptation that leads us to sin; but by the one that tests our faith.

What does he mean by Saying; *"to know"* does not imply that God needs to test us, in order to know. But it means to let us discover ourselves what is inside us.

❖ But at all events that Scripture, "The Lord your God proves you, that He may know whether you love Him," cannot be taken in any other sense, then, that you by Him may know, and that it may be made evident to yourselves, what progress you have made in His love[4].

❖ It means that He makes us "know[5]."

❖ Again, saying: *"Rise up, O Lord"* (Psalm 3:7), means 'Make us rise up.' Likewise, saying: "Even the Son does not know that day," does not imply that He is not aware of it; but that He would not reveal it to those who do not yet know it[6].

St. Augustine

Thus, on the negative aspect, we should refrain from listening to this foreign voice; whereas on the positive aspect, he says:

"The Lord your God you shall follow; Him alone you shall fear; His

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[1] *Sermon 54:3.*
[2] *Comm. On Matthew, 32.*
[3] *Commentary on Matthew, 42.*
[4] *St. Augustine: On Ps. 5.*
[5] *St. Augustine: On Ps. 6.*
[6] *St. Augustine: On Ps. 6.*

commandments you shall keep; His voice you shall obey; Him you shall serve; and to Him you shall hold fast" (Deut. 13:4).

So we should dedicate our life to the fellowship with God, by following Him, fearing Him, keeping His commandments, and sanctifying our ears to listen to Him.

Here, the extent of the crime becomes apparent, when He commands putting to death the criminal himself; to save the faith of the others.

"But those prophets or those who divine by dreams shall be put to death for having spoken treason against the Lord your God – who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery – to turn you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst" (Deut. 13:5)

Because it was difficult for the people to discern between the illness and the ill; when the illness has gone too far, and has become extremely contagious, the ill should be put to death, to avoid having more victims

Considering the false prophet as a public enemy of the people, a traitor to the country and to God, the King of kings, he should be stoned to death.

In the Old Testament, God warned His people against the false prophets. And in the New Testament, He connected the appearance of false prophets and false Messiahs to the end of days (Matthew 24:11; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Peter 2:1); And said that signs and omens will be deceiving (Matthew 24:24; 2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10). The false teachers were included among the list of false prophets (Matthew 7:15; 2 Peter 2:1). Because of the great thirst of mankind for knowledge, and seeking to know something new, they unwisely fall in their deceit (Ephesians 4:14).

Prophets are tested through the Law and the word of God (Isaiah 8:20); and, according to St. John the beloved, we should "*test the spirits"* (1 John 4:1). If their teachings are contradictory to the word of God, they should be rejected. "*Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching; for to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person"* (2 John 10, 11).

2. THE ENTICING RELATIVE

As the pestilence of idolatry has been far too serious, the Law commands putting to death anyone who entices it, whatever close his relationship or friendship is. It is fitting for the believer to make his position clear: Is he on the side of God or on the other side?! Although God counts our love for others as though it is for Him; yet, if this love makes us loose our fellowship with God, we shall have to choose between either of them. By the same spirit: "*Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me"* (Matthew 10:37). "*Whoever comes to Me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be My disciple"* (Luke 14:26).

"If someone secretly entices you – even if it is your brother, your father's son or your mother's son, or your own son or daughter, or the wife you embrace, or your most intimate friend – saying: 'Let us go worship other gods, whom neither you nor your ancestors have known, any of the gods of the peoples that are around you, whether near you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other, you must not yield or heed any such persons. Show them no pity or compassion and do not shield them. But you shall surely kill them; your own Hand shall be first against them to execute them, and afterwards the hand of all the people. Stone them to death" (Deut. 13:6-10)

The 'brother' in Hebrew is any relative. In our days, we notice how family

relationships may entice many to apostasy; and how temptations may attack us even through our own households.

"Your mother's son," not only him who is like a brother to you, but even your own flesh and blood.

"The wife you embrace;" namely, the wife to whom you are committed to embrace and protect.

"Your intimate friend;" the word 'friend' in Hebrew means in whose company you find joy and pleasure.

It is not strange to speak of the brother, the sister, the son, the daughter, or the friend, who secretly tries to entice man to sin; as the devil has previously used Eve to entice her man Adam; and thought that he was also capable of doing the same to Jesus Christ through His disciple Peter.

Enticement to evil turns a relative into an enemy, as he becomes a soul killer. Those whom we love and cherish, if they misuse this love, enticing us to the perdition of our souls; they turn into enemies who draw us to fatal sins.

Whoever accuses a relative or friend of enticing another to idolatry, would have to start stoning him. First to bear the responsibility before God that he is true in accusing him, and secondly to proclaim that God comes before any relative or friend, is above everyone.

"For trying to turn you away from the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." Then all Israel shall hear and be afraid, and never again do any such wickedness" (Deut. 13:10, 11)

Although the enticement might be secret (6), yet the punishment should be public (10), to become a lesson to whoever entices others in secret, and to make it clear that this new ordainment will be strictly followed in the new land (see also Act 5:11).

3. THE ENTICING TOWN

What if a whole city rebelled against the covenant with God, and served foreign gods?

"If you hear it said about one of the towns that the Lord your God is giving you to live in that scoundrels from among you have gone out and led the inhabitants of the town astray, saying: 'Let us go and worship other gods,' whom you have not known, then you shall inquire and make a thorough investigation. If the charge is established that such an abhorrent thing has been done among you, you shall put the inhabitants of that town to the sword, utterly destroying it and everything in it – even putting its livestock to the sword. All of its spoil you shall gather into its public square, then burn the town and all its spoil with fire, as a whole burnt offering to the Lord your God. It shall remain a perpetual ruin, never to be rebuilt. Do not let anything devoted to destruction stick to your hand" (Deut. 13:12-17)

It is to be noticed:

(1) He says "*One of the towns;"* namely, a town in Israel. We do not have to judge those outside, as according to the apostle Paul: "*For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it those who are inside that you are to judge? God will judge those outside"* (1 Corinthians 5:12, 13). The town that used to worship the living God, then wholly diverted to idolatry, tends to become an offense to the other Israeli towns. And as the apostle St. Peter says: "*It would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than; after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment that was passed on to them"* (2 Peter 2:21).

(2) He calls some of those men who enticed the people *"scoundrels"* (corrupt or perverted men) as they were in the episode of Gibeah (Judges 19:22; 20:13), or sometimes translated as 'the sons of Belial;' those who have neither the fear of God, nor of people; who oppose their conscience and break the laws. The apostle says: *"What agreement has Christ with Belial?"* (2 Corinthians 6:15); Putting 'Belial' in the place of the devil, makes his children 'the devil's sons.' Thus, those people have become a corrupt leaven that in turn corrupted the whole dough, to bear the corrupt nature of the devil. The Holy Bible warns us against the wicked ones, saying: *"One sinner destroys much good"* (Ecclesiastes 9:18); and: *"Bad company ruins good morals"* (1 Corinthians 15:33).

(3) As it concerns the destruction of a whole town, it has to be well investigated to make sure of the real facts. When God intended to destroy Sodom, He said: *"I must go down and see…"* (Genesis 18:21) Some Jewish scholars say that when an individual is accused of enticing someone to idolatry, he is to be judged before a minor tribunal. Whereas if it is a town that is accused of this offense, it is to be judged before the assembly of the Sanhedrim; which, would first dispatch two learned delegates to give counsel and advice. If the town in question receives their counsel well, and presents a true repentance, it would be pardoned, and left in peace; but if it persists on idolatry, they will have to make war against it and destroy it, in order to keep away its bad influence from infiltrating to other towns of Israel.

(4) If there is a few believing minority, they would be allowed to get out of the town, before men, women, and children are put to the sword (15). All of its spoil would then be gathered into its public square; then the whole town and its spoil would be burned with fire; to remain a perpetual ruin, never to be rebuilt.

(5) No one is allowed to take anything of the spoil of that town, as it is accursed (17); lest he would have the portion of Achan son of Carmi who took some of the devoted things, and the anger of the Lord burned against the Israelites (Joshua 7:1).

(6) Every remnant of that sin should be removed, *"so that the Lord may turn from His fierce anger"* (17) as God is jealous, and counts the worship of foreign gods as a major crime. In the New Testament, God counts mixing the table of God and that of the devil, a great crime. *"What pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?"* (1 Corinthians 10:19-21)

(7) God rewards those who turn back from this sin, as doing right in His sight:

"So that the Lord may turn from His fierce anger and show you compassion, and in His compassion multiply you, as He swore to your ancestors, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God by keeping all His commandments that I am commanding you today, doing what is right in the sight of the Lord your God" (Deut. 13:17, 18)

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 13)

LET EVERY HAND THAT ENTICES ME BE BROKEN

❖ Your hand bears me as though to Your eternal bosom;
Let every hand that draws me away from you be broken.
If it is the hand of a false or a deceitful prophet that stretches to perform signs;
It is your hand alone that can keep me;
That will protect me from being snatched away from you.

❖ Let the hand of my brother, my sister, or any of my relatives be cut off;
If it dares to misuse this relationship,
To deprive me of enjoying my relationship with Him;
As you are my Father, my Brother, my Sister, and everything to me.

❖ If the whole town deviates after vanity;
And if the whole world is deceived after corruption;
My soul remains faithful to you.
You are above all.
Let me acquire You, O Holy One.
Even if I have to lose the whole world

CHAPTER 14
STATUTES FOR SANCTIFICATION
FUNERALS, FOOD, AND TITHES

Following his firm talk concerning the enticement to idolatry, he deals with the pagan customs of funerals (1-2); asking them to take into consideration that they are '*the children of the Lord;"* and 'a holy, elect, and a special people.' Then he deals with the issue of the clean and unclean kinds of food. For the sake of practicing the offerings and sacrifices with pure hearts, he set the statute of the clean and unclean animals, to separate His people from the Canaanites (3-21); He requested from them to offer tithes (22-23), to be used in fulfilling the needs of His elected ministers, as well as of the poor (28, 29).

1. Funeral customs	**1–2.**
2. Clean animals	**3–8.**
3. Clean fish	**9–10.**
4. Clean birds	**11–20.**
5. The dead corpse	**21.**
6. The tithes	**22-29.**

1. FUNERAL CUSTOMS

The believer practices the holy life through his customs, even during difficult moments like death; in his daily life, as in eating and drinking; in his worship, as in giving; and in his relationships with others, as in caring for the strangers and the needy.

"You are children of the Lord your God. You must not lacerate yourselves or shave your forelocks for the dead. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; It is you the Lord has chosen out of all the people on earth, to be His people, His treasured possession" (Deut. 14:1-2).

Presenting to them statutes for their sanctification, that concern their daily habits, and in certain situations, God does not give orders to be strictly obeyed; but as a Father, He confirms to them their adoption to Him. As what comes from a father is nothing but exalted love for the sake of the edification of his children. By giving these statutes, God's intention is not just keeping them automatically; but He is seeking the response of His children to His fatherly love, to make them holy as He is holy.

But when the Only-Begotten Son came with His Holy Spirit; He granted us the spirit of adoption to God the Father; and the commandment of the New Testament became sweet and joyful. We do not find in the commandments, just orders and warnings; but in them, we find a royal way, fitting for the children of God. As children of God we accept His commandment, and even bear the fellowship of suffering together with the crucified Christ, to inherit and be glorified with Him. "*And if children, then heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with Him, so that we may also be glorified with Him"* (Romans 8:15). *"And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father.' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through Christ"* (Galatians 4:6, 7).

As children of God, they are committed to a special kind of life that is fitting for them; that differ both inward and outward from others. He keeps reminding them of their position: *"You are the children of the Lord your God;"* and that they have entered with God into a covenant; not because of their own worthiness, but through

the riches of God's mercies, who chose them to be His holy, elect, and special people. It is fitting for the people of God to bear a special holiness, and not to be like the peoples surrounding them. Having lifted them up above all peoples, as far as the holy life is concerned; So, it is not fitting for them to go down to the level of adopting pagan customs, like lacerating the body and shaving the forelocks, to express their grief in funerals.

God commanded them to refrain from the pagan customs, in order to open the road before them toward the new teachings and the practical living faith. The pagans used to lacerate their faces, shave their heads, strike their chests, and putting dark paint on their faces, to express the extent of their grief for the dead. As a sign of their enjoyment of a new life different from that of the pagans, it was fitting for the people of God not to adopt such customs.

Refraining from those customs is considered as a testimony to new concepts for the believers, the children of God, concerning death; namely, seeing that those who die, holy in the Lord, are departing to a better life; and believing that their life do not end by their death; but they are still living together with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, waiting for the eternal glory.

The people of God, having carried in their bodies the 'circumcision,' the sign of the Lord, it is not fitting for them to carry the signs of foreign gods; as it was the custom of pagans to lacerate their bodies, not only in funerals, but also during practicing the worship of their gods; like what the priests of Baal used to do (1 kings 18:28).

God, the Creator of the body, would not be pleased by mutilating it; but would be pleased by caring, subsisting, and dignify it, as is fitting to a holy gift from the Lord. *"Everything created by God is good"* (1 Timothy 4:4). The body as a beautiful divine gift, man has no right to mutilate it for whatever cause. Lacerating the body in funerals makes them like children who play with sharp knives. So God, in His fatherhood, intends to take the knife away from their hands, to keep them from hurting themselves.

Lacerating the face and shaving the head are exaggerated expressions of despair and grief, that contradict with the words of the apostle Paul: "*We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope"* (Thessalonians 4:13). Refraining from these practices would testify to their belief in the resurrection from the dead; to their conquest over death; and to having no fear of walking through the valley of the shadow of death. It would also testify to their faith in the perpetual divine presence, as God is the God of the living and the dead, who brings them all together to live with Him forever.

Although we do not deny the believer's natural feeling of grief for separation from his beloved ones; yet, this should be within certain limits and up to a certain time. Many pagans have come to believe in the Lord Christ, when they saw how the Christians confronted death with courage and joy, as testified by the **Martyr Justin** before he received faith[1].

Even in the periods of peace; of the factors that drew pagans to faith, were the senses of peace and hope in eternity that they saw in the funeral rites of the Christians[2].

He, who concentrates his sight on His Christ in his inner depths, would also consider death as a divine gift; as a crossing bridge to eternity; and as a true liberation

[1] *2 Apology, 12.*1998 ،راجع للمؤلف عطية الموت

[2] *Boniface Ramsey: Beginning to Read the Fathers, p. 218.*

from the temporal life, with all its spiritual and physical ailments.

❖ Death of the righteous became, in the sight of believers, like mere sleep; and turned even into life.

St. Basil the Great

St. Gregory the Nazianzus, seeing in his elder sister **St. Gorgonia** a living role model of the Christian, was very impressed by her piety and fearless confrontation of death, to say:

Gorgonia's home was the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrew 12:22, 23)… where Christ dwells, together *"with the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven."*

Everything she could snatch from the prince of this world, she deposited in safe places, leaving nothing behind other than her own body. She distanced herself from everything for the sake of the higher hope; the only wealth she left behind for her children was her role model to follow, and the hope to enjoy what she was worthy of.

Talking about her death… She longed much for the time of her departure from this world; recognizing Him who called her; and believing that she would rather be with Christ, far better than anything else on earth (Philippians 1:23).

That Saint longed to be set free from the chains of her body, and to escape from the mire of the world in which we live. The more exalted thing is that she tasted the beauty of her beloved Christ, in whom she was continuously contemplating.

Saying, *"**It is you the Lord has chosen**"* (2), does not imply negativism on the part of man; but he is committed to act as is fitting to this choice, in order to be counted as a true member of the holy people.

❖ Why did He choose us? *"To be holy and blameless before Him"* (Ephesians 1:4). When we hear the expression *"has chosen us;"* we should not assume that faith alone is enough; but we should add to it, a holy and a blameless life. If men choose what is better for them, God would certainly do the same. Choice is truly the gift of the loving and the merciful God. Having made us saints; it is fitting for us to continue being as such. The saint is he, who partakes of faith; and the blameless man is he, who leads a blameless life[1].

St. John Chrysostom

2. THE CLEAN ANIMALS

The true believer, feeling the divine presence, even as he stands before a beloved deceased, should behave as is fitting to this presence, and according to his faith. Now, the believer also proclaims his realization of the divine presence, even at the dining table, as God has revealed to him the clean and the unclean kinds of food. People often ask the question: Why should God care for what kind of food His believers eat?

(1) The believer, in the Old Testament, had to feel a commitment to a Law that controls his behavior; not to put limitations on his freedom, but to help him act as is fitting to a child of God. A Christian, in the New Testament, feels a commitment in all his actions, even in eating and drinking; not only for the sake of his own conscience, but for the sake of that of his brethren - the weak in faith, so as not to put a stumbling block in their way (Romans 14:13). The apostle Paul has put the following living principle of faith to guide our behavior: "*Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the Church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own*

[1] *In Ephes. hom. 1.*

advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved" (1 Corinthians 10:31-33).

(2) To let him feel, that he is dedicated to the Lord; belongs to a chosen people, and a designated spiritual kingdom. God intending to protect His people from the abominations of the nations forbade them to share the same table, or to have serious relationships with the pagan nations. In many countries nowadays, refusing to share the same table with someone, is considered as a grave insult, and as a rejection of having any other relationship with him.

(3) To think all the time of purity and sanctity, even during his eating and drinking; to become holy, as God is holy. It is as though the discernment between clean and unclean kinds of food is a daily call to the people to get preoccupied with the holy life.

(4) God intends to keep His people from partaking of sharing tables with the pagans, which they used to consider as an integral part of their idolatry practices. Yet, as the Lord Christ Himself, came to the world and dwelt among mankind, as one of them, it is fitting for the believers, not to separate themselves, since they would then need to go out of the world (1 Corinthians 5:10). Yet, they should not be conformed to this world, but should be transformed by the renewing of their mind (Romans 12:2)."*Do you know that your bodies are members of Christ?… For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body"* (1 Corinthians 6:15, 20). Man, with his whole being, has come to be for the Lord Christ, who alone, would lead him by His Holy Spirit, to reign over the soul, the spirit, and the body, with all its talents and possibilities, to work for the glory of God.

(5) These kinds of food have spiritual symbols, as we previously saw in our commentary on the book of Genesis. The discernment between the clean and unclean animals, birds, and fish; calls on the believer to distinguish between the true believers who walk by the spirit of righteousness and holiness, and the others.

(6) God, as the Creator of the body and soul, cares for everything concerning man – physically and spiritually.

(7) God intends to confirm the unity of man; as what enters his stomach, would have its effect, even on his soul; and what the soul bears of spiritual and psychological feelings, would likewise affect the body.

We have previously dealt in our commentary on the book of Leviticus[1], in some detail with the food, allowed and forbidden; and what it involves of spiritual concepts, as well as of health significance. Now, in the New Testament, in Jesus Christ, there is no more discernment between clean and unclean food; "*Everything created by God is good"* (1 Timothy 4:4). Yet, he who cares for his spiritual life should be careful, concerning his body. For instance, there is a difference between a mother who, while preparing food for her household, mixes it with her prayers and praise, feeling that she is in the presence of the Lord, and another who is preoccupied with world songs and corruptive thoughts.

"You shall not eat any abhorrent thing; these are the animals you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, the deer, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope, and the mountain-sheep. Any animal that divides the hoof and has the hoof cleft in two, and chews the cud, among the animals, you may eat. Yet of those that chew the cud or have the hoof cleft you shall not eat these: the camel, the hare, and the rock badger, because they chew the cud but do not divide the hoof; they are unclean for you. And the pig, because it divides the hoof, but does not chew the cud, is unclean for you. You shall not eat their meat, and you shall not touch their

[1] *Cf. The author: Leviticus, chapter 11 (in Arabic).*

carcasses" (Deut. 14:3-8)

The animals you may eat are those that chew the cud and divide the hoof. If we take the cow as an example of chewing the cud; it has inside it a complicated kind of stomach with more than one chamber. In the morning it eats the grass that enter into a certain place in the stomach; and by noon it rests or stands in the shadow of a tree, and starts chewing the food it has already eaten by its teeth; then transfers it to another place in the stomach. This is a portrait of the believer who finds his food in the word of God, eats it up, and then meditates on it every now and then. And as the Psalmist says: "*Happy are those… whose delight is in the Law of the Lord; and on His Law they meditate day and night"* (Psalm 1:1,2).

- Meditation on the Law implies, not just reading it, but practicing it; and according to the apostle Paul: "*Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God"* (1 Corinthians 10: 31)[1].

St. Jerome

- Let us count everything of secondary importance, besides listening to the word of God; as there is no such thing as inconvenient time for it… All times are[2].

St. John Chrysostom

Chewing the cud refers to the perpetual meditation on the word of God[3]; or, according to **Origen**, it is the going forth from the literal meaning of the word of God to its symbolic meaning[4].

The divided hoof, on one side, as a sign of separation; and united on another, as a sign of unity; refers to the acceptance by the believer of the Holy Bible with its two Testaments, the Old and the New[5]. It also refers to the believer, who knows how to be holy in this temporal life; and to become holy as well in the eternal life[6]. Moreover, it refers to the believer who holds fast to his belief in God the Father, and in God the Son[7].

Whoever walks with a hoof, divided on one side and united on another; is he, who knows how to walk with the spirit of discernment; who knows what is for his temporal life, with its limitations; and what is for his eternal life, and how to get preoccupied with it. As to having the hoof united on the other side, In all his behavior; whether in his daily activities, or during his worship, he would never separate from, but walks in the Lord Jesus Christ; according to the words of the apostle Paul: "*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in Him"* (Colossians 2:6).

If the hoof refers to what is dead in our body; its division refers to bringing to death the lusts that are deadly to the soul.

The reason behind banning the animals considered as unclean is probably because those animals like the pig and the camel were usually offered as sacrifices to the idols. In Palestine these two animals are known for feeding on poisonous plants and for being sometimes infested by harmful parasites.

Because God cannot stand uncleanness; whereas the people in their stubbornness seek what is unclean, the prophet Isaiah says: "*A people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens, and offering incense on bricks; who*

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[1] *In Ps. Hom. 1.*
[2] *In John, hom, 18:4.*
[3] *Ep. Of Barnabas 10:11,12; St. Clement of Alexandria: Paedag. 3:11; St. Irenaeus: Adv. Haer. 5:8:4; St. Jerome: On Ps. hom. 23.*
[4] *Origen: In Lev. Hom. 7:6.*
[5] *St. Jerome: On Ps. hom. 23.*
[6] *St. Clement of Alexandria: Stromata 5:8; Paedagogus 3:11.*
[7] *St. Irenaeus: Adv. Haer. 5:8:4.*

sit inside tombs,… who eat swine's flesh with broth of abominable things in their vessels" (Isaiah 65:3, 4).. He offered them different kinds of animals that they may eat; that when He refers to refraining from eating unclean animals like the pigs, they would not be offended.

3. THE CLEAN FISH

"Of all that live in water you may eat these: whatever has fins and scales you may eat. And whatever does not have fins or scales you shall not eat; it is unclean for you" (Deut. 14:9, 10)

Beside an inclusive ban on eating carnivorous fish, there are two conditions to consider a certain kind of fish as clean:

To have fins those help it to swim against water currents, a reference to the soul that can strongly go against the adversary currents of this world.

To have scales that protect it against its surroundings, referring to the grace of God to which the believer holds fast to resist everything that may corrupt his soul.

4. THE CLEAN BIRDS

"You may eat any clean birds. But these are the ones you shall not eat: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey, the buzzard, the kite of any kind, every raven of any kind, the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull,, the hawk of any kind, the little owl, and the great owl, the water hen and the desert owl, the carrion vulture and the cormorant, the stork, the heron of any kind, the hoopoe and the bat. And all winged insects are unclean for you; they shall not be eaten. You may eat any clean winged creature" (Deut. 14:11-20)

Because the birds included in verses 12 to 18 feed on dead corpses, they are not to be eaten. The fierce carnivorous prey-eating birds are considered unclean, because they are like those, who, not having the spirit of love, but that of violence and hatred, are not considered holy in the sight of the Lord. And all insects are considered unclean.

5. DEAD CORPSES

You shall not eat anything that dies of itself; you may give it to aliens residing in your towns for them to eat, or you may sell it to a foreigner. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God" "You shall not boil a kid (goat's young) in its mother's milk" (Deut. 14:21)

We are warned against eating any dead corpse for health reasons; as well as for a symbolic concept. It is not fitting for the believer to feed on dead issues, and to die together with them, but he should feed on the living word of God, the grantor of life. God intended for His Old Testament believers to keep away from anything dead, in order to realize that they should let the dead bury their own dead, and to seek what is above, where death cannot reach them.

The present day Law prohibits selling dead corpses for health reasons, and for fear of being poisoned or infected.

Moreover, as slaughtering has not drained off the blood in dead corpses of animals or birds, God's Law prohibits them.

The commandment that prohibits slaughtering a kid (a goat's young) in its mother's milk (Exodus 23:19; 34:25) came because the Canaanites used to do that as a practice of magic to increase fertility; as well as for humane measures between the young and its mother, even among animals and birds; like prohibiting slaughtering a cow or a goat and its young in the same day (Leviticus 22:28); or killing a nursing bird together with its young. God has created the animals for the benefit of man, and

allowed him to slaughter and eat them, yet, within certain limits of compassion.

Concerning the kid (goat's young) that should not be boiled in its mother's milk; some believe that it refers here to the lamb offered for Passover.

6. THE TITHES

Here he presents three uses for our resources: For the ministry to God; for the welfare of our families; and for the needs of others.

Speaking of the tithes and presenting them to God, clarifies the following points:

1. Keeping the Sabbath is based on presenting the tithes; as the whole time of man and his wealth are gifts from God, and just talents entrusted to us (Deuteronomy 8:18; Matthew 25:14). A part of them should be set apart for the Sanctuary, as a sign of sanctifying all the yield of your seed (23:25).

"Set apart a tithe of all the yield of your seed that is brought in yearly from the field" (Deut. 14:22)

2. Presenting the tithes and the firstlings were a chance to celebrate feasts; and to be generous toward all within your gates (27), as though Moses was looking ahead to the coming days of peace and abundance. Presenting the tithes was a sign of sanctifying all what we possess on account of the Lord. It seems to be a traditional statute that was handed over the generations (Jacob in Bethel – Genesis 28:22). Feeling that what he possesses (the land) is a holy gift from the Lord, the believer is committed to present the tithes, as a sign that he responds with love, to the divine love. In his love, he presents to the Levites (ministers of the word), to the strangers, the orphans, and the widows (29); and the fruit he will receive, will be joy (26) and blessing (29).

"In the presence of the Lord your God, in the place that he will choose as a dwelling for His name, you shall eat the tithes of your grain, your wine, and your oil, as well as the firstlings of your of your herd and flock, so that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always. But if, when the Lord your God has blessed, the distance is so great that you are unable to transport it, because the place where the Lord your God will choose to set His name is too far away from you, then you may turn it into money. With the money secure in hand, go to the place that the Lord your God will choose" (Deut. 14:23-25)

3. Then he connects the giving to joy:

"Spend the money for whatever you wish – oxen, sheep, wine, strong drink, or whatever you desire. And you shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your household rejoicing together. As for the Levites resident in your towns do not neglect them, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you"

"Every third year, you shall bring out the full tithe of your produce of that year, and store it within your towns; the Levites, because they have no allotments or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake" (Deut. 14:28, 29)

- In the episode of widow offering the two mites (Mark 12:41-44), something appears indeed, that surpasses the talk of Moses, concerning the issue of giving money. Whereas Moses received gifts from those who have got money; the Lord Jesus, on the other hand receives a gift, even from someone who got nothing[1].

Hegemonis

- We are entrusted to control and to use the temporal riches for the sake of the good

[1] *Disputation with Manes, 42.*

of all, not as though we possess anything of our own eternally. If we accept the fact that possession here on earth is temporary, we will be able to enjoy an eternal possession in heaven.

However, we should put before our eyes, the example of that widow who, forgetting herself in her care for the poor; and thinking only in the life to come, gave all what she has; as testified by the divine Judge Himself; who said that while the others contributed (to the treasury) out of their abundance, that widow, out of her need; has put in, everything she had - her two mites.

Although she was actually more needy than many poor, she surpassed all the rich in spiritual wealth. Thinking only of the life to come, and longing to the heavenly treasure, she insisted on giving back all that she was given. Let us then, offer, and give back to the Lord all the gifts we got from Him. He, who accepts them in the person of every poor. Let us give with pleasure. We shall have great joy when we get the reward that He has promised[1].

Paulinus of Nola

4. There are two kinds of tithes: the first kind, which is offered to the Levites; from which, a portion is given to the priests (Numbers 18:24-28; Nehemiah 10:37-38). Of what remains, the second kind of tithes is offered; of which they eat in the presence of the Lord in the first and second year. As to the tithes of the third year, it is given to the Levites and the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28, 29). In the fourth and the fifth year, it is consumed by those who give it. In the sixth year it is offered to the poor; and in the seventh year, it is offered as a Sabbath to the land; and everything would be common to all (Exodus 23:10, 11)[2].

5. The Levites, in turn, feel committed to present the blessing to the people, through teaching and prayers; and the people will rejoice to share with them the gifts given to them by God (29).

[1] *Letters 34:2-4.*
[2] *Adam Clarke Commentary.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY (CHAPTER 14)

LET ME WALK AS A SON OF YOURS AND AS A MEMBER OF YOUR HOLY PEOPLE

- You have chosen me as Your child.
  You made a covenant with me; and offered me the two stone tablets.
  Grant me to walk as is fitting of a holy child of yours.
- Let me have the fitting behavior.
  As is fitting to a member of a chosen people, referred to a holy God.
  Not to act in the foolishness of the ignorant.
  Lacerating my face in funerals,
  Or shaving my head to show off grief.
- Let even my eating and drinking be sanctified.
  Let nothing unclean enter my mouth,
  Nor anything unclean enters my heart.
- Let me offer the tithes, the firstlings, and the votive gifts that I vow;
  And count these as a symbol of offering all what I have;
  As there is nothing that I actually possess.
  All what I have in my hands are of the riches of Your love and care.

CHAPTER 15
THE SABBATICAL LIFE

God, who finds His pleasure in referring Himself to the orphans, the widows, and those castaways; presents His Law for the sake of transforming everyone's life into a Sabbatical life; namely, all his life would become "a Sabbath for the Lord." He wishes to transform our life into a true rest in Him. The poor would find his rest in God; and the rich would enjoy the same life. The Holy Bible has already dealt with the Sabbatical year (Exodus 23:10; Leviticus 25:1-7).

In this chapter he clarifies that those in debt, and cannot pay their debts back, are not to be denied the benefit of the Sabbatical year. This does not mean that the debt is altogether cancelled, but those who are unable to pay would be remitted. He also spoke of setting the Hebrew slave free (Exodus 21:2-10); and of piercing the ear of the Hebrew slave who choose to accept slavery by his own free will.

1. The Sabbatical year 1–6.
2. Caring for the poor 7–11.
3. The Hebrew slave 12–18.
4. The firstlings 19–23.

1- THE SABBATICAL YEAR

As the holy life does not stop at special practices, but touches our relationships with ourselves, with God, and with other people; that is why the statute of the "*the year of the remission of debts*" came to reveal God's care; and that of His children, for those in debt, who are unable to pay back; remitting what they owe for the sake of the Lord Himself; also for those in need; and for the slaves who had no one to care for them.

"Every seventh year you shall grant a remission of debts. And this is the manner of the remission: every creditor shall remit the claim that is held against a neighbor, not exacting it of a neighbor who is a member of the community, because the Lord's remission has been proclaimed" (Deut. 15:1, 2)

(1) The Lord, being God of all; referring Himself to the needy and the suffering, presents to them the statute of the Sabbath of remission (of the seventh year); by which he reveals the extent of His care for His children. Counting himself as the one in debt for his brother, He insists on the remission of the needy of their debts in the Sabbatical year "by the end of the seventh year;" and calls it "the remission of the Lord."(2).

(2) God intends to set all the days of our life as a joyful Sabbath, and rest in Him. In every week He sets a Sabbath to the Lord; namely, "*the day of the Lord*," in which He proclaimed His rest after creating the world in the first six days. Having created man in the sixth day He had rest, wishing to introduce this rest of love to His beloved man in the seventh day. But after the divine Word came and recreated us, through raising us from the dead together with Him, and the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in us, He made Sunday a Sabbath for Himself and for us; making it a "day of the Lord," which transforms all the days of our life into a life, holy, and resurrected in the Lord.

Every seven years He sets the seventh year, as a year for the Lord, to bless all the years of our life; and every 50 years (7×7=49) He sets a joyful Jubilee in the Lord. Namely, God always sets for us, every possible chance to enjoy our life as a feast and rest for the Lord. By saying "*a remission for the Lord*."

He proclaims that all what the believers practice, of celebrating feasts, giving,

or remissions, are all in the name of the Lord and for His sake; as though the believer, in all his inner thoughts and his behaviors, lives in the Lord.

How wonderful is the expression "*a year of remission for the Lord;"* as it refers to the work of the Lord Christ who proclaimed "*the acceptable year of the Lord*" (Luke 4:19); having come to "*bring good news to the poor, and to proclaim release to the captives"* (Luke 4:18; Isaiah 58:6). He came to us, the poor, the burdened with debts, to reconcile us with God, freely with His blood (2 Corinthians 5:20).

All God's children since Adam were looking forward to "*the year of the remission for the Lord*;" and descending to Hades, our Christ encountered with thousands and tens of thousands of fathers, prophets, priests, and people; young and old, anticipating Him, who, alone will pay back their debts, and will bring them over to enjoy the year of remission for the Lord.

(3) As the Sabbath or rest of the Lord is in His remitting our souls of the debt, brought upon us through our sins, and in paying for it by giving up His life for our sake; it is fitting for us to pay His love back by our love toward our brethren; by forgiving their faults against us; and by remitting them all their debts.

(4) So, as not to abuse this privilege, he says: "*Of a foreigner you may exact it, but you must remit your claim on whatever any member of your community owes you"* (3). It is not unjust to exact the foreigner to pay back his debt, because, as a stranger living in Canaan, who does not own land, but subsists on trade or craft; and does not loose his income in the year of remission, the way a Jew does, he is therefore committed to pay back what he owes.

Some believe that the remission is confined to the Sabbatical year alone, after which the debtor resumes paying back his debt; on the assumption that, firstly, during the Sabbatical year, no one works on his land, and accordingly, there is no crop to be sold to pay back debts. And secondly, that, if the debt is to be remitted altogether, it would end up that no one will be going to lend anyone, for fear of loosing their money once the Sabbatical year is there.

The word "*remit"* in Hebrew means "forsake;" namely, the creditor forsakes the debt that is in the debtor's hand; the way the land is forsaken with no agriculture in that year.

(5) God allows for the poor and the debtors to be there among His people; yet within limits: "*except when there may be no poor among you"* (4). As there will be a remission every seven years, there would be among them, no one extremely poor, or utterly miserable. The poor would, together with the rich, practice the life of thanksgiving; The rich would rejoice as he gives and remits; counting it, as though he is doing it to the person of the Lord Himself. And the poor and the debtor would also rejoice, as he sees the loving Lord proclaimed and transfigured in the acts of the rich and creditors.

Some believe that, by saying: "*except when there may be no poor among you"* (4), he confirms that remission is not general, but is confined to the needy and the poor; on the assumption that the goal of the Sabbatical year is not for the debtors to abuse their creditors, but for keeping the poor from extreme poverty.

(6) Seeking from the creditors to remit their debtors; the Lord commits Himself to make up for their loss:

"Because the Lord is sure to bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession to occupy, if only you would obey the Lord your God by diligently observing this entire commandment that I command you today

When the Lord your God has blessed you, as He promised you, you will lend

to many nations, but you will not borrow; you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you" (Deut 15:4-6)

He does not command the rich to remit for nothing; but rewards them with greater wealth, power, and authority; yet not on the expense of their brethren, but as far as foreigners are concerned.

The apostle Paul showing his care for the giver as well as for the receiver, says: "*I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but it is a question of (equality… As it is written: 'He who gathered much had nothing leftover, and he who gathered little had no lack'"*(2 Corinthians 8:13, 15).

(7) As the land was given to the people as a free gift from God, who intends for them to have wealth and freedom, it is fitting for them not to let their poor debtors be in poverty and humiliation; according to the proverb: "*The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a slave of the lender"* (Proverb 22:7).

(8) So that the rich would not stop lending the poor, his command of remission applies only to the seventh year, after making sure that the debtor is truly unable to pay back his debt; beside the fact that God makes up for every loss.

(9) The statute concerning the Sabbatical year, in which a "*remission for the Lord*" is set, came as a practical lesson for forsaking the greed or the love of money, being a kind of idolatry. And as the apostle Paul says: "*Be sure of this, that no… greedy (that is an idolater) has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God"* (Ephesians 5:5); and: "*Put to death therefore, whatever in you is earthy…. And greed (which is idolatry)"* (Colossians 3:5).

It is fitting for man to work, not to treasure for himself, but to give others: "*but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need"* (Ephesians 4:28).

Actually this statute concerning the remission of the poor debtors has been like a proclamation of 'brotherhood' among all the believers in the One God. It is based on the fact that, as God is the Father of all, and His nature is the forgiveness of sins; so whoever forgives his brother, is worthy of God's forgiveness. The Lord Christ gives a demonstration of this by His parable of the one who owed ten thousand talents, and was remitted by his creditor, yet when he refused to remit his fellow slave who owed him a hundred denarii; the creditor cancelled his prior remission and exacted him to pay back his debt of ten thousand talents (Matthew 18). The wise Solomon says: "*One who gives water will get water"* (Proverb 11:25). Whoever waters the others by his love, will be watered by the greater love of God.

2. CARING FOR THE POOR

"If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or right-fisted toward you needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, 'The seventh year, the year of remission is near,' and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing, your neighbor might cry to the Lord against you and you would incur guilt. Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work, and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land'" (Deut. 15:7-11)

If we count what came in this chapter as the Lord's 'Program for the poor;' the way most of the countries of the world do; yet God brought us into the roots of the

problem. Many so-called socialist systems claim that they could eliminate altogether the existence of extremely poor citizens in their society. Advanced capitalistic countries likewise, create special programs for the needy[1]. However, in the same city in both systems, we find extremely rich as well as extremely poor citizens.

God, on the other hand, proclaims *"Do not be hard-hearted… Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought (in your heart)"* (Deut. 15:7, 8); as the problem of the vast material gap between the different categories of people, lies in the heart, which is corrupted by sin; and there will be no cure by any system, unless the heart changes and is renewed through rejecting the sin:

(1) Through love, we are committed to give or to lend according to our own conditions and to the need of others. "*Do not be hard-hearted"* (7); the alms comes from the heart, the same way as God's gifts come from His loving heart.

(2) God caring to sanctify us and to conform our depths to our external behavior, advises us: ***"Do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor"*** (7); because if you do, you would reveal the inner hardness of your heart; as "*when clouds are full, they empty rain on the earth"* (Ecclesiastes 11:3). When we have faith, our hands give liberally; and according to the apostle James: "*If a brother or sister is naked, and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?"* (James 2:15, 16)

He warns the rich against refraining to give loans, saying:

"Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, 'The seventh year, the year of remission is near,' and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility, and give him nothing" (Deut. 15:9)

He warns us against entertaining hidden thoughts coming out of a corrupt heart. It is not enough to be careful against misbehaving, but to have corrupt depths. The 'unhealthy or evil eye' here is contrary to the '*healthy or simple eye*' blessed by the Lord Christ (Matthew 6:22; Luke 11:34).

❖ The summit of virtue, and the foundation of all the commandments of God, is to combine loving God to loving the neighbor (Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27). Whoever loves God, does not despise his neighbor; and does not prefer wealth to him, but would give him liberally, having in mind the words of the Savior: "*Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me"* (Matthew 25:40). He would realize that the God of all counts what is done to comfort the poor, as though is done to Him personally. One should not look at the humble appearance of the poor, but should look at the greatness of Him who considers what is given to the poor, as though is given personally to Him[2].

St. John Chrysostom

(3) By saying "***The Lord your God will bless you****"* (10), he confirms that the creditor who remit the debt owed to him by the poor, with a pure heart full of love for God, will loose nothing; as his whole life will become a '***blessing***.' God will bless him in all his work, and in all that he undertakes. Seeing the Lord Himself in his debtor, the creditor will become as though a bearer of the Lord in himself. God will bless him, and everything he touches will be blessed; and wherever he goes, the blessing of the Lord working in him will be on everything around him.

(4) Some people may refrain from lending others, especially when the seventh year is close, counting it as wise; seeking what is his and disregarding what is God's

[1] *Cf. J. Vernon McGee: Deuteronomy, ch. 15.*
[2] *Homilies on Genesis, hom. 55.*

and others;' according to the words of the Psalmist: "*Though while he lives he blesses himself (for men will praise you when you do well for yourself)"*(Psalm 49:18). But "*God loves a cheerful giver"* (2 Corinthians 9:7). And His gift for the generous giver is according to the prophet Isaiah: "*The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden"* (Isaiah 58:11).

(5) The divine commandment warns us against disregarding the poor and the needy; because when they cry out, God will hear their voices filled with bitterness. The New Testament warned us in Matthew 25:31-46, saying that he who disregards the poor, will loose the eternal inheritance; as what he does is directed against God Himself. The apostle James warns us against treating the poor laborers unjustly, saying: "*The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts"* (James 5:4). And the apostle John says: "*How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?"* (1 John 3:17).

Of the gifts given by God to His people, is the existence of poor among them; so that their hands may stretch with love toward them, to gain the blessing of giving, and to enjoy the work of God with them: ***"There will never cease to be some in need on the earth"*** (11). The existence of poor or needy among us is a chance for us to open up our hearts with love, and our hands with giving (15:11). The Lord Christ says: "*You always have the poor with you"* (John 12:8). It is a blessing for the rich to have a chance to give with their whole heart; and for the poor to lift up their heart with thanksgiving to God, the Grantor of love. The serious difference of life standards and the existence of extreme poverty is a fruit of our sins and of the corruption of our hearts. Knowing that sin would always be in the present world, and that there would never cease to be people in need, the Lord confirms the need to sanctify the heart; and to do what we possibly can to the poor; and to lift up by love that horrible and cruel gap between the rich and the poor.

3. THE HEBREW SLAVE

"If a member of your community, whether a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, and works for you six years, in the seventh year you shall set that person free" (Deut. 15:12)

The people were called to freedom; so if someone had to sell himself, or be sold, as a slave; he is not committed to be a slave all his life, but will be set free on the seventh year or during the year of the Jubilee, whichever is nearer (Exodus 21:2).

John Newton, a former slave broker before his conversion, hanged this verse on the wall of his office, to remind him of his personal debt toward humanity.

Defending the virginity of St. Mary, the Mother of God, **St. Jerome** clarified that those called the brothers of Jesus, were His cousins, children of Mary, the sister of His mother; and that was according to the custom of the Jews who used to call the relatives as brothers; referring to the Book of Deuteronomy (15:12; 17:15; 22:1)[1].

"And when you send a male slave out from you a free person, you shall not send him out empty handed. Provide liberally out of your flock, your threshing floor, and your wine press, thus giving to him some of the bounty, with which the Lord your God has blessed you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; and for this reason I lay this

[1] *St. Jerome: The Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary, 10.*

command upon you today. But if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you, because he loves you and your household, since he is well off with you, then you shall take an awl and thrust it through his earlobe into the door, and he shall be your slave forever. You shall do the same with your female slave.

Do not consider it a hardship when you send them out from you free persons, because for six years they have given you services worth the wages of hired laborers; and the Lord your God will bless you in all that you do" (Deut. 15:13-18)

When the master is asked to set his slaves free, it is fitting for him not to consider it as a great favor on his part; as he is actually paying back what he owes to the Lord who brought him and his fathers out of the land of Egypt, and gave them on their departure, much gold, beside limitless blessings. The believer now, is asked to pay back that divine debt, to free his brother slave, and to give him, together with his freedom, plenty of gifts.

Remission of a slave on the seventh year of his servitude is not a gratuity from the master to his male or female slave; but everyone has a natural right to live free, and nobody has the right to confiscate his freedom. The six years during which the slave works, is a natural commitment to work, and not to lose the freedom granted to him or her by God.

Yet, if the slave chooses to stay in his master's house, not out of need, nor of lack of another job, but because he loves him and his household, his earlobe will be pierced into the door as a sign, not of servitude, but of love. He, with his complete freedom prefers the servitude melded with love over the freedom that would separate him from his beloved master! Love gives this optional servitude an exalted taste of sweetness!

Although verses 16 and 17 reveal to us that slavery was allowed in Israel, yet the slaves there were happy in most cases; and the laws were supporting them.

The term '*female slave"* (17), applies to the women who give themselves up for service, as it was the case with the men already mentioned. But it does not apply to those sold as female concubines, mentioned in (Exodus 21:7).

4. THE FIRSTLINGS

"Every firstling male born of your herd and flock you shall consecrate to the Lord your God; you shall not do work with your firstling ox nor shear the firstling of your flock. You shall eat it, you together with your household, in the presence of the Lord your God year by year at the place that the lord will choose. But if it has any defect – any serious defect, such as lameness or blindness – you shall not sacrifice it to the Lord your God; within your towns you may eat it, the clean and the unclean alike, as you would a gazelle or deer. Its blood, however, you must not eat; you shall pour it out on the ground like water" (Deut. 15:19-23)

This subject was already dealt with in (Exodus 13:1, 15; 11:30; Numbers 13:17, 18). If God has redeemed every firstborn of His people, and did not let them perish together with those of the Egyptians by the tenth plague (Exodus 13:11-16); that is why it is fitting for them to offer the firstlings of their herds and flocks, as a sign of consecration of everything they have for the Lord (19-23).

God, being perfect in purity and holiness, will accept from His people's hands no sacrifice with a defect, especially that it is a shadow of the sacrifice of Christ who is blameless and without sin. Every defect in any sacrifice, makes it unfit as an offering for the forgiveness of sins, but would add, upon the sinner, another sin of not keeping the commandment.

About the sacrifice of Christ it was said: *"For if the blood of goats and bulls*

with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God?!" (Hebrew 0:14) The Lord Christ offers Himself as a sacrifice without blemish, so as to bring to Himself His Church, redeemed by His blood, "*without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind – yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish"* (Ephesians 5:27). That is why the apostle Peter advises us, saying: "*Strive to be found by Him at peace, without spot or blemish"* (2 Peter 3:14). This is the work of the Savior Himself, who, according to the apostle Jude: "*is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of His glory with rejoicing"* (Jude v. 24). It is also said about those redeemed in their heavenly glory: "*In their mouth no lie was found"* (Revelation 14:5).

As we unite with Christ Jesus, our slain Lord, who is without blemish, we bear His righteousness, to become in the sight of God the Father, without blemish; presenting our lives, given up together with that of our Christ, as a sacrifice of love and thanksgiving, united with the sacrifice of Christ.

When 'Laiita' asked **St. Jerome** to give her an advice for the best way to raise up her daughter 'Paula' (given her grandmother's name), he presented to her the following text, that she should present her daughter as a pure offering to the Lord without blemish: [I speak generally; but in your case, you have no choice; as you have already offered your daughter, even before conception. Whoever offers a sacrifice with a certain serious defect like lameness or blindness, is committing a crime of uncleanness, how much more would be the punishment of her, who, after being ready to offer a part of her body and the purity of her blameless soul to the kisses of the king; then becomes slothful in her offering?[1]]

If we care for the land (agriculture), for the poor, and for the slaves; we are, above all, committed to care for the house of God, by offering the firstlings that are without blemish to the Lord (see 13:1, 2; 34:19, 20; Leviticus 27:26-29; Numbers 18:15-19). We should offer firstlings of cows and sheep without defect as sacrifices of peace; whereas those with certain defects may be slaughtered in our houses. These firstlings are shadows of the true Firstborn Jesus Christ, the One with no blemish, who was offered for the whole humanity, as a sacrifice of peace for God His Father, who received it as a scent of pleasure for all of us.

[1] *St. Jerome: Letter 107:7.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 15)
LET MY WHOLE LIFE BE A SABBATH FOR YOU

❖ Having created man on the sixth day;
The seventh day became a Sabbath for You.
In man You have found Your comfort and pleasure.
You granted man Your Sabbath to give him rest
Let my whole life becomes a Sabbath for You, O the Source of every rest!

❖ Finding Your comfort in the needy and the heavily burdened;
You command me to care for every needy and suffering.
To be compassionate toward them for Your sake.
To remit every needy debtor.
You are ready to pay back;
To make up for every sacrifice I do on my part.
By Your precious blood, You have paid back all my debts.
Grant me to remit every material debt for Your sake.

❖ You have become a Brother for me;
I, who am unworthy to be Your slave.
Grant me to receive every poor as my brother in the Lord.
Having consented for me to be Your slave;
You have brought me to the gates of Your heaven;
And opened up my ears to hear Your voice.
You have received me as a blessed child;
As Your partner in the eternal glory.

❖ You have granted me everything.
I shall offer You, of what is Yours, the tithes and firstlings.
Receive my offering, which is actually Your gift!
I get ashamed when I see the Grantor of everything, stretching His hand to receive my offering.
The glory is Yours, O You who give me the favor of receiving my offering.

ANNEX TO CHAPTER 15

SLAVERY IN THE HOLY BIBLE AND IN THE SAYINGS OF THE EARLY FATHERS[1]

CONCEPT OF SLAVERY

A slave is a person committed to be enslaved by another person, and to work for him without freedom, and almost with no human rights of his own. A slave is described as *"the owner's property"* (Exodus 21:21); like a piece of furniture, evaluated for a certain price, with which the master can do whatever he wishes; and that he can leave as inheritance for his children after him (Leviticus 25:45-46).

PAGANISM AND SLAVERY

Slavery was known by the pagan nations, both the retarded and the civilized like the Greeks and the Romans. Some of their philosophers like Aristotle considered the barbarians (the uncivilized) as slaves by nature, and are only fit for that destiny. The Roman law gave the slaves no civil or human rights whatsoever, and did not punish or bring into account the master who torture, rape, or even kill his male or female slave[2].

SLAVERY AND THE JEWS

Compared to other peoples, slavery in the Jewish nation was considered mild and relatively compassionate. It could not be said that the Mosaic Law has consented to slavery, as it was already prevailing in the whole world. As it was not an easy task to cancel that system by a single stroke, it was committed to establish certain measures and by-laws to harness its cruelty and inhumanity; to give the slaves some human rights, and to lessen, as much as possible, the humiliating treatment they suffered, in order to let them live like human beings and brothers, albeit under severe conditions. The Jews knew two kinds of slavery: the slavery of the Hebrews, and that of the Gentiles.

The Jewish Law banned the kidnapping of humans for the purpose of selling them as slaves, and put to death anyone doing it. Concerning Jewish slave mongers, "*If someone is caught kidnapping another Israelite, enslaving or selling the Israelite, then that kidnapper shall die. So, you shall purge the evil from your midst"* (Deut. 24:7). As to this trade in general, whether the person is an Israelite or otherwise, "*Whoever kidnaps a person, whether that person has been sold or is still held in possession, shall be put to death"* (Exodus 21:16).

KINDS OF SLAVERY

The system of slavery goes back to the time of Noah. The curse that dwelt on

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[1] *Cf. The author: Exodus, chapter 21.(in Arabic)*
Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, article Slave, Slavery,
New Unger's Bible Dictionary, Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois, article Service,
International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, article Slave, Slavery,
R. H. Barrow, Slavery in the Roman Empire (1928),
I. Mendelsohn, Slavery in the Ancient Near East (1949),
W. L. Westermann, The Slave Systems of Greek and Roman Antiquity (1955),
M. I. Finley, ed., Slavery in Classical Antiquity (1960),
J. Vogt, Ancient Slavery and the Idea of Man (1974),
N. Turner, Christian Words (1980), p. 389-90.

[2] *Bishop Yoanis (Fr. Shenouda El-Souriany): The Christian Church in the Apostles' era, 1971, p. 41.(in Arabic).*
Schaff: History of the Christian Church, vol. 1, p. 445-6.

Canaan, the son of Noah, because of disgracing his father was: "*Lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers"* (Genesis 9:25). Several systems of slavery appeared since then that could be divided into three kinds:

(1) **Domestic slavery**: (household slavery), has been the most common. Beside hired labors, there were both Hebrew and foreign slaves possessed by the head of the household, like 'Hagar' who served Abraham and his wife Sarah (Genesis 16:1); and those to whom the Lord Christ referred in His parable, as "*slaves of the householder"* (Matthew 13:27; 21:34).

(2) **Slaves of the nation** (the system of forced labor): A common kind at that time, under which the Israelites fell, as forced laborers for the Egyptians (Exodus 3:6-19; 13:3). And like the Canaanites whom king Solomon "*conscripted for slave labor"* (1 kings 9:20, 21).

(3) **Slaves for ministry in the temple**: Like those whom Moses and Joshua designated to serve the ministers in the temple; as "*hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of the Lord*" (Numbers 31:25-47; Joshua 9:21-27).

ACQUIRING SLAVES

Slaves were acquired through either of the following sources:

(1) **Through purchase**: As it happened when Joseph son of Jacob was sold as a slave by his brothers for 20 pieces of silver (Genesis 37:38). An Israelite could also buy a slave (Leviticus 25:39, 44); could sell a close relative, like a daughter for example (Exodus 21:7; Nehemiah 5:5). The children of a widow could be sold to pay back their father's debt (2 Kings 4:1). And a very poor man could even sell himself as a slave to pay back his debts; to be set free on the next Jubilee (Leviticus 25:39, 47). So also could a poor woman sell herself as a slave (Deuteronomy 15:12, 13, 17). The price of a slave varied. The prevailing price according to Exodus 11:32, was 30 pieces of silver; and according to Leviticus 27:3-7, varied between 3 and 50 pieces of silver, (40 according to 2 Maccabees 8:11), according to the age of the slave, and his gender; and in case of controversy, a priest could be consulted (Leviticus 27:8). Joseph, as a boy, was sold for 20 pieces of silver (Genesis 37:28). In case someone sells his daughter because of extreme poverty, the buyer had no right to sell her to a foreigner. If he intended to give her to his son in marriage, he should do to her as any other girl. And if he took her as his wife, and then married another, he had to keep on her, her dues concerning her food, clothing, and marital right, or else he should set her free.

(2) **Through exchanging slaves**: A Hebrew could exchange a foreign slave for another slave, for a flock of sheep, or for any other provision.

(3) **As a pay back of a debt**: Although poor people could sell themselves as slaves to pay back their debts (Exodus 21:2-6; Nehemiah 5:1-5). Yet, the buyer should not abuse the debtor, but should treat him as a brother; As, according to Leviticus 25:35-40, "*If any of your kin fall into difficulty and become dependent on you, you shall support them, they shall live with you as though resident aliens. Do not take interest in advance or otherwise make a profit from them, but fear God; let them live with you… If any who are dependent on you become so impoverished that they sell themselves to you, you shall not make them serve as slaves. They shall remain with you as hired or bound laborers."*

(4) **As a gift**: A slave could be given as a gift (Genesis 29:24).

(5) **As an inheritance**: Children could inherit foreign slaves as a possession (Leviticus 25:46).

(6) **Slavery by free choice**: At the remission of slaves on the seventh year, a slave had the choice between gaining his freedom and remaining as a slave forever for

the sake of his love for his master (Genesis 21:6). However, history never told of even a single case of this kind.

(7) **A thief unable to give back what he stole could be sold as a slave**: According to Exodus 22:3, *"If unable to do so, shall be sold for the theft."* By his labor he could pay it back, beside a punishment for his crime.

(8) **A slave by birth**: The children of a Hebrew slave could by birth be slaves to the master. If the father is set free, after being married to female slave belonging to the master, the wife and her children remain as slaves. The number of slaves could duplicate because of the children born in the household of the master.

(9) **Captives of war**: Those most probably became slaves (Genesis 14:21). The enemy, after putting to death a certain number of men, they used to keep some men, women, and children as slaves and concubines (Deuteronomy 21:10, 11, 14). Many Israelites became slaves for foreign nations, after falling captives of war; as for the Phoenicians (Joel 3:6), the most famed for slave trading in the old days; the Philistines (Amos 1:6); the Syrians (1 Kings 3:41; 2 Kings 8:11); the Egyptians[1]; and the Romans.

Most slaves under the Jews were either war captives, or belonged to some Canaanite peoples that stayed back in the land after Joshua took it over, or of the surrounding nations overcome by the Israelites (Numbers 31:26-28); or were bought as slaves (Leviticus 25:44, 45); or have became slaves because of poverty, or as a result of crimes they have committed.

RIGHTS OF THE SLAVES

The service that the slaves are committed to their Hebrew masters differs whether the slave is a Hebrew or a foreigner.

(1) The Hebrew slave enjoys with his Hebrew master, privileges that the foreign slaves, like the Greeks or the Romans, do not have. The Hebrew slave is treated like a brother, with no humiliation. As all Israelites are servants of God, if they ever become slaves to one of their brethren, their master should treat them like hired laborers, as fellow travelers on their mutual journey, and with compassion (Leviticus 25:39; Deuteronomy 15:14). *"You shall not make them serve as slaves. They shall remain with you as hired or bound laborers… For they are My servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt, they shall not be sold as slaves are sold. You shall not rule over them with harshness, but shall fear your God"* (Leviticus 25:39-43). By this, the divine Law introduced a new view of the slave; that he is a fellow in servitude to the One God.

Anyhow, dealing with the slaves mostly depends on the person of the master (Genesis 24; 39:1-6). The true men of God treated their male and female slaves with the fear of God. 'Job' says: *"If I have rejected the cause of my male or female slaves, when they brought a complaint against me; what then shall I do when God rises up? When He makes inquiry, what shall I answer Him? Did not He who made me in the womb make them? And did not one fashion us in the womb?"* (Job 31:13, 14). Nevertheless, a slave generally lived in humility. Many masters, contrary to the divine Law, abused their slave brethren, and unfortunately women, got the greater share of humiliation and inhuman cruelty.

(2) A slave had the right to acquire money or possessions; and in this case, if he got enough, he could redeem himself by his own money (Leviticus 25:49). It came that, when Saul asked his servant if he has on him any money to give as a gift to the prophet Samuel, the man of God, he answered, saying: *"Here, I have with me a*

[1] *Josephus: Antiq. 12:2:2-3.*

quarter sheckel of silver" (1 Samuel 9:8).

(3) The slave has the right to take his wife and children with him when he is set free, if he was married while he was free.

(4) The slave could enjoy special privilege, as it happened with Eliezar of Damascus, the foreign slave to whom Abraham gave the authority over his household; and with Joseph the Hebrew slave whom Pharaoh made the second man over Egypt after himself (Genesis 15:2; 39:4).

(5) The slave, when he is set free, does not go empty-handed, but would be liberally provided for, out of the flock, the threshing floor, and the wine press (14). The Lord Christ, when He liberated us, He granted us the riches of His Holy Spirit, to set forth bearing His righteousness and holiness in us

(6) The slave could marry his master's daughter (1 Chronicles 2:35); and the master, as well, could marry his female slave, or give her in marriage to his son; and he could not sell his Hebrew male or female slave to a foreigner (Exodus 21:7-11). By this, the female slave had the same rights as any one of the households. This is a living portrait of the work of God, who gave us as a bride to His Son, to have the fellowship of His heavenly glories.

(7) In case the master or his son denies the rights of the female slave he married, concerning her food, clothing, or her marital rights, she would be set free. If the slave is circumcised, he would have the right to partake of the sacrifice of Passover (Genesis 17:12), and of all the other religious feasts (Deut. 12:12, 18; 16:11, 14), and could also enjoy the Sabbath (Exodus 20:11; Deut. 5:14).

Finally, Hebrew slavery was cancelled altogether, after the return from captivity.

LIBERATION OF THE SLAVES

This could be done by one of the following ways:

a. **By redemption**: Anyone could redeem a slave, by paying his or her price to the owner, then set him or her free.

b. **After completing the duration of servitude**: According to the Mosaic Law, no Hebrew slave could be enslaved forever; but should be set free after six years of work. If he entered alone, he would come out alone. If he had a wife, she would come out with him. And if his master gave him a woman in marriage, who gave him children, the wife and children would belong to the master, and he would come out alone.

The slave should enjoy remission from servitude on the seventh year, namely, on the sabbatical year; a reference to the freedom which we all enjoyed, by the coming of the Lord on the sabbatical year; namely on the consummation of time; granting Himself to us as "the Source of the true rest," putting an end to the servitude of sin; saying: "*If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed"* (John 8:36).

The slave had the option, to leave his master's house, or to seek to stay with him all his life. If he loves his master, his wife, and his children, he could enslave himself forever to him by his own free will.

He would then, take an awl and thrust it through his earlobe into the door, as a sign of complete obedience, according to the words of David: "*You have given me an open ear"* (Psalm 40:6). That is what the Lord Christ did. The Son, became a servant for our sake (Ephesians 5:25-27), bore in His body the wounds of the cross for the sake of our salvation, and became a slave, to raise us up from the servitude to the adoption to God.

c. **According to the statute of the Jubilee**: The year of the Jubilee has been

the greatest year, when all slaves should be set free, whatever the number of years he or she served "*They shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee; then they and their children with them shall be free from your authority; they shall go back to their own family and return to their ancestral property"* (Leviticus 25:40, 41). The jubilee occurred on the fiftieth year, a symbol of the work of the Holy Spirit, who grants the Church the perfection of freedom in the worthiness of the blood of Christ. By the Holy Spirit we gain the forgiveness of sins, enjoy the fellowship with God in His Son, and bear the spirit of adoption, by which we can call God as our Father.

d. **In case the slave is harmed**: "*When a slave-owner strikes and destroys the eye of a male or a female slave, the owner shall have to let the slave go, a free person, to compensate for the eye*" (Exodus 21; 26). And in case he strikes his male or female slave, and he or she dies, he would be avenged.

e. **By running away from his master**.

f. **To make restitution**: If someone becomes a slave because of a theft; when he manages to pay back what he owes through his work, he would be set free (Exodus 22:1-4).

g. **In case the master dies with no heir of his own**: What Abraham said in (Genesis 15:2), raised this question: Is it a right for slaves to be set free and to enjoy what the master left behind, if the later dies with no heir; Or what Abraham said was because he feared that his servant would do that under the circumstances, and not according to the law?

h. **By a direct divine command**: As it came in Jeremiah: "*The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, after king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to make a proclamation of liberty to them – that all should set free their Hebrew slaves, male or female, so that they should hold another Judean in slavery"* (Jeremiah 34:8, 9).

LIBERATION OF THE FEMALE SLAVE

In case a Hebrew female servant is sold to a Hebrew master as a housekeeper or a concubine, she could not be set free on the seventh year, nor on the year of the jubilee, if her owner has purchased her for that purpose (Exodus 21:7). Yet she could get her freedom completely in the following cases:

* **If she does not please her master**; yet he does not have the right to sell her to a foreigner (21:8).
* **If he chooses to give her in marriage to his s**on, and he does not do to her what is usually done, according to the custom
* **If he, or his son married her, then took another wife, and neglected her**, as far as food, clothing or marital rights are concerned (Exodus 21:11, Deut. 21:14).

THE SLAVE-OWNER HAS THE RIGHT TO THE FOLLOWING:

1. Acquire non-Hebrew slaves as permanent property (Leviticus 25:45).

2. Leave his non-Hebrew slaves as inheritance for his children (Leviticus 25:45).

3. If the master gives his slave a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters; if he sets his slave free, the master can keep the wife and her children (Exodus 21:4).

4. Search for his run-away slaves to bring them back (1 kings 39-41).

5. Grant freedom to any of his slaves any time, beside his commitment to set them free on the seventh year and the year of the jubilee according to the Law, as we have seen.

6. Circumcise the Jew and foreign slaves in his household (Genesis 17:13, 23, 27).

7. Sell or exchange his slaves (Genesis 29:24). However there are certain conditions, as far as his Hebrew slaves are concerned.

8. Discipline the slave – male or female – yet within certain limits (Genesis 21:20).

9. Take his female slave, or give her in marriage to others (1 Chronicles 2:35).

10. Take the daughter of his slave in marriage (1 Chronicles 2:34), etc.

11. Purchase slaves from foreign markets (Leviticus 25:44).

12. Keep a slave who escaped from a cruel master, although not as a slave (Deut. 23:15).

13. Enslave a thief he caught stealing from him (Genesis 44:8-33; Exodus 22:3).

14. Seek the counsel of his slaves (1 Samuel 25:14).

15. Give command to his slaves to serve him (Genesis 14:14; 24).

SERVITUDE OF THE GENTILES

Those were mostly captives of war (Numbers 31:9; 2 Kings 5:3); purchased (Genesis 17:27; 37:28, 36; Exodus 27:13;Joel 3:6, 8), or by birth (Genesis 17:12). Yet, we find in the Holy Bible or in history, no indication that the Jews ever had a slave market[1].

Before the Mosaic Law, Abraham, the Patriarch, presented to us a living example of how to deal with slaves, when he had in his heart, that in case he did not have children of his own, to leave his possessions to one of his slaves – Eleazar of Damascus (Genesis 15:2), to whom he gave the authority over everything he had. The story of Isaac's marriage to Rebecca (Genesis 24) reveals Abraham's confidence in his slave, who proved to be really worthy of that honor.

When the Law was received, it provided the slaves with rights that kept their humanity, of which:

1. Whoever kidnaps someone, sold him, or found in his possession, would be put to death (Exodus 21:16).

2. The crime of murdering a slave was equivalent to that of murdering a free man (Leviticus 24:17, 22).

3. It gave the slaves the right to worship their own gods, even if they were wrong. Yet, it also gave the Hebrew slave-owner the right to circumcise his slaves.

4. It gave the slaves the right to partake of celebrating the Jewish feasts (Exodus 20:10; 23:12).

CHRISTIANITY AND CARING FOR SLAVES

Christianity dealt objectively with the system of slavery; with no intention to provoke the slaves against their masters; who in the Roman Empire represented half the number of its inhabitants. According to Pliny, one of the rich Romans, by the name of Claudius Isidorus, in the days of Augustus Caesar, was known to possess 4116 slaves[2].

Although the New Testament, and the Church in its early days; have not come with a law to cancel the system of slavery, yet, with what they presented, of strong and living concepts about love, they could shake the foundation of that system, and transform it from one of violence, oppression, and humiliation, to carry love and compassion. Besides raising the conditions of slaves, yet not provoking them to rebel against their masters, but to obey them (Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:23-25; 1

[1] *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible, p. 889.*
[2] *J. Hastings: Dictionary of the Apostolic Church, 1954, vol. 2, p. 509.*

Timothy 6:1, 2; 1 Peter 2:18-21), as a testimony to Christ who dwells in them.

The life of the Lord Christ came as a practical revolution against the system of slavery. The Word of God, the Creator, became a slave, to bring the slaves on to adoption to God. The Lord Christ was delivered for thirty pieces of silver; was sold as a slave, and was not ashamed to be counted as one of them, but sanctified the life of the believers among them. Thus the slaves, seeing their Master becoming their partner, living as one of them, would not surrender in humiliation; but would believe that nobody, whatever his wealth, authority, or violence may be, can destroy their souls. They are the partners of the Lord Christ, in His life and in His sufferings; bear the inner freedom that no one can destroy or take away.

And as several masters and slave-owners believed in the incarnate Creator, who, through His will and His Father's pleasure, became a slave; they came to adopt either one of two stands: giving freedom to their slaves, or dealing with them as beloved brethren; in order to be able to acquire every soul on account of the kingdom of God. Each of these stands did push the world forward toward the liberation of slaves.

The Lord Christ came to direct the whole humanity toward the inner servitude that demolished the freedom of their will, saying: *"You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free… Everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin… If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed"* (John 8:31-36).

With pride, the apostle Paul calls himself a slave (Romans 1:1; Titus 1:1); believing that he is sold to his Savior, who guides his life and all his actions according to His divine will. The true believer feels that he, with his whole freedom, puts his whole being in the hands of his Beloved, to stir him according to His will.

The church believes in the possibility of the impact of even a slave on his master, through his holy life in the Lord. We do not marvel to see **St. John Chrysostom** say to his listeners in his meetings, that every one of them would tell those outside that he has been in the company of the Seraphim. The father would tell his son; the mother, her daughter, and the slave, his master. The Council of Gangra asked the slaves to submit to their masters in the Lord, as a testimony to the living gospel in them; and not to try to run away from them; or to use violence against them[1].

The apostle Paul, confirming that there are no slaves or masters in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28), asked both to be like the Lord Christ (Ephesians 6:5-9). St. Paul dealt with the problem of slaves from an angle of faith, asking the slaves to obey their masters in the Lord, but not on the expense of their faith and salvation. He, at the same time, asked the masters to look at the slaves with a new eye, as being brothers equal to them, and fellows in the servitude to God, the Master of all. The apostle asks us to abide by the human system, but within the limitations of faith. He urged the slave to go with courage, even as far as martyrdom, rather than to obey his master in what may contradict his salvation. And urged the master to consider the slave as his brother.

Because the system of slavery started to collapse from its roots[2], that was among the main reasons the Roman State violently turned against the Christian Church. **Its collapse could be referred to the following reasons:**

a. The Church committed her children to deal with slaves as brothers (1 Corinthians 7:21, 22; Philemon 3:28; Colossians 3:11)

b. The apostle Paul presented to us in his epistle with a practical lesson. He

[1] *Council of Gangra Canon 3.*
[2] *Fr. Tadros Malaty: The Coptic Church "Church of Alexandria," Melbourne, 1975, p. 77.*

sent back the run-away slave and robber, Onesimus, to his master Philemon, with the most magnificent message that could ever be written, describing him, after his repentance, as his brother; his son whom he has begotten while in his chains; his heart; his partner; and his helper in ministry; (whom he later ordained as a Bishop). In this message he wrote: "*Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave – a beloved brother – especially to me"*

c. Having lived according to the gospel, some masters were committed to set their slaves free, through an inner motive, with no direct order to do that.

d. Several of those who were previously slaves got high positions and exalted honors in the Church. Some of whom even became martyrs, like Blendina, Bablis, and Phlictas, whom the Church considers as heroes of faith[1]. Some of the former slaves were ordained Bishops like Onesimus, the disciple of the apostle Paul, who became a Bishop over Borea in Macedonia[2]; and Calistus over Rome in the third century AD.

e. The early writings of the Church encouraged the collapse of that system; like for example what came in the '**Didache**': [Do not rebuke (bitterly) your male or female slave, who look with hope toward the Lord your God, lest they lose the fear of God, who is above all, and who has no partiality toward faces[3].]

St. Clement of Alexandria says: [Slaves are humans just like us[4].]

Fr. Lactantius says: [We should not count slaves as our slaves, but as brethren in the spirit; and as fellow-servants in religion[5].]

St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote, [You should not despise slaves, nor let them swell with pride; but rather be humbled for the sake of the glory of God[6].]

St. Augustine believes that the appearance of slavery was a fruit of sin; as the divine purposes would never let man reign nor have authority over another[7].

St. John Chrysostom proclaimed the same idea[8], when he said that slavery only started when Canaan fell under curse (Genesis 9:25). **St. John Chrysostom**, a contemporary of **St. Gregory of Nyssa**, enticed the Christian not to have more than two slaves to serve his household, and not to humiliate them[9]; and spoke about many masters who acquired a thousand of slaves[10]; and a few in Antioch who acquired hundreds of them. **St. John Chrysostom** believes that slavery was not in God's original plan[11].

The Cappadocian Theologian **St. Gregory the Nazianzus** proclaims that, although slavery is a hateful discrimination, yet it was a matter of fact of his time[12].

With the same spirit, **St. Basil the Great** says that although no one is a slave by nature, yet, at the same time, he did not seek the change of society. He says: [Although some man claims himself a master, and another a slave; yet, in my opinion, concerning equality of rank, we are all a flock of our Creator, fellow slaves[13].]

A VIEW BY ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA CONCERNING

[1] *Frend: Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church, 1965, p. 297.*
[2] *Apostolic Constistutions7, 4, 46.*
[3] *Didache, chapter 4.*
[4] *Paedagogus 3:12.*
[5] *Lactantus: Instit. 5:16.*
[6] *Epistl. ad Polycar. 4.*
[7] *De Civ. Dei. 19:15.*
[8] *In Cor., hom. 40.*
[9] *In 1 Cor. hom 40:5.*
[10] *In Matt. hom 63:4.*
[11] *In 1 Cor. hom. 40:5, in Eph. hom 22:2.*
[12] *De rebus suis 80-82.*
[13] *De Spiritu Sancto 20:51.*

SLAVERY

Some scholars believe that **St. Gregory of Nyssa** was the first Theologian to lead an intellectual revolution against slavery. In his fourth homily on the Book of Ecclesiastes, he introduced a theologian foundation to oppose slavery, based on the following points:

* When someone assumes that he is a master of his kind, he counts himself as different from those submitting to him (as though he is of a different nature).
* The human nature, that God created free; each of them has got the right to take his own decisions by himself.
* There should be discernment between possessions and non-reasonable creation, on the one hand, and the image and the likeness of God; the reasonable free being, on the other hand.
* There should never be authority over the free image of God. No man can pay the price of another man!
* The title "master' does not give someone authority over those who submitted to him.
* Whom do you think you are; you, who assumes that you are a master over a human being?

The following are some quotations from his writings:

1. All of us are equal by nature:

- ❖ All of us are equal by nature[1].
- ❖ It is not nature, but love of authority that divided mankind into slaves and masters[2].
- ❖ God has granted humanity the right of deciding its destiny. (The master has no right to control the life of the slave) [3].
- ❖ He, who submits to you by custom and law is equal to you by the honor of nature[4].
- ❖ Humanity has been originally integral. Everyone has the authority to run his own life with no master; to practice his life with no grief or labor. So, what does it mean to be led, but to be enslaved?[5]
- ❖ To divide the creation, that naturally has the right to be equal, into slaves and masters; into a category that orders, and another that submits; is a distortion and a robbery of the system put by God[6].
- ❖ Slavery is a mutilation of the integrity of the living being[7].
- ❖ The condition of independence and freedom is a call of wisdom to man's will[8].
- ❖ The greatest problem for freedom is for man to be his own master[9].

2. God is the Master of all:

- ❖ A master says: I have acquired slaves for myself. I have slaves born in my house! Look how awful is his arrogance! A talk like this is a challenge to God. The prophecy tells us that all things are slaves under the power that surpasses all. That is why, when someone makes God's possessions as his own, gives himself an authority over his own kind, assumes that he possesses men and women; what he

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[1] *De Beatitudinibus,1.*
[2] *De Oratione Dominica, 5.*
[3] *De Oratione Dominica, 5.*
[4] *De Oratione Dominica, 5.*
[5] *De Beatitudinibus, 3.*
[6] *Contra Eunomium, 1:35.*
[7] *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinaruim, 23.*
[8] *De Hominis Oplficio 16:14 PG. 44:185 A.*
[9] *De Beatitudinibus, 8.*

does is a going beyond his nature through pride; assuming that he is different from those who submit to him[1].

3. The human nature is free:

❖ "I have acquired male and female slaves!" What do you mean? Are you committing some man to servitude, when he is free by nature, and has free will (has the right to decide his own destiny)? Are you introducing a law in competition with God? Are you transforming His Law into a human law? God has set certain basis for man to be the king of the earth; and for his life to be controlled by the Creator; he, whom you bring under the yoke of servitude; you are challenging and fighting against the divine Law! Why are you going beyond your own authority?[2]

4. Why have you forgotten the limits of your authority?

❖ You have forgotten the limits of your authority. Your Law is to have authority over the non-reasonable things. It is written: "To have authority" over birds, fish, tetrapods, and reptiles. Why do you go beyond that, and set yourself above those who are free by nature? Why do you count those of your kind as though of the same level as tetrapods, and even of the same level as those of no pods?

Everything are submitted to man; and according to the text of the prophecy, these are: sheep, oxen, herds, and flocks. Cows have never begotten human herds! Only the non-reasonable beings are subjected to man.

By dividing mankind into slaves and masters, you let humanity enslaves itself, and possesses itself![3]

5. What price have you paid to purchase your slaves?!

❖ 'I have acquired for myself male and female slaves.'

Tell me for what price? What have you found in the world that equals human nature?

What price do you suggest to pay for 'reason'? (as man is a reasonable creature)?

How many 'obole' can be paid for being "according to the likeness of God."

How many 'staters' have you got when you sold a being formed by God?

God said: "Let us make man in Our image and according to Our likeness." So, if man is according to the likeness of God, and has authority over everything on earth from God, who is the buyer? Tell me! Who is his seller?… God does not wish to bring man down to servitude. When we became slaves to sin He Himself called us to freedom. If God does not enslave him, who is free; who is then he, who puts his authority above that of God?![4]

6. Will the slave be sold together with what he possesses? The whole earth!

Some believe, that, according to the Roman law, when a slave is sold, the bargain does not include his possessions (like his clothes). But **St. Gregory**, as he rebukes those who take part in buying and selling slaves, talks like a spiritual man and a preacher, and not as a lawyer and a man of law. He considers it shameful, to sell a man, a free being, together with what he possesses; as God has set him to have authority over the whole earth.

❖ How could he, the one with authority over the whole earth and everything on earth,

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[1] *In Eccles. Hom. 4.*
[2] *In Eccles. Hom. 4.*
[3] *In Eccles. Hom. 4.*
[4] *In Eccles. Hom. 4.*

be put on sale? And if you consider to include in the bargain everything he possesses; what would be the price of the whole earth, and everything on it? If all this were beyond evaluation; what price would then be paid for him who is above everything? Tell me!

He, who truly knows the human nature, says that the whole world is not worthy to be paid for one human soul. So, when a human being is put on sale; it is as though the owner of the whole world is put on sale.

Let us assume then that his whole possessions are also put on sale. That means that the whole earth with its islands, lands and seas, etc., is put on sale! How much would the buyer pay? What would the seller ask for, putting into consideration all the possessions included in the bargain?[1]

7. How would the contract of the sale be written?

St. Gregory wonders how the contract for buying and selling of man, whom God granted to have authority of the whole world, could be written on paper?!

❖ Would you be deceived by a piece of paper; to assume that you have become a master over the one on the likeness of God?! What idiocy is this?! If the contract is lost; If it is eaten by moth?! If it is destroyed by water?! What would be your guarantee as an owner concerning his servitude?![2]

St. Gregory did not talk frankly of the price paid for every human soul; namely, the blood of the Lord Christ who purchased us; and no power on earth can ever take away, corrupt, or delete that document. We have all been purchased for a price; and no one of us can ever purchase his brother.

8. It is just a difference in the title:

St. Gregory believes that the difference between the master and the slave is just in the title. They are partners in everything.

❖ I do not see anything superior in you over those under your authority except the title alone.

What does this authority give you as a person? It does not give you a longer life, or more beauty, or more health, or exaltation in virtue.

Your origin is from the same ancestors to whom he is referred; your life is of the same kind as his life;

You and him, who submits to your authority, are surrounded by the same sufferings and pleasures, joys and grieves; sicknesses, fears, and death. Are there any differences in these things between the slave and his owner? Are they both not going to turn into the same dust after they die? Aren't they both going to face the same judgment: one kingdom, and one hell?

If you both are equal in all these things; then where is your superiority? Tell me, you who are human assume that you are a master of another human? You, who say: 'I have acquired male and female slaves! As though you have acquired a herd of goats or pigs[3].

9. A call to set the slaves free

In a sermon on the Easter (Christian Pasch), **St Gregory of Nyssa** incited those among his listeners who own slaves to set them free; as the Lord Christ has, by His resurrection, set us free from the servitude of sin:

[Will you pay attention to my words? On this joyful day, does suffering take

[1] *In Eccles. Hom. 4.*
[2] *In Eccles. Hom. 4.*
[3] *In Eccles. Hom. 4.*

away from the afflicted souls, as the Lord takes death away from the bodies…? Turn their disgrace into dignity; their affliction into joy; and their fear into comfort. Bring on those cast away on street corners as though from their graves… Let the beauty of the feast flourish as a flower on everyone[1].]

And on another occasion he says: [Extend a generous hand to slaves, who suffer bitterness all their lifelong[2].]

And in another talk, **St Gregory** expresses his belief that the Christian society in a commitment to equality, should set the Church congregation free of servitude and every oppression:

[Let us cancel all social discrepancies; between submission and authority; extreme poverty and riches; common and elite… Let us practice political and social equality… Let us give the chance to everyone to choose what he wants[3].]

[1] *In Sanctum Pascha.*
[2] *Contra Usurarios.*
[3] *De Morstuis.*

CHAPTER 16

THE ANNUAL FEASTS

The goal of the divine commandment is to transform the believer's life into a perpetual feast; as according to what he says in this chapter: *"You shall surely celebrate"* (15), The prophet Moses talks to us about the three great annual feasts (Exodus 23:14-17; 34:18-23; Leviticus 23); which could be called '**the feasts of sojourning;'** in which the people remember their sojourning with joy and pleasure, offering gifts to the house of the Lord, as much as they could afford. These are:

The feast of Passover (1-8) which symbolizes the redemption; and in which humanity rejoiced for its conquest over the devil.

The feast of the weeks or the Pentecost (9-12): which symbolizes our joy for the dwelling of the Holy Spirit on us.

The feast of the Booths (13-17) when we dwell here, as though in booths, anticipating the perfection of glory in Christ.

He did not refer here to the other major feasts, like the feast of the horns, and the day of atonement; just mentioning the feasts during which the people assemble together in the house of the Lord. We have already dealt with the feasts in our study of the books of Exodus, Numbers, and Leviticus; their spiritual concepts, their rites, and systems. For study the feasts (numbers 28-29)

Here, he concentrates on the communal joy, and the collective worship at the place chosen by the Lord; and on how the believer should not appear empty-handed in the house of the Lord. He ends that by confirming the fairness of justice in the house of the Lord, and on not mixing between the worship of God and that of the idols. A sign of faithfulness to the covenant is giving the heart to God, through practicing joy and rejoicing. By that, the Law mixes the heart giving by the perpetual joy in the Lord, with the practice of justice as a sign of faithfulness to God the Just who refuses oppression; not discriminating between the statutes that apply to the believers, and those pertaining to worship. We notice this all along the whole book. No justice and love without pure worship; and no accepted worship without justice and mercy toward the brethren. By that worship mixes with behavior, to work together as one integral holy life.

1. The feast of Passover 1–8.
2. The feast of the weeks 9–12.
3. The feast of the booths 13–15.
4. The feasts and the giving 16–17.
5. The feasts and the justice 18–20.
6. Not mixing between the worship of God and that of idols 21.

1. THE FEAST OF THE PASSOVER

The feast of the Passover for the Hebrew people has a special meaning, as they remember in it, the exodus of ancestors from the land of Egypt to cross over to the wilderness, setting forth toward the Promised Land. It is the feast in which the foundation is established of setting the people as a nation, born in Egypt, in a foreign land, then set forth to the wilderness as a foreign young girl betrothed to her Groom. According to the words of the Lord in the Book of Jeremiah: *"I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown"* (Jeremiah 2:2). It is as though, the feast of Passover is the remembrance of the setting forth of the young girl, born in a foreign land, to a state of maturity, to be a spiritual bride to the heavenly Groom.

That is what made the event of the "Exodus," or the "feast of the Passover," the backbone of the Holy Bible, being a shadow of the Exodus, realized for us by our Passover Jesus Christ; Who brings us over from the land of servitude to the wilderness; heading to heaven; as a heavenly bride adorned for her Man (Revelation 21:2). The Book of Exodus has already dealt with this feast in chapter 12.

The law of the Passover has its special sanctity; the people are committed to keep the whole month, although the feast is only celebrated for one week in the middle of the month.

"Observe the month of Abib by keeping the Passover to the Lord your God, for in the month of Abib the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night" (Deut. 1:1)

In the Septuagint version, it came as*: "Observe the month of the new things, and observe the Passover to the Lord your God."*

❖ The time of shadows has come to an end, and the old things have become vain. Now, the month of the new things is within our hands. It is fitting for everyone to observe the feast in obedience to Him[1].

Pope Athanasius the apostolic

The month of Abib, the month of the new fruits (between the months of March and April), is the month in which the people enjoyed the exodus from the land of Egypt, and the setting forth from the servitude. It became the beginning of the Jewish year (Exodus 12:2).

❖ If God Himself likes the feast and calls for observing it; it is not fitting, brethren, to be reluctant in celebrating it, or to do that slothfully; but we should approach this heavenly feast actively and zealously[2].

Pope Athanasius the apostolic

It was called the feast of Passover, because the destroyer angel, at midnight, passed over the gates, sprinkled with blood, spared everyone; and struck down all the firstborn of the land of Egypt (Exodus 12:29). Thus, the Egyptians urged the Israelites to hasten their departure from the land.

In this feast, we spiritually depart from 'Rameses" of Egypt, which, according to **Origen** means "confusion;" set forth from the corruption and confusion, to where the inner peace and holiness are. The feast of the Passover is a call to evaluate the connection of the soul to the true Passover – the unique sacrifice of Christ, which alone, can bring us over to the bosom of God the Father; bearing the righteousness of our Savior, to find in Him our perpetual joy, eternal peace, and our living heavenly fellowship with the Holy One Himself.

Let us spiritually set forth, as though by midnight, amid the pitch darkness, to enjoy the pledge of heaven, that needs no sun, moon, or a lamp to give it light, as the Sun of righteousness Himself shines in it; sets in us His heavenly kingdom, reflects the splendor of His glory on us, and keeps the forces of darkness from approaching us.

With every Sunday; and with every breath of our life, we celebrate the feast of the Passover; as we experience the resurrection of Christ our Passover; to live the risen life that challenges the last enemy; namely, death! God transforms all our days into incessant feast, and shines in midnight amid darkness, to let us enjoy the splendor of His glory in our sojourn.

"You shall offer the Passover sacrifice to the Lord your God, from the flock and the herd, at the place that the Lord will choose as a dwelling for His name. You

[1] *Paschal Letters, 19:1.*
[2] *Paschal Letters, 6:1.*

must not eat with it any leavened. For seven days you shall not eat unleavened bread with it – the bread of affliction – because you came out of the land of Egypt in great haste, so that all the days of your life you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt. No leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory for seven days, and none of the meat of what you slaughter on the evening of the first day shall remain until morning. You are not permitted to offer the Passover sacrifice within any of your towns that the Lord your God is giving you. But at the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for His name, only there shall you offer the Passover sacrifice, in the evening at sunset, the time of the day when you departed from Egypt. You shall cook it and eat it at the place that the Lord your God will choose; the next morning you will go back to your tents. For six days you shall continue to eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day, there shall be a solemn assembly for the Lord your God, when you shall do no work" (Deut. 16:2-8)

We have already dealt with the rite of this feast in our commentary on the Books of Exodus 12 and Numbers 28. Here we shall concentrate on the following points:

1. The sacrifices of the feast should be offered at the place that the Lord chooses as a dwelling for His name (2, 6, 7). Here, he did not refer to Jerusalem; as the temple was not yet built, which confirms that this book was written before the time of David, when Jerusalem was chosen as the city of God, for Solomon the son of David to build the temple of God.

The sacrifices are offered at the place that the Lord chooses as a dwelling for His name (2), confirming that the house of the Lord is a gift from God to His people. He chooses the place to proclaim His dwelling among His people. So, looking in His depths, man sees within him a temple chosen by the Lord, for the sacrifices of love and thanksgiving to God may be offered, through the cross "the sacrifice of the Passover." Within us is the spiritual Jerusalem chosen by God Himself as His holy city; where he sets His temple; and where He receives our offerings.

The commandment is still there: ***"You shall offer the Passover sacrifice to the Lord your God, from the flock and the herd, at the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for His name"*** (2). What is this place but "the Golgotha," where the unique sacrifice of the Passover was offered. Any offering or sacrifice offered outside the Golgotha, will not be received by God the Father as a smell of pleasure and content. This is the work of the Holy Spirit of God, who turns the Church into a Golgotha where the Crucified One encounters His beloved who comes to carry with Him His cross. There, the true sacrifices of love are offered.

The Holy Spirit also works to set out of the soul, a Golgotha, and to build an altar, not built of stones; but is an exalted altar; where our Christ proclaims His cross, and the soul enjoys encountering with Him, saying: "*With great delight I sat in His shadow, and His fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love"* (Songs 2:3, 4).

Let us not offer our sacrifice at the place we choose, bur at that chosen by the Spirit of the Lord, out of which He sets a true Golgotha!

2. In verse 2 he refers to offering the sacrifice on the first day of the feast from the flock (of sheep) and the herd (of cows); to be eaten during the meal of the Passover; and nothing of it is to remain until the next morning. Whereas, on the rest of days of the feast, any other kind of beasts could be slaughtered. He connects the feast to sacrifices. The Passover itself is a sacrifice; and Christ, our Passover, has been slain for our sake (1 Corinthians 5:7); and other sacrifices were offered during the rest of

the seven days of the feast (Numbers 28:19).

During every Divine Liturgy of the Eucharist, celebrating the feast of our Passover; namely, the cross of the Messiah and His resurrection, we enjoy fellowship with the victim Christ; and offer our given life as a sacrifice of love, accepted through the cross. Whoever does not accept to be crucified together with the crucified Christ, would not experience the joy of resurrection together with Him; and would not taste the 'feast of the Passover.' That is why **St. Augustine**, looking at the altar which carries the given Lord's body and blood; asking us to receive His sufferings practically, says: [You are on the altar; you are in the chalice.]

3. For seven days they are to eat unleavened bread (3, 4, 8). They should not only refrain from using leaven during the whole week; but they should not even allow its presence in the house (1 Corinthians 5:7).

4. That unleavened bread he calls "**the bread of affliction**," being not easy to digest, and not nice to the taste. Probably referring to their affliction in the land of bondage. As they ate it, they would remember how their fathers got out of Egypt in a haste, before their bread had the chance to be leavened. According to the Jewish rite, the head of the house breaks the unleavened bread, and hands to every member of his family a piece of it, saying, 'This is the bread of affliction which your fathers ate in the land of Egypt.'

The apostle Paul believes that in the unleavened bread, there is the reference that the celebration of this feast should be with the spirit of loyalty without the leaven of hypocrisy (1 Corinthians 5:7). The seven days of that feast refers to the whole week; namely, to the whole life.

The Christian sees in all his days a feast of Passover, when he receives the victim Christ in His depths, as a cause of incessant heavenly joy.

In saying *"**you go back to your tents**"* (7); is a clear indication that this book was written when the people were still dwelling in tents. Yet this expression was used later on to refer to the dwelling places either tents or buildings (1 Samuel 13:2; 2 Samuel 20:1; 1 Kings 8:66 etc.).

Christ our Passover

The feast of the Passover used to bring to the Jews a special joy once a year; when hundreds of thousands of lambs were slain; that were incapable of purifying the inner depths. However, the true men of God, looked forward to the true Lamb that alone can purify to perfection, and can pour joy over the believers all along their days of sojourn, and even in heaven itself. St. John the beloved saw in the middle of the throne, "*a lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered*" (Revelation 5:6). And seeing Jesus approaching him, St. John the Baptist said: "*Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29). And of Him, the apostle Peter says: "*You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world"* (1 Peter 1:18, 19). Before our fall into sin, the Word of God, by His own will, chose to offer Himself as a Passover Lamb to bring man who was going to fall, over to glories. The apostle Paul, on the other hand, very clearly, calls the cross of Christ a "Passover feast;" saying: "*For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival"* (1 Corinthian 5:7, 8).

By this, our Savior Jesus Christ, by His cross, has turned our life into a perpetual Passover; not to eat a lamb unable to resurrect; but to eat His given body and blood, to enjoy the risen paschal life; to eat it, not with bitter herbs, but with the

Spirit of true repentance, to enter into the joy of His heavenly Kingdom. Not to sprinkle blood over the posts of the gates of our houses, but the Spirit of God to sprinkle it in our depths; to have the gates of heaven opened before us; and to have the right to enter into the bosom of God the Father, in the worthiness of the blood and righteousness of Christ.

2. THE FEAST OF THE WEEKS

The feast of Passover is connected to an historic event; which is the setting forth of the people from bondage; as a symbol of the freedom that we were to have in Christ Jesus. Whereas, in the feast of the booths or the weeks, **there is a thanksgiving offering for God's work that pours over us through the inheritance from the land He granted us.** The first feast is the feast of the reconciliation between God and man through the blood; **whereas the second feast is that of equality between mankind**; as all partake together of the joy before the Lord; also through the sacrifice of Christ.

The feast of the weeks; namely, the Pentecost; is celebrated seven weeks after the feast of Passover (the fiftieth day). In it, messengers are sent to collect a bunch of barley, to be offered to the Lord as firstlings (Leviticus 23:10). Some believe that this feast celebrates God's care for the land; from which the harvest is reaped in its proper time, through God's care of the weather conditions.

How is the feast celebrated?

"You shall count seven weeks; begin to count the seven weeks from the time the sickle is put to the standing grain. Then you shall keep the festival of weeks to the Lord your God, contributing a free-will offering in proportion to the blessing that you have received from the Lord your God" (Deut. 16:9,10)

1. Bringing an offering to the Lord, ***"in proportion to the blessing …"*** an optional offering, like a tax given to the King "God Himself," the owner of the land, he granted to the people to work it; a "***free-will offering,"*** left to the believer to give, joyfully and freely, according to his own discretion with no limitation. As the Lord is giving him generously, blessing his crop (10); it is fitting for him; likewise, to offer freely of what he has granted him.

As it is a feast of thanksgiving to the Lord, who freely gives; It is fitting to celebrate it, not only by worship, but the believer should do like his God, by giving freely to his needy brother.

2. **mixing the giving with rejoice**

"Rejoice before the Lord your God – you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levite resident in your towns, as well as the strangers, the orphans and the widows who are among you – at the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for His name" (Deut. 16:11)

The believer should translate his thanksgiving practically by giving freely to his brother; and by his joy in giving, with the spirit of praise, to rejoice, together with his brethren.

The goal of the feasts is to let the believer enjoy the spiritual joy, to live as though in heaven; and to reflect this joy on the life of his family, his relatives, and those working with and under him. He should practice this rejoicing in his house, his worship, his work, and his encounter with others; especially the poor and the needy. Rejoicing before the Lord, should not stop at praising Him by the mouth; but he should express his joy and thanksgiving to God by his whole being.

Rashi[1], a Jewish interpreter, believes that God requests from the believer to

[1] *Joseph Parker: The People's Bible, vol. 4, Deuteronomy 16:11.*

bring joy to eight hearts: four on his own side – the son, the daughter, the male and female slave –; and four on God's side: the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow. The believer should so celebrate the feast, sitting among his family, the slaves, the men of God, the strangers, and the needy. Just as he cares to have his own family share the joy of the feast with him, he should not forget those working with and under him; those who minister to the Lord, and those for whom the Lord cares: the orphans and the widows.

Whoever lacks family love, is haughty toward the lowly slaves, disregards the ministers of the Lord, does not open his house before the strangers, or does not care for the needy, thus would not be able to celebrate the feast.

By that, the celebration of the feast comes to be an icon of heaven, where all assemble around God, and enjoy His bosom. The believer finds himself as though among his own family; with no discrimination between a master and a slave, a male and a female, a Jew and a Gentile, a rich and a poor, a priest and one of the congregation.

This feast is connected to worship; particularly in offering sacrifices of peace, and of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. The heart comes to bear the nature of joyful thanksgiving.

He distinguishes the kind of joy by saying: ***"rejoice before the Lord;"*** because the worldly rejoice based on having fun, and not being committed to responsibility, etc., would not be accepted by the Lord; and would not fulfill the soul; but would probably turn into grief.

3. Meditating on the salvation work of the Lord: Of the important factors that brings inner joy to the soul, and that make us keep the divine commandment, is to remember God's dealings with us in our life, and His amazing salvation for us.

"Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and diligently observe these statutes" (Deut. 16:12)

He connects between joy and the salvation work of the Lord, together with the life of thanksgiving and obedience to the commandment. They are all melded aspects of one fact; namely, 'the fellowship with God the Savior.'

A Pentecostal church

In the Passover feast, we saw a symbol of the Lord Christ, the true Passover, who transformed our life on earth as though in heaven, into an incessant feast. When we see Him, our souls rejoice and our whole being utters the new song of the Lamb. As to the feast of the Weeks or the Pentecost, we see the Church celebrate it all the days of her sojourn on earth; offering to God the Father, and to Christ the Firstborn, an amazing offering of thanksgiving, on account of all believers. And as the apostle says: "*Christ has been raised from the dead**, the first fruits of those who have died***" (1 Corinthians 15:20). This is the first and the greatest crop, accepted by God the Father, and the object of His pleasure; those who unite with Him, come to be, together with Him, 'first fruits,' who are called, " *the first converts in Achaia"*(1 Corinthians 16:15); or according to the apostle James, "*He gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of His creatures"* (James 1:18). Of them it is also said: "*These follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They have been redeemed from humankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb"* (Revelation 14:4). The Church thus becomes in a state of perpetual feast, in which she presents Christ her First Fruit, the first head of grain, "*he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord*", an offering of thanksgiving, accepted by God the Father.

3. THE FEAST OF THE BOOTHS

These three feasts integrate together by proclaiming our need for God's sanctification of all the stages of our work in this world. The Jews used to celebrate the feast of the Passover with the first strike of the sickle, as a sign of the beginning of the harvest; and the feast of the Pentecost when the harvest comes to an end, as a sign of the continuation of God's blessing of our work; and the feast of the booths at the end of the agricultural year, as a sign of putting the seal of God's blessing on our work at the end of the road. It is as though God's blessing is accompanying us at the beginning, during the work, and up to the end.

In the **feast of the Passover**, the believer enjoys the reconciliation with God. In the **feast of the Weeks**, he offers his thanksgiving to God for His generosity to his brethren, and for his feeling of the equality among the believers. And in the **feast of the booths**, the believer rejoices for his sojourn, longing to set forth to heaven. These three feasts are not separable from each other; and form a kind of unity between God, man, and heaven; a unity that produces a mutual and a personal joy, and would not be realized except through the sacrifice of the Lord Christ on the cross.

He reminds them of certain rites related to the feast of the booths that he has already dealt with (Numbers 29:12); and clarifies the following points:

Connecting between making the booths, and gathering in the produce from the threshold floor and the wine press:

1. ***"You shall keep the festival of the booths for seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshold floor and your wine press"*** (Deut. 16:13). As, when God blesses our crops, and pours a flood of His temporal gifts through His exalted blessing, He fears lest our souls would connect to the world, and not to its Creator. That is why, when we enjoy the good gifts, it is fitting for us to set for ourselves the 'booths,' to remember that we are strangers and sojourners on this earth, on which we shall not settle down forever.

2. Connecting between the feeling of sojourning, and the heavenly joy in the Lord:

"Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns. Seven days you shall keep the festival to the Lord your God at the place that the Lord your God will choose; for the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce, and in all your undertakings, and you shall surely celebrate" (Deut. 16:14, 15)

This festival is a call to realize the real position of man in this world – that he is a stranger; and according to the Psalmist: "*For I am your passing guest, an alien, like all my forebears"* (Psalm 39:12). It is not a pessimistic view; as it goes hand in hand with a looking forward toward the open heaven, and the arms of God outstretched to the believers; calling them to set forth to find comfort in Him. And according to the apostle Paul: "*For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"* (2 Corinthians 5:1). The feeling of sojourning with hope in heaven produces an inner joy.

That is God's wish, to rejoice before Him, together with others. If it is fitting for those under the Law to rejoice and to bring joy to the lives of others; What would be more fitting for us, who have entered into the era of grace, and have enjoyed the perpetual dwelling of the Holy Spirit in us; He who grants us His fruits; namely, love, joy, etc.

The believer rejoices for the sake of the blessings and gifts given to him by God. He also rejoices that he is giving others; his joy in giving more than for taking;

counting the joy of his brethren as his own.

In the festival we rejoice for the sake of the Lord, who is Himself our feast, for the sake of His gifts that proclaim His love for us; and for the sake of His granting us the blessing of giving to others to bring joy to their hearts. We also rejoice for the sake of His true and honest promises that we gain when He brings us into the bosom of God the Father, instead of the booths under which we live here; and enjoy the fellowship of glory together with Him. Here, we only know the inner spiritual joy, with which "***we shall surely celebrate***" (15).

4. THE FEASTS AND THE GIVING

He gives us general features of those three annual feasts, as it came in Exodus 23:16, 17; 34:23.

(1) **Practicing the collective life in the Lord:**

"Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place that He will choose: at the festival of unleavened bread, at the festival of weeks, and at the festival of booths" (Deut. 16:16)

The appearance of the males three times a year at the central location of worship, refers to the confirmation of unity in the Lord, and fellowship together with the spirit of communal joy.

2. The giving:

*"**They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed; all shall give as they are able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God that He has given you" (Deut. 16:16, 17)***

This giving is a sacrifice of thanksgiving offered to the Lord of what He gives us; everyone as he is able; and as much as his heart floods with thanksgiving to God, and his love for his brethren, to fulfill their needs, and to bring joy to their hearts; the way God is fulfilling his needs and bringing joy to him. The apostle Paul tells us: *"Now concerning the collection for the saints… On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn…"* (1 Corinthians 16:1, 2).. And about the Macedonians he says: "*I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints--, and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord, and, by the will of God, to us"* (2 Corinthians 8:2).

A marvelous portrait of giving; giving the soul to God and to His beloved, before the material giving; namely giving love and joy before the visible giving; coming from true longing and desire to give; given according to their means, and even beyond their means; counting it an honor and glory, to enjoy the grace of giving, and partaking of the ministry of the saints. In this they followed the role model of the poor widow who gave all what she had (Luke 21:4).

5. THE FEASTS AND THE JUSTICE

God desires for His people to practice the joy in the Lord, to come to His house with joy; for all to rejoice: the rich by giving with generosity and love; and the poor by receiving the gift with thanksgiving. This joy is much more realized by setting for them judges and officers at all the gates of every town and village, to investigate the troubles of the people, and to render justice to the oppressed.

No special buildings were established for justice; and it was not held in public places; but at the gates of towns. Why?

(1) Almost all the towns were surrounded by walls with gates, through which those working on the fields crossed every day to their work, and returned after they finish it; and through which strangers coming from other places entered. The gates

were considered as public places where those coming in and going out encounter.

(2) If it was advisable to protect the town with strong walls against probable enemies; it was also fitting to support its people with justice; as without it, no walls could protect the town against the enemy; as it may be destroyed by oppression.

(3) God Himself, the wholly just is the One who protects His people: "*For I will be a wall of fire all around it, says the Lord, and I will be the glory within it"* (Zechariah 2:5).

"You shall appoint judges and officers throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall render just decisions for the people" (Deut. 16:18)

It is fitting for the judge to realize that it is out of God's love, that He allowed man to practice judgment; "*For the judgment is God's"* (Deut. 1:17). As a judge is God's deputy and ambassador, he should present an image fitting to this great and serious position. Judges were called 'god': *"In the midst of the gods he holds judgment. How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?"* (Psalm 82:1); And the apostle Paul advises us "*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God"* (Romans 13:1).

In the wilderness, he set for them judges according to their numbers, together with leaders of thousands and leaders of hundreds. Now, as they are approaching cities, he sets for them judges and officers (the executive body of judgment) in every town and village. As men set forth to the house of the Lord to worship with joy, they also find at home those who protect and defend them against oppression,

Beside the 70 elders who were chosen by Moses to become the nucleus and the beginning of the assembly of the 'Sanhedrim, that sits for judgment in Jerusalem, in the large and the small towns that included more than 120 families, he set councils of judgment according to the size of each town. That was done in the days of Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 19:5, 8).

Some believe that the 'officers' here, are groups of secretaries and scribes who accompanied the judges to help them; and were probably like councils to support them.

God commanded the people to choose for themselves judges with the spirit of justice and impartiality. In the Hebrew text, it came as: *"Justice, and only justice"* a repetition that confirms the fact; probably because the figure 2 refers to 'love' that makes the two into one. Like when the poor widow, through her love, put two cents in the treasury box; and the good Samaritan, as a sign of his love, gave two dinars to the hotel to take care of the wounded man. It is fitting for the judge, while issuing judgment, not to harbor in his heart any feeling of hatred, even toward those condemned to chastisement or even to stoning. He should rather carry in himself love that goes hand in hand with justice.

"You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right" (Deut. 16:19)

Knowing the corrupt nature of man's heart, God warned the judges against three things: "distortion of justice, partiality, and accepting bribes"

- When they accept bribes, they lose their souls. No one acquires unjust profit without just loss. Wherever there is profit, there would be loss; the profit would be in the treasury box, whereas the loss would be in the conscience[1].

[1] *Sermon 13.*

Fr. Caesarius of Arles

He warns the judges against practicing any oppression, and accepting any bribes (Exodus 23:8); and commands them to commit themselves to justice.

"Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the lord your God is giving you" (Deut. 16:20)

6. NOT MIXING BETWEEN THE WORSHIP OF GOD AND IDOLATRY

"You shall not plant any tree as a sacred pole beside the altar that you make (for yourself) to the Lord your God; nor shall you set up a stone pillar – things that the Lord your God hates" (Deut. 16:21)

Mention of the sacred poles and the stone pillars is a proof that these speeches were said at an early time when the people first confronted the Canaanite worship atmosphere; and not at a later time when they were influenced by the pagan customs surrounding them. It is also obvious that it was long before the temple of Solomon was established; at a time when it was possible to set altars at several places.

The **sacred pole** *(Asherah*) was a kind of tree or a wooden pole that symbolized the god '*Astarate*,' that was supposed to embody a magic power.

And the **stone pillar** (*masseba*) was a sacred pillar, probably a memorial that referred to the male god Baal.

The altar set in the name of God, is for the people and not for God. "*That you make for yourself;"* God is in no need for our sacrifices or offerings; but it is us who are in need of being reconciled with God.

God hates mixing between truth and vanity; between God's worship and idolatry. It is fitting for man not to falter between two different opinions, but to walk along the royal road. He does not request from us just to walk according to the truth, but also to be particular in our behavior, lest we may offend anyone. That is why he not only rejects the worship of idols, but He even rejects planting a tree as a sacred pole, or setting a stone pillar, beside the altar; lest any one may assume that he, who set it is practicing idolatry.

In the Septuagint version, it came as: "***nor shall you set a stone pillar; things that the Lord your God hates***." **St. Jerome** discerns in his commentary on the title of Psalm 16 (15): *"A Mikhtam of David."* between a memorial with which God is pleased, and that which He hates.

Psalm 16 and other psalms represent a memorial on which the words of God are inscribed, to remember always the death of the Lord; the way Jacob set a memorial stone on the grave of Rachel. So, **St. Jerome** sees in the hearts of believers what resembles a sacred grave, on which is inscribed a memorial of the death of Christ; by which they partake of His passion and death. There are also memorials that are hated by the Lord; like the one set by Absalom for himself; and like when Lot's wife turned into a memorial of salt, by looking backward instead of forward[1].

[1] *St. Jerome: On Ps. hom. 61.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 16)

"YOU SHALL SURELY CELEBRATE"

❖ You set of Your Sabbath a Sabbath for me; and of Your rest a rest for me.
You rest in me, and grants me rest in You.
You wish that all my days become holy feasts.
You wish to bring me into an incessant feast.

❖ You turned my life into perpetually new days.
A Daily exodus from the bondage of sin.
A crossing over to the heavenly Canaan.
To make me celebrate the Passover, O You, the true Passover.

❖ All my days are harvest days.
The fruits of Your Holy Spirit are incessant and never decrease.
Let me approach You by the fruits of Your Spirit;
Let my soul eat and rejoice.
Let me be fulfilled by Your work;
And let the souls of the hungry be fulfilled together with me.
Let us all, You Holy One, eat out of Your paradise that You have planted for my sake.
Let Your heavenly company come to eat, drink, and rejoice.

❖ Let me spend my whole life as a feast of booths.
My soul will never settle down as long as I am on earth.
As long as it lives in the tent of this body.
Until I encounter You, and settle down in the bosom of Your Father.

❖ You advise me; You even promise me:
"You shall surely celebrate"
Yes; Let me celebrate.
Celebrate Your Sabbaths, and Your incessant feasts.
Celebrate, when I offer You of what You granted me.
When I do not appear before You empty-handed.

❖ Let me rejoice in your righteousness;
And walk by the spirit of justice filled with love.
When no oppression creeps into my heart.
When I offend no one by my behavior.
When You rejoice in Your work with me, O my good Savior.
Let my soul, my body, and my whole being rejoice.
Let every poor and needy rejoice with the generosity of my heart.
Let every suffering soul rejoice when it finds in my life the spirit of justice and love.

CHAPTER 17
FIRMNESS WITH IDOLATERS, WITH JUDGES, AND WITH THE KING

Chapters 17 and 18 deal with the principles to which the principal leaders of the people at that time: the king, the priest, and the prophet, are committed. Idolatry was characterized by fun and abominations; whereas the worship of the true God was characterized by seriousness, together with repentance. The former produces a temporary joy that would never satisfy the soul; whereas the later produces an inner joy. God, with His love for His people gave them the feasts, in order to transform their life into a perpetual joy in the Lord. Yet that would not be realized through slothfulness in observing the commandments of the Lord. That is why He speaks firmly of three things: punishment for idolatry; submission of the judges, in the spirit of obedience, to the holy collective system; and the king's commitment to the divine commandment.

1. Punishment for idolatry 1-7.
2. Submission of the judges to the system 3-18.
3. Commitment of the king 14-20.

1. PUNISHMENT FOR IDOLATRY

"You must not sacrifice to the Lord your God an ox or a sheep that has a defect; anything seriously wrong; for that is abhorrent to the Lord your God" (Deut. 17:1)

Having previously proclaimed that the true and perpetual joy is in the attachment to the holy God, and in entering with Him into a perpetual covenant. It is fitting for the believers, not only to become holy, as He is holy (Leviticus 10:44), but also not to offer a sacrifice that has a defect. As God is holy, the sacrifice of reconciliation should be also holy with no defect, being a shadow of the Lord Christ who is without blame; in order to grant His people the holy life.

Every ox or sheep with a defect, offered to the Lord, is not only unacceptable to Him, but would be counted as abhorrence and a sin; as in it, there is an insult to the true sacrifice that is without blemish.

On the tongue of the last prophet of the Old Testament, God warns His people against offering a sacrifice with a defect, saying: "*When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not wrong? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not wrong?"* (Malachi 1:8).

"If there is found among you, in one of your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, a man or woman who does what is evil in the sight of the lord your God, and transgresses His covenant by going to serve other gods and worshipping them – whether the sun, the moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have forbidden – and if it is reported to you or you hear of it, and you make a thorough inquiry, and the charge is proved true that such an abhorrent thing has occurred in Israel, then you shall bring out to your gates that man or that woman who has committed this crime and you shall stone the man or the woman to death" (Deut. 17:2-5)

As idolatry is considered as a great crime, being treason against God, against the holy congregation, and against man himself. Its punishment is stoning to death.

Idols since the old days concentrated more on worship of the sun and the stars; then turned to the statues that carried one way or another, the figures of men, beasts, birds, or reptiles. The danger of this sin is that who practices it would not rest until he entices others to follow his lead. It is like a plague that propagates to infect a

multitude. Some believe that mentioning the worship of the sun indicates that the book is written in the days of Assyria. Yet, this ancient worship goes back to times long before the days of the prophet Moses, to the Sumerian times[1].

Some believe that worship of the sun started in the days of the tower of Babel, when the people, fearing that God might send another great flood on them, they resorted to the sun, on the assumption that it would never send a flood. They did not realize that the sun has a role in the fall of rain and the occurrence of floods, through the evaporation of water to form clouds in the sky, that eventually fall in the form of rain[2]. They worshipped the sun, the moon, and the stars, counting them as friends of man; they worshipped them and denied their Creator.

Why idolatry is considered as a great crime?

(1) It represents a direct rebellion against God, who has forbidden it. If rebellion against the temporal king is counted as a great crime, how much more should the rebellion against the King of kings?!

(2) It is evil in the sight of the Lord: *"**It is evil in the sight of God, and transgresses His covenant**"* (2). He hates it and would never stand it, as it represents replacing Him by His creation.

(3) It bears treason against the covenant with God. It is a kind of matrimonial treason. It breaks the spiritual matrimonial bond between God and His believers.

(4) It is an abhorrent thing in Israel (4). If God has chosen that people become His own, holy, and dedicated to Him; consummate His divine will; and be provided with His divine mysteries; If they divert to idolatry, their sin would be counted more serious than that of other peoples. It would be abhorrence!

What is the statute of falling to idolatry?

(1) **Thorough inquiry;** Because of the seriousness of this sin, a person should not be punished for mere suspense; but a thorough inquiry should be made.

"And if it is reported to you, or you hear of it, and you make a thorough inquiry, and the charge is proved true that such an abhorrent thing has occurred in Israel" (Deut. 17:4)

With the care of the Law for the holiness of the people of the holy God; yet the reputation of no one should be slandered or he should be unjustly oppressed. Every man should be considered innocent until he is proved guilty after thorough inquiry; and then he should be dealt with accordingly.

In the last chapter we saw how the Law cared for setting judges characterized by justice and impartiality. The present chapter requires that judges should be capable of thorough inquiry of the cases, lest someone might fall under oppression. If "*the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether"* (Psalm 19:9), the judge, as God's deputy, is committed to be clothed with justice in non-partiality.

As the poor man might not find someone to give him justice anywhere, it is fitting for him to resort to the house of God, where he will find the Lamb of God who presents the spirit of righteousness, together with mercy and compassion. Yet, even there, many people are offended in their faith because of the partiality they find in the men of God.

(2) No innocent man should be harmed under the pretence of defending the glory of God:

"On the evidence of two or three witnesses the death sentence shall be

[1] *J. A. Thompson: Deuteronomy, 1973, p. 201,202.*
[2] *J. Vernon McGee: Deuteronomy, ch 17.*

executed; a person must not be put to death on the evidence of only one witness. The hands of the witnesses shall be the first raised against the person to execute the death penalty, and afterwards the hands of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst" (Deut. 17:6, 7)

(3) The punishment of idolatry is to be stoned to death; whether it is a man or a woman; as the woman's weakness should not be an excuse for such a sin.

(4) Stoning shall be done at the gate of the town. In other situations it was done outside its walls (Nehemiah 8:1; Acts 7:58; Hebrew 13:12). And during the wandering in the wilderness, it was done outside the camp (Leviticus 24:14; Numbers 15:36). The hands of the witnesses were the first to be raised against the person to be stoned for the following reasons:

a. As long as the sin is public, or could be made public; the punishment should be done that way.

b. In order that it would be a lesson to everyone in the town.

c. Being the first to stone, the witnesses could not be justified before their conscience in case they are false witnesses; to let them feel that they have killed someone unjustly with their own hands.

❖ According to the old Law, whoever disobeys the priests was to be expelled out of the camp, stoned by the people, or had his head cut, to atone for his transgression by his blood. Now, such a person is to be severed by the sword of the Spirit; or expelled from the Church, and torn to pieces by the demons[1].

St. Jerome

d. The literal translation of the Hebrew text is "*The dead man dies*;" "*a man of death*" (1 Kings 2:26); or "*a son of death*" (1 Samuel 20:31). As if the verdict of death is nothing strange, for by his evil deed, he actually became a son of death and in its hand; and as though stoning him would only reveal death that has dwelt in his soul.

2. SUBMISSION OF THE JUDGES TO THE SYSTEM

The judicial job is not an honor that a judge acquires for himself; but it is a commitment and a responsibility. That is why the following principles were set:

(1) A judge should not act in something he doubts; or in which he finds some difficulty to make a decision.

Before his conscience, he is committed to send to a higher level of justice, with more experience:

"If a judicial decision is too difficult for you to make between one kind of blood-shed and another, one kind of legal right and another, or one kind of assault and another – any such matters of dispute in your towns – then you shall immediately go up to the place that the Lord your God will choose, where you shall consult with the levitical priests and the judge who is in office in those days; they shall announce to you the decision in the case. Carry out exactly the decision that they announce to you from the place that the Lord will choose, diligently observing anything they instruct you" (Deut. 17:8-10)

'Jethro,' Moses' father-in-Law advised him to concentrate only on the major and difficult cases (Exodus 18:13). And after the death of Moses, some persons were found eligible as men of God to bear the same role, like Nathaniel, Deborah, and Gideon. Sometimes that position was given to the high priest, like 'Eli' (1 Samuel 1); or to an assembly of priests and Levites who served the Sanctuary.

(2) It is fitting for the judge to be humble and a knowledge-seeker; he should be committed to submit to those who are of more experience, and of higher rank:

[1] *St. Jerome: Letter 14:8.*

"You must diligently observe everything they instruct you. You must carry out fully the Law that they interpret for you or the ruling that they announce to you; do not turn aside from the decision that they announce to you, either to the right or to the left. As for anyone who presumes to disobey the priest appointed to minister there to the Lord your God, or the judge, that person shall die. So you shall purge the evil from Israel. All the people will hear and be afraid, and will not act presumptuously again" (Deut. 17:10-13)

The Law requested the appointment of just judges, as a sign of the bond between the people and the just God. As to the difficult cases that the local judges could not handle, these are taken up to the Levitical priests or to the judge at the temple; namely to the supreme judicial level; and whoever disobey their decision would be put to death (17:8-13).

The second book of Chronicles tells us about what King Jehoshaphat did when, after he appointed judges in all the cities of Judah, he set a higher judicial body in Jerusalem: "*In Jerusalem he appointed certain Levites and priests and heads of families of Israel, to give judgment for the Lord and to decide disputed cases"* (2 Chronicles 19:8); and said to them: "*Consider what you are doing, for you judge not on behalf of human beings but on the Lord's behalf. He is with you in giving judgment." Now, let the fear of the Lord be upon you"* (2 Chronicles 19:6-7).

❖ It is fitting for men to be careful while walking in between the fire and the water, so as not to either drown or be burned. And it is fitting for us likewise to control our steps in between the apex of pride and the whirlpools of slothfulness; as it is written: "*Do not turn aside, either to the right or to the left.*[1]*"*

St. Augustine

It is fitting for the judge to obey the judge senior to him; or else he would be stoned to death, to become an example to the whole people. The offense here may seem simple, and does not warrant such a punishment. But, as the offender is in a leading position, his faults are magnified. As it is fitting for others to obey him, he is committed, in his turn, to obey his superiors. God does not accept for a leader to be arrogant or stubborn.

3. COMMITMENTS OF THE KING

(1) He has to be a believer.

"When you have come to the land that the Lord your God is giving you; and have taken possession of it and settled down in it, and you say: 'I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,' you may indeed set over you a king whom the Lord your God will choose. One of your own community may you set as a king over you; you are not permitted to put a foreigner over you, who is not of your own community" (Deut. 17:14, 15)

Surrounded by several nations with great and strong kings, the people covet to have a king of their own. The prophet Moses, with the spirit of prophecy, and through his experience with his people, realized that once they settle down in the Promised Land; instead of being proud of God's leadership as their king, they would ask for an earthly king, coveting what the nations around them have. This is the ways of the natural, and not of the spiritual man, to seek the apparent glory, and not the beauty of the inner one. Even after experiencing evil kings, when the Lord Christ came, they rejected Him. They wished for an earthly king to liberate them from the Romans, and to bring them temporal authority.

Moses, with the spirit of prophecy, spoke of the king, coveted by the people,

[1] *St. Augustine: Letter 48:2.*

400 years after his departure; according to the lust of their hearts, and not according to the mind of God, *"They made kings, but not through Me; they set up princes, but without My knowledge"* (Hosea 8:4). That is why he confirms here: *"You may indeed set over you a king whom the Lord your God will choose"* (15).

It is obvious from the way this was written, that the royal system has not yet appeared in Israel, and its appearance seemed remote and even unacceptable.

Moses, in his reluctance to set kings over Israel, was not in this less that what the prophet Samuel felt, when the people requested from him, saying: *"Appoint for us a king to govern us, like other nations"* (1 Samuel 8:5). Displeased by what they said, Samuel warned them, saying: *"In that day, you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day"* (1 Samuel 8:18). *"But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, 'No, but we are determined to have a king over us"* (1 Samuel 8:19).

With the spirit of prophecy, the prophet Moses knew that the people will insist on setting a king over them like other nations; and the talk here came to set the broad lines of the commitments of the king.

God did not promise them a king, nor commanded them to choose one; but the Law came to set a system, and to reveal certain features of the future king. God desired to have those people as His own, and wished for them to be distinguished from other peoples. He desired to refer them to Him, being their king. But, if they coveted to have a king, He would allow them to do, on condition that he should realize the will of God; and should be a shadow and a symbol of the King Messiah.

The Law set the statutes concerning the royal system, that if they sought a king; he has to be through the choice of God Himself; from the people of God; and not a foreigner, chosen because of his might, his exalted possibilities, or his strong personality; for fear that he may divert the people toward idolatry and foreign gods; and may lead the people astray toward unclean and unfitting practices. That is why the king should be a believer, bearing a symbol of the true King, the Savior Messiah. As being a believer, he would long to realize, not his own will, but that of the heavenly King, the King of kings.

Requesting from them not to choose a foreigner, it is obvious that the Law has given the people the right to choose the king; and it is also obvious that the commandment here confirms the people's commitment of positive work to choose the king (and subsequently all the leaders). It is the right of every man to contribute in choosing the believing leader who walks with the spirit of the Lord. That is why the apostle Paul, in his epistles, concentrates on being particular in choosing the deacon, the priest, and the bishop (1, 2 Timothy and Titus).

In his work '*On Priesthood,*' **St. John Chrysostom** says:

[Those referred to Christ, destroy His kingdom, more so than His enemies and His adversaries; when they choose the unworthy for the ministry[1].]

[It is not enough for them to apologize for not having enough knowledge of his person; because that would make their responsibility more serious! What they count as a justification would make their position worse.

If they intend to purchase a slave, would they not let a physician examine him first; ask the seller for a warranty; and would they not inquire about him from the neighbors? They may still, even ask for some time to put the slave under probation! Should they not be more particular and careful in choosing someone for such a great position?

[1] *The author: Pastoral Love, Alexandria 1965. p. 230 (in Arabic).*

If he inquired about him, and yet chose him despite his prior knowledge of his unworthiness; in case of any future accusation against the one chosen, he, who contributed in choosing him, would be more responsible, and subsequently more severely punished[1].]

St. Jerome says: [In these days, many build churches with marble walls and pillars, glittery golden ceilings, and altars adorned with precious stones; yet they give little care, when it comes to the choice of the ministers of God[2].]

(2) The king should avoid anything that may alienates him from God:

It is fitting for the king to harbor the spirit of humility; and not to be like the kings of the surrounding nations (16, 17). He should not be preoccupied with what may deprive him of the holy pious life, like the love of vainglory, the carnal pleasures, and the love of wealth.

"He must not acquire many horses for himself, or return the people to Egypt, in order to acquire more horses, since the Lord has said to you, 'You must not return that way again" (Deut. 17:16)

It is fitting for the king to realize that the nation is not there for his sake, but he is there for the nation's sake. He should not do what is for his own luxury and glory; but what is for the good of the congregation.

It is fitting for the king not to bring the people back to servitude, out of which they came; namely, from the land of Egypt; as that way should be completely closed. The people should live with the spirit of freedom, and not with that of servitude. Returning the people to Egypt does not merely imply dispatching some persons to purchase horses for him; but transforming the life of the king himself into a tyrant who dedicates the people's talents on his account; for his own wealth and glory.

Man often tends to go, with his heart and mind, back to the old land of bondage, like when the Hebrew people in the wilderness yearned to return to Egypt to eat the parsley and onions, and to smell the pots of meat. The heart of man often goes back to the works of the corrupt old man, instead of enjoying those of the new man, made in the image of his Creator. It is fitting for the believer not to go back with his heart with that of the wife of 'Lot,' who turned into a pillar of salt; but to have before him the gate of hope in the future life; and to say, together with the apostle Paul: "*This one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 3:13, 14).

By such a joyful futuristic look, our heart would not turn back to the past; to what has already passed and came to an end; but to be happy with the days that passed and with the end of every year; rejoicing in the present, and setting forth toward the future with the spirit of glorious joy.

- We can take the horse to be a symbol of the worldly possessions, or to any kind of honor, on which we proudly lean; wrongly assuming that, the higher we go, the more secure we become! Shouldn't we realize that the higher we get, the heavier and more violent would be our fall?! How would security be realized? It would not be through power, authority, honor, glory, or horses![3]

St. Augustine

Origen believes that the horses refer to the devils who fell down from heaven because of their pride; those who said: "*I will ascend to the tops of the clouds. I will make myself like the Most High"* (Isaiah 14:14).

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[1] *The author: Pastoral Love, Alexandria 1965. p. 230-231 (in Arabic).*
[2] *The author: Pastoral Love, Alexandria 1965. p. 233 (in Arabic).*
[3] *On Ps. 33 (32).*

- ❖ When Pharaoh rode his horses, he perished; so did his people. That is why; the Law confirmed that Hebrews should not possess horses. Remember that king Solomon did not get his horses from Jerusalem or from Judea; but purchased horses from Egypt (2 kings 10:28). Horses were sold in Egypt. "*Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses; but our pride is in the name of the Lord our God"* (Psalm 20:7). Our Lord also have horses; but beside this He has shining mountains; whereas the mountains of the devil are full of darkness[1]."
- ❖ In the book of Psalms it is written: "*The war horse is a vain hope for victory"* (Psalm 33:17); and somewhere else in the Holy Bible it came: " *horse and rider he has thrown into the sea"* (Exodus 15:1). The commandment to the king of Israel was not to acquire many horses (Deut. 17:16)… I think that horses are the human sinners, and their riders are the demons that override the wicked… Whoever turns into a persecutor is a horse; and the devil is his leader who strikes us with a spear. The horse runs and the devil strikes with the spears. Its rider drives the horse against its will to a state of agitation[2].

St. Jerome

The king is not forbidden to ride horses, although the King of kings, in His humility, entered into Jerusalem riding a donkey and a colt. He is forbidden from over-using the horses in a kind of vainglory; or, with many horses, some men unworthy of honor, would abuse their position in the royal palace; as it is written: "*I have seen slaves on horseback, and princes on foot like slaves"* (Ecclesiastes 10:7).

God fears that the king would probably take pride in his personal power and military possibility; as it is written: "*Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses; but our pride is in the name of the Lord our God"* (Psalm 20:7); and, "*The war horse is a vain hope for victory; and by its great might it cannot save"* (Psalm 33:17); and, "*Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses"* (Hosea 14:3).

As Egypt has been the source of exporting horses to Canaan (1 Kings 10:28, 29); God did not wish for them to acquire many horses, for fear that they would accordingly enter into too many commercial dealings with Egypt, something that would probably get them to yearn for the gods of Egypt, like the calf of Ibis; as they previously did in the wilderness, when they made for themselves a golden calf and worshipped it.

The king is committed to trust in the Lord, and to walk according to the commandments of His covenant (18-20). It is fitting for him to realize that he, in turn, is submitted to the heavenly King. The king should not assume that he is above the Law or the divine statutes; or, that in the sight of God, he is greater than those submitted to him.

As far as carnal lusts are concerned, it was said that a king "*must not acquire many wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away"* (17). That was what king Solomon fell in: "*He loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hitite women… Solomon clung to these in love… For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David"* (1 kings 11:1-6).

He warned the king against the love of wealth: "*Also silver and gold he must not acquire in great quantity for himself*" (17); as the love of wealth would probably make the king press on the people for his own benefit; in which King Solomon also fell (1 Kings 12:4). The love of wealth may also make the king trust his possibilities

[1] *On Ps. hom. 9.*
[2] *On Ps. hom. 56.*

and capabilities, and not the arm of the Lord. It is said: "*Put no confidence in extortion, and set no vain hopes in robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them"* (Psalm 62:10). David collected gold and silver (1 Chronicles 29:4); yet he did not collect them for himself or his own family, but for the ministry of God and the people of God.

(3) The king should commit himself to the divine commandment:

"When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this Law in a book from the one before the priests, the Levites. It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, and be careful to observe all the words of this Law and these statutes, neither exalting himself above other members of the community nor turning aside from the commandment, either to the right or to the left, so that he and his descendants may reign over his kingdom in Israel" (Deut. 17:18-20)

It is fitting for the king to be, before anything else**, a man of the Holy Bible**; a man of the word of God; loving the divine word. It is fitting for him to be a diligent student in his study of the word of God; to walk in the spirit of obedience of the divine commandment; to bow his heart with the spirit of love before God who set him a king; and before His people. God will grant him success in everything.

a. Some believe that the copy of the Law that the king should write for himself is the **Book of Deuteronomy,** which gives commandments and statutes that concern the life of the king and the leaders; not like the Books of Levites and Numbers, that give statutes, which mostly concern rites, ministry, and priesthood. Others believe that the Law here means **the five Books of Moses** that were kept together in one unit, as a foundation of anything that concerns the religious aspect.

b. Although the king must have had more than one copy of the Law, yet he was committed to **write with his own hand a copy for himself**, once he sits on the throne, if he had not done that beforehand. He had to write his own copy, to be like a renewal of the covenant between God and him. This copy should be written from the one in the hands of the priests, an exact copy of the one kept inside the ark of covenant before the Lord.

c. Although the king, most probably, had scribes, whose handwriting was far better than that of the king; yet he still was committed to write his copy by himself; as writing makes the thoughts more steadfast, and gives the chance to the writer to meditate on what he is writing, more so than the mere reading; by which the Law will become printed on the king's mind.

d. The king will learn that, in the affairs of his state, and under all circumstances, there is nothing more important than to sit and be preoccupied by the commandment of God. His heavy responsibilities would be no excuse; nor that there are others who can do this work.

e. It is not to write it, then keep it in his desk; he has to read it, not once or twice, but to keep reading it all the days of his life.

f. The goal of reading it, is to turn his life into one of piety; to learn to fear the Lord his God; and to realize, that although he has got authority and honor, yet he is committed to bow in fear before the authority of God the Almighty; who is above all and the King of all.

g. He is committed to be faithful in executing all the commandments and statutes; and in keeping the Law all the time.

h- By the Law, he learns to be humble; and his heart will not be exalted above his brethren.

i. His days will become long; namely, fruitful and blessed.

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 17)

GRANT ME THE SPIRIT OF HOLINESS, JUSTICE, AND AUTHORITY

❖ Longing, O holy Father, to set me a saint for Yourself;
You Sent for me Your Holy Son to bring me up to You.
And offered me Your Holy Spirit to sanctify me completely.
Grant me not to offer you what is not fitting for You.
But to smell in all my offerings the fragrance of Your holy Son.
I wish I had in my depths, no defect or uncleanness.
So that my prayers and all my worship would be holy in You.

❖ In the old days, idolatry was a major crime, punished by stoning to death.
Let Your fiery Spirit work in my heart, to take away all the gods foreign to me.
Let no uncleanness have a place in my depths.
But let Your Spirit dwell in me, to grant me the spirit of holiness.

❖ Grant me, together with the holiness, the Spirit of justice.
You set me a judge; so let me judge myself with the spirit of justice.
You are the Judge of judges, who judge all men.
Grant me the spirit of truth, together with humility.
Let Your commandment be my law.

❖ Together with holiness and justice, grant me the spirit of authority.
You are the King of kings.
You set Your people kings; yet not like those of the nations.
You have chosen me a king, who carries a spiritual authority.
I say to this thought: Go, and it will go; and to that: Enter, and it will enter.
Grant me an authority, not to fear sin or the devil or the events.
By You, I become a king. By You, my soul will become rich with all blessings.
But, will realize the mysteries of Your commandments.
Your Law is the constitution of my inner kingdom.
From which I shall not turn aside to the right or to the left.
It will set for me my royal road.

CHAPTER 18
THE MINISTERS OF THE LORD

As the priests, the Levites received the Lord as their portion; the people are committed to give them the portion of the Lord; namely, the tithes, the firstfruits, and the vows. The people are committed to fulfill the material needs of the priests, the Levites, scattered among the towns. As to the ministers of the devil, like the soothsayer, the omen-interpreters, and the sorcerers; these will have no place among them. The nations around them used to have false prophets and those who practiced witchcrafts depending on the power of Satan. That is why God banned those practices (9-14).

God set for His people prophets to utter the word of God and to proclaim His will (15-19). Any prophet, who prophesies something other than what is uttered by the Lord, shall die (20-22).

On another side, Moses presented a prophecy about the True Prophet; "**the Anticipated Prophet,"** the incarnate Lord of the prophets; namely, about the coming of the Lord Christ, saying: *"The Lord will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren, Him you shall hear…" He is unique in His prophecy; the Lord of the prophets; who grants life to him who hears Him;… and "Every soul who will not hear that Prophet, shall be utterly destroyed from among the people*" (Acts 3:22, 23; 7:37; etc.).

1. The portion of the priests the Levites 1–8.
2. No soothsayers or witch-crafters 9–14.
3. The anticipated Prophet 15–22.

1. THE PORTION OF THE PRIESTS THE LEVITES

The people were about to enter into the Promised Land; a fertile land that depends on rainwater. It is as though God Himself subsists them by the land as well as the water. Now, He designated a whole tribe not subsisted by land to live on, to confirm that they will have God's own inheritance; as a living example of the complete dependence on God, and not on the land.

God did not care to mention anything about the rights of the king; but on the contrary, we find the prophet Samuel warning the people who asked him to set a king over them, saying: *"This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you. He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen, and some will run before his chariots. He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties, will set some to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and some to make his weapons of war and equipments for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks and bakers. And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants"* (1 Samuel 8:11-15).

While caring for the needs of the priests and the Levites, and designates the greatest part of His portion to be theirs, He warns the people against the behavior of the kings, who often abuse their authority, and take what is not theirs.

(1) In order that the priests do not preoccupy themselves with the affairs and the riches of this life, but with what is for the edification of the souls. They were not given a portion in the spoils of war, or in the Promised Land that was divided by lot among the tribes. God has confirmed that He would be their portion and their inheritance.

"The priests and the Levites, indeed all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel. They shall eat the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and His portion. Therefore, they shall have no inheritance among their brethren; the Lord is their inheritance, as He said to them" (Deut. 18:1, 2)

In the Old Testament, the priests and the Levites had neither portion nor inheritance with Israel in the Promised Land. Whereas, in the New Testament, the whole church – priests and congregation – feel that their portion is the Lord Himself; and their lot is the new land, the heavenly Canaan.

The priests eat "***offerings of the Lord made by fire***" (1); literally translated in Hebrew as "the fire of Jehovah;" which means here, what came in the book of Numbers: "*This shall be yours of the most holy things reserved from the fire; every offerings of theirs; every grain offering and every sin offering and every trespass offering which they render to Me*" (Numbers 18:9).

Whereas, in the New Testament, all the believers have the right, not to eat offerings made by fire, but to have the fiery Spirit dwells in them, to transform them into offerings and sacrifices of fire. They become ministers of God, flaring with fire; among whom dwells God, the consuming Fire.

The priests, in the Old Testament, used to eat God's portion of tithes, firstfruits, and vows; whereas in the New Testament, the Lord presents Himself to them as their portion. He offers His body and blood, given for love of the whole humanity. God, who is Spirit is their portion; but, having their bodies as a gift from God, He does not leave them hungry, but is committed to fulfill them. He presents to them His portion as their portion.

Every true believer says together with the Psalmist: "*You, O Lord, are the portion of my inheritance and my cup. You maintain my lot*" (Psalm 16:5). God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:26).

While the body longs to acquire the whole world; the soul would not be fulfilled except by God her Creator. He alone would fill every void in her; and grants her every fulfillment, joy, and peace. By acquiring the Lord her God, she acquires everything; to say together with the apostle: "*As poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things*" (2 Corinthians 6:10). "*Everything is yours!*" (1 Corinthians 3:21).

(2) God did not leave it to the people to choose to give the priests according to their generosity; but He set a statute that designates their portion.

"And this shall be the priest's due from the people, from those who offer a sacrifice, whether it is bull or sheep. They shall give the priest the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach. The firstfruits of your grain and your new wine and your oil, and the first of the fleece of your sheep, you shall give him. For the Lord your God has chosen him out of all your tribes to stand to minister in the name of the Lord, him and his sons forever" (Deut. 18:3-5)

Josephus[1], Philo[2], and the Talmud, believe that what came here (3), do not mean the sacrifices offered in the temple of the Lord, but those slaughtered at home for personal use.

a. In the book of Leviticus 7:32-34, the priests were given the right of the breast and the right thigh. Here, he adds the cheeks and the stomach. The best portion of the sacrifice was offered to the Lord on the fiery altar; the next best was given to the priests and the Levites; then he who offers the sacrifice will have what is left. The sacrifice of the burnt offering was an exception; it was offered wholly to God.

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[1] *Antiqu. 4:4:4.*
[2] *De Praemiis Sacerdot.*

Feeling that God dwelt among His people, whom He granted the Promised Land as their possession, the worshippers felt that they should offer Him the best they have. And as the priests and the Levites were His representatives, they were happy to offer them as well the best they have.

What is the portion of the true Christian as a priest of the Lord?

* **The shoulder (the arm):** referring to God, who supports the arm of the believer to work in the kingdom of God.
* **The cheeks:** referring to the sanctification of the words coming out of the mouth. **St. Jerome** believes that 'Bethphage' means "the house of the cheek," as a symbol of the mouth, the house of confession. Therefore, this house belongs to the priests.

❖ It was the custom to give the cheek (*Siagona*) to the priest; Why?… It is a part of the priestly work to be able to teach the people; according to the words of the prophet: *"Ask the priests concerning the law"* (Haggai 2:11). It is the duty of the priest to answer the questions concerning the Law; and consequently they are granted the power of talking, symbolized by the cheeks; and the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, symbolized by the breast. There is no benefit in words, when there is no knowledge.

When you get the cheek and the breast; then you receive the muscles of the shoulder (the arm) as well, a symbol of works[1]. You would not benefit anything, if you have the possibility of words and easy talking, if you have no knowledge; and if you do not translate them into works[2].

St. Jerome

* **The stomach:** The dedication of hidden inner depths on account of the Lord.
* **The firstfruits of grain:** To have a portion of the bread coming down from heaven.

b. **The firstfruits of the fruits:** That appears in its season, and cannot be kept for a long time. They were used to be given to the priests who used to live among the people for priestly work in the towns.

The priests Levites working in the temple, used to get the firstfruits of grain, wine, and oil for food, and the fleece of sheep for clothing. Then they, in turn, used to fulfill the needs of the poor and the needy.

(3) If God was committed to give His portion to His ministers; it is fitting for His ministers not to be preoccupied with their portion, but to stand and minister in His name forever, they and their sons. All their thoughts should be concentrated on testifying to the Lord before the people, and on training their sons in ministering.

(4) Some believe that the word "***sacrifices***,"(3) does not mean just the animal sacrifices offered to the Lord, but includes all what are slaughtered for general use[3]. This means that the priests had their portion of everything slaughtered, even in the towns for regular consumption and not for offering to the Lord. They had their share in the daily food of the people.

(5) The Levite gets, beside his portion, "*what comes from the sale of his inheritance from his fathers"* (8).

Although they did not have the right to inherit in the Promised Land that was divided by lots among the tribes; yet they were allowed to purchase houses, herds, and fields; as it happened with Abiathar (1 Kings 2:26; Jeremiah 32:7, 8).

"And if a Levite comes from any of your gates, from where he sojourns among all Israel, and comes with all the desire of his mind to the place which the

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[1] *Cf. St. Jerome: Letter 6:1,2 PL 22:608-9; Commmen. On Melach. 2:3,4 PL 25:1554-5.*
[2] *Cf. St. Jeromeon Mark 11:1-10, hom. 81 (VII).*
[3] *Adam Clarke Commentary.*

Lord chooses …" (Deut. 18:6)

Although God chose the tribe of Levi for the ministry in His temple, yet He forced no one to minister, but says: '*and comes with all the desire of his mind to the place which the Lord chooses.'* God does not cancel the human will, but wishes it to be in harmony with His will; He sanctifies it and works with it!

"Then he may serve in the name of the Lord his God as all his brethren the Levites do, who stand there before the Lord. They shall have equal portions to eat, besides what comes from the sale of his inheritance (from his fathers)" (Deut. 18:7)

Saying "*he may serve,"* God confirms that the priesthood is not a means of honor, but is a way for work and ministry; partaking of the work of the Lord Christ – washer of the feet of others. He does the work of the Lord, with His Holy Spirit; a kind of work, although it seems impossible, yet it is full of sweetness and holy honor.

Every believer sings together with the Psalmist: "*You, O Lord, are the portion of my inheritance and my cup. You maintain my lot"* (Psalm 16:5); "*God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever"* (Psalm 73:26).

Although the Levites had houses of their own, yet they were considered as nomads and sojourners in this world, having no portion of lands to leave for the children after them.

Here, God confirms that He loves those who love His holy altar. Every care they get, He counts as directed personally to Him.

2. NO SOOTHSAYERS OR WITCH-CRAFTERS

Speaking of the priests, the ministers of the Lord and His representatives; who represent the people before Him, He warns them against resorting to idol-ministers or the like, who assume that they do their shepherding work through passing the son or the daughter in the fire, especially in the time of crisis to please the gods (Leviticus 18:10; 20:2-5); soothsaying; interpreting omens, sorcery; conjuring spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead:

"When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. There, shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead" (Deut. 18:9-11)

❖ Holiness for them lies in being liberated from the pagan customs. But for us it is not the case. The apostle Paul says: "*that she may be holy in body and in spirit"* (1 Corinthians 7; 34)[1].

St. John Chrysostom

Both the ancient Egyptians and the Chaldeans were famed for the arts of magic, and the Canaanites as well (1 Samuel 28:7-10). Those peoples used to practice two kinds of magic: good magic they use to heal ailments, solving problems, and helping the leaders to make important decisions, etc.; and evil magic, to do harm to others, like letting demons dwell in their bodies, bring them illness, or lose their peace etc. The Mosaic Law came to confirm that all kinds of magic, whatever are their ways or goals, are evil, and considered as abominations and uncleanness.

God intended to protect His people against idolatry with all its abominations, customs, and ministers; as they were in danger of resorting to all kinds of magic, and to the devil to realize their lusts. They even started to offer their sons and daughters as

[1] *In John, hom. 14:2.*

human sacrifices to 'Molech,' the god representing the sun (Leviticus 18:21). God wanted to protect His people from resorting to the devil and his followers to get to know the future, and to consult concerning their actions, instead of resorting to God, through His ministers. God has granted them the holy land, to let them have fellowship with Him, and not with the devil.

The prophet mentions here nine terms for ways of telling the future through magic, Those ways may not be found nowadays as they used to be; but unfortunately there are similar ways or even worse; like the movement of "devil-worship" and the like of ways that claim to reveal the future; that may have names different from those used in the days of the prophet Moses.

By **witchcraft**, he probably means getting to know the divine will through shaking the arrows, as it came in Ezekiel 21:21: "*For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the road, at the forks of the roads, to use divination; he shakes the arrows, he consults the images, he looks at the liver."*

By **soothsaying,** he means reading the future by examining the clouds, and making strange noise.

By **interpreting omens**, he means revealing the hidden things through reading the cups, as it was done in the days of Joseph. And was used by the Syrians through studying the movements of the birds, the fire, the rain, and other natural phenomena.

As to **sorcery,** some used drugs and herbs, considered to have magic effect; or magic words, to do harm to other people.

In all these kinds of magic, we see how the devil misused everything. He misused nature created good by God for our sake. He misused our food and drink, like in reading cups; and our bodies, like reading the palm; and he even misused the dead, claiming his ability to call up dead people to reveal the future.

God does not wish to hide His divine will from us, nor to make the future as something unknown. He proclaimed His will by several ways, until the Word of God Himself came; the Only-Begotten Son, to speak to us face to face (Hebrew 1:1). But, unfortunately, man prefers the wrong and erroneous ways of magic and divination, to listening to the voice of God Himself.

God created man as a being longing to reveal the future, not like animals that by nature fulfill themselves today, and never think about the future. This longing, creates in the heart of the believer a strong wish and a flaring fire to reveal the life to come. He yearns to set forth to behold God and to throw himself in His bosom; to get to know the heavenly creatures, to partake of their praises; and to encounter the men of God, from Adam to the end of days. Yet, with the corruption of his heart, this wish turned into a state of anxiety and apprehension toward the future of this world, which makes him sometimes resort to magic and divination.

Why does God reject divination and the like?

(1) The devil deceives man by one of two ways that seem as though contradictory: Either he incites man to deny the world of spirits: to deny God Himself, his angels, the devil, and the eternity of human soul, by which he destroys his hope for eternity. Or not to deny the existence of God, the holy spirits, and the devil, yet he deceives man into thinking that he is the one with authority; giving abundantly what God Himself does not. I remember what a young man, who started to adopt devil-worship, once told me: 'Why should I not worship the devil, when he gives me everything I need?' It is the same way by which the devil tried to tempt the Lord Christ, when "*he took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and he said to Him: 'All these things I will*

give You if You fall down and worship me'" (Matthew 4:8, 9).

(2) Connecting to the works of the devil makes man lose his sanctity; and lead him to practice the abominations of the other nations (9). God is Light. Whoever walks in Him, would enjoy the light and the truth. Whereas he, who partakes of the works of the devil, would walk in the darkness and connects to vanity.

(3) The works of the devil makes man lose his compassion and gentility, and bear a kind of cruelty and violence, even toward his children; to the extent of offering them as human sacrifices.

He presents to them the reasons that would keep them from resorting to the devil and his followers:

(1) *"For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord"* (12). Whoever loves God, would not do the works of the devil.

(2) "*Because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out before you"* (12). If the people practice the things that the nations did, they would have the same destiny as these nations had.

(3) God wishes to distinguish them from the other nations, to be blameless; namely, perfect in His sight in everything.

"*You shall be blameless before the Lord your God. For these nations which you will dispossess listened to the soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not appointed such for you"* (Deut. 18:13, 14)

With the same spirit the apostle Paul says: "*This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind… But you have not so learned Christ"* (Ephesians 4:17, 20). And together with the apostle Barnabas, he also says: "*who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways"* (Acts 14:16); by which they destroyed themselves, whereas the people of God, walk in the way of the Lord.

The goal of keeping us away of these wrong ways, is God's longing for us to be blameless: "***You shall be blameless before the lord your God****"* (13). He does not wish to deprive us of anything; but He seeks our fulfillment and perfection in Him.

The Pelagians depend upon the verse 13 in their claim that man can become blameless on his own. They state that either he is able to realize that; or it would be the fault of the one who set a commandment that is impossible to execute[1]. **St. Jerome** responded to this by saying: [That is what God seeks from us to strife for; yet, even the apostles of Christ themselves, were not blameless as yet.]

God calls us to perfection; namely, to a perfect growth in a blameless life. But, it is fitting for us to discern between the absolute divine perfection, and man's perfection.

- ❖ As the end of life is the beginning of death, stopping along the race to virtue, is a sign of the beginning of the race to evil[2].
- ❖ Whoever heads toward the true virtue, would not partake except of God; who Himself, is the absolute virtue[3].
- ❖ Whatever has limits is not a virtue[4].
- ❖ As I always say, perfection has no limits. The limits of virtue is the absence of

[1] *St. Jerome: Against the Pelagians, Book 1,14.*
[2] *Life of Moses, 6.*
[3] *Life of Moses, 6.*
[4] *Life of Moses, 7.*

limits. How can man reach the limits, where there can be no limits?![1]

- Nobody can disregard the command of the Lord: "*You shall be perfect, just as your father in heaven is perfect"* (Matthew 5:48). As to the naturally good things; although men realize their inability to achieve everything; yet by achieving a part of it, they gain great honor[2].
- It is fitting for us to strive diligently, not to fall from the perfection that could be achieved, but to seek it as much as we possibly can. To this extent, let us make progress in that goal we seek; as the perfection of human nature, probably lies in the growth in goodness[3].

St. Gregory of Nyssa

3. THE ANTICIPATED PROPHET

In all ages, the works of magic, divination, and all kinds of prophesying, had their special appeal, even in our present day, and in the most advanced societies. That is why, an exalted work that fulfills the needs of man, and that reveals the secrets of the future, had to be presented. And that is why, the prophet Moses, in his farewell address, proclaimed the coming of the Lord Christ, who alone, bears the soul as though to heaven, to behold the doors open, and to find for herself a place in the bosom of God the Father; by which it settles down, rest, and waits with hope for the great day of the Lord, when man wholly enjoys fellowship in the eternal glory. It is as though, it was fitting for the believers of the Old Testament to dedicate their whole energies to visualize the future coming of the Messiah the Savior of the world; Whereas for those of the New Testament, to anticipate His coming to bring them up to His glory.

The "Word of God;" who is the "Wisdom of God" came to us to acquire Him, in order to behold clearly the future; and even to taste its pledge, with the spirit of joy and rejoicing.

Together with the greatness of the personality of the prophet Moses, who, for nearly 40 years could bear the burden of the people, and suffered much of the hardness of their hearts; he had a big heart, wide enough for them all. God granted him the ability to perform signs and wonders, in such a way that the people could not imagine anyone like him. Although the prophet Moses drew the attention of the people to the coming of the Lord Christ from their midst, yet he could not perfectly realize His Person; and if he could, it was difficult for him to present it to the people.

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear" (Deut. 18:15)

Here was a promise of the coming of "the Prophet." Because the people almost worshipped the prophet Moses after his death; that is why archangel Michael hid his body, and wrestled with the devil who intended to reveal it to divert the people from the worship of God to that of Moses. If Moses told the people that the One who will come is greater than him, they would have assumed the existence of two Gods; as they could not comprehend the divine persons. That is why he said to them "*like me."* Through incarnation He became a Man; and thus came to be "like him."

(1) He says "***from your midst;"*** namely, from the midst of Israel, and not from another nation, as some try to claim. The Lord Christ Himself confirmed this by saying to the Samaritan woman: "*Salvation is of the Jews"* (John 4:22); And St. John

[1] *Life of Moses, 8.*
[2] *Life of Moses, 9.*
[3] *Life of Moses, 10.*

says: "*He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him"* (John 1:11).

The apostle Peter spoke to the multitudes of Jews after the Pentecost about the Person of Christ, saying: "*And that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the time of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren, Him you shall hear in all things, whatever he says to you. And it shall come to pass that every soul who will not hear that prophet shall be utterly destroyed among the people. Yes, and all the prophets from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days"* (Acts 3:20-24).

And in the farewell speech of St. Steven the archdeacon about the Person of Christ, he said: *"This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear"* (Acts 7:37). And the evangelist St. John says: "*Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, 'This is truly the prophet who is to come into the world'"* (John 6:14).

(2) By saying "*A prophet from your midst*," he designated Him from the other prophets who appeared along the ages; Here he means the Prophet who alone can say. "*I am the light of the world"* (John 8:12); "*The Word by whom the Father spoke to us"* (John 1:1; Hebrew 1:2).

(3) He says "***like me;"*** for although He is the Lord of the prophets, yet He became like Moses.

* Moses used to talk with God in an exalted way; as it is said of him: "*If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision, and I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, Even plainly, and not in dark sayings. And he sees the form of the Lord"*(Numbers 12:6-8). "*But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face"* (Deuteronomy 34:10). Whereas, concerning Jesus Christ, the Son of God and His Word, "*He is in the Father, and the Father is in Him*" (John 14:10). His realization of the will of God is perfect (John 5:20, 21).

* While Moses is the one who provided Israel with the Law; and who saved them from the servitude of Pharaoh; the Lord Christ is the Teacher of mankind, and the Savior of the world from the servitude of the devil.
* While Moses is the founder of the new ordinance for the people, by exalted signs and wonders, the Lord Christ came to the world to set the New Testament, by His exalted divine might.
* While Moses was faithful, yet as a servant (Numbers 12:7); The Lord Christ, on the other hand, was the "Only-Begotten Son." "*Moses was faithful in all His house, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken of afterwards; but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast to the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end"* (Hebrew 3:5, 6).
* Moses stood as an intercessor between God and His people, as we saw in Deuteronomy 5:5. Whereas the Lord Christ was, being the Mediator who is One in essence with the Father, He carried us as members in His body, and reconciled us with His Father. "*For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time"* (1 Timothy 3:5, 6). But there is a great difference between the two mediations: The first was a mediator to gain the divine promise through the ministry of the copy and

shadow of the heavenly things; whereas the second has brought us into heaven itself. And as the apostle Paul says: "*who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said: 'See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.' But now, He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also a Mediator of a better covenant which was established on better promises"* (Hebrew 8:5, 6).

* Moses was privileged over the other prophets, in that he talked to God mouth to mouth (Numbers 12:6-8). Whereas Christ, who is in the bosom of the Father, came down from heaven to declare the Father (John 1:18; 3:13).
* Moses performed exalted signs and wonders in the name of the Lord, whereas Christ performed several signs by His own command. St. John, testifying to his inability to count the works of Christ, ended his gospel saying: "*And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself couldn't contain the books that would be written"* (John 21:25).
* While Moses acted the roles of a king and a leader, Christ, came as the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Revelation 19; 16; 1 Timothy 6:16).
* In the whole history of humanity, no one presented the divine Law, except the prophet Moses and the Lord Christ. Moses received the Law when the people were disturbed and afraid, because of the fire and the mountain filled with smoke; whereas the Lord Christ came to grant a grace above grace, presenting both the truth and the grace together (John 1:14).

(4) He says: "*I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command Him"* (18). Although the Lord Christ is Himself the Word of God; yet, having incarnated, He submitted in obedience to consummate the will of His Father concerning us, which is the same as His will. That is why we do not marvel that, when they said: "'*How does this man know letters, having never studied?' Jesus answered them and said: 'My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him"* (John 7:15-18). Therefore, that great promise has been realized, and the "Prophet" came; the great Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

The words uttered by Moses, the great among the prophets, could not apply except to the Person of the Lord Christ; about whom it is said that He is like him. Whereas about Moses, it was said: "*But since then there has not arisen in Israel, a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land, and by all the mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of Israel"* (Deuteronomy 34:10-12). Thus, if there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, how can God raise a prophet like him, except by the coming of Him who is his Lord and who became like him?

He gives a warning against the false prophets; even after the coming of Christ, false prophets would come; and He tells us not to fear the false prophet (18-20).

❖ The prophet Moses speaks about Christ, saying: "*The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren, Him you shall hear"* (15). Therefore, whoever disobeys Him is disobeying the Law[1].

[1] *Commentary on Galat. 2*

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Anticipating the coming of a special Prophet, they did not ask John the Baptist: 'Are you a prophet?' meaning, 'Are you one of the regular prophets?' but their question was: "Are you **the prophet**?" (John 1:21), adding the article "**the**;" meaning, 'Are you the prophet about whom Moses told us?' That is why, John did not deny that he is 'a prophet,' but refused to be called '**the prophet**[1].'

St. John Chrysostom

❖ He is like him; namely, body-wise, and not exaltness-wise. That is why the Lord Jesus was called 'the prophet[2].'

St. Augustine

"According to all you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying,

'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die. And the Lord said to me: 'What they have spoken is good.' 'I will raise up from them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put my words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it from him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?' – '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; you shall not be afraid of him" (Deuteronomy 18:16-22)

God wished to encounter with every man personally, and to speak with him face to face; but because no man could look at the glory of God and live; he cried out, saying, "*Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die*;" That is why the divine proclamation to men, had to be realized through some man; and that is why God has spoken to the prophet Moses on the Mount of Sinai in the midst of the fire, for the sake of the whole people.

Thus, God sent, from one generation to another, a prophet or more, to whom God spoke on behalf of His people; until the time came for the Word of God Himself to appear as a Prophet like Moses; though He is the Lord of the prophets; then man could encounter with God, and speak to Him.

The world was in need for the divine proclamation, not only through Christ, but also in Him. Although He spoke to the multitude like one of them; yet He proclaimed His glory only to a few "to Peter, James, and John" on the Mount of Tabor, in His transfiguration; and brought up Moses and Elijah to testify to Him as representative of the Law and the prophets.

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[1] *In John, hom. 16.*
[2] *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tract. 15:23.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 18)

THE MINISTERS OF GOD AND THE MINISTERS OF THE DEVIL

❖ The keys of my heart are in Your hands.
Open up, come in, and dwell in my depths.
Let Your true ministers also come in with You.
To proclaim Your word, hiding in Your commandment.
To find their comfort in Your Kingdom in me.

❖ Close up the gates of my heart by the keys of the truth.
So that no false prophet would enter,
nor an abomination would sneak in.
I will not ask anyone else but You.
The devil and his angels will have no place in me.

❖ The believers have waited long for your coming.
Adam together with Eve waited for You.
The patriarchs and the prophets anticipated Your coming.
At last You came to our world.
And turned our earth into heaven.
You gave Your blood an atonement for the whole world.
Yes, Come in into the inner world of my heart.
Proclaim Your dwelling in my depths.
I waited too long for You, the Savior of my soul.

CHAPTER 19

THE CITIES OF REFUGE AND THE FALSE WITNESS

It was fitting for the people of God to translate their religious life into proper behavior in all the social relationships, their civil and criminal dealings. As beginners in spiritual life, the congregation was in need of a detailed statute to control their behavior and dealings.

In the previous chapter, he referred to the anticipated Prophet, to whom they should hear, in order to enjoy salvation. Now he is providing us with a symbolic portrait of this Messianic salvation - setting the cities of refuge to which manslayer who kills his neighbor unintentionally against his will takes shelter. This primitive justice is far from intentional killing; with the purpose of opposing it. It does not break the sixth commandment, but would rather keep it.

He also spoke of honoring the rights of others, whether concerning their possessions or their souls. No one is allowed to remove a neighbor's landmark to confiscate a land that is not his; and it is not fitting for any one to be a false witness against an innocent man.

1. The cities of refuge 1–13.
2. Removing the landmarks 14.
3. The false testimony 15–31.

1. THE CITIES OF REFUGE

"When the Lord your God has cut off the nations whose land the Lord your God is giving you, and you dispossess them and dwell in their cities and in their houses, You shall separate three cities for yourself in the midst of your land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess. You shall prepare roads for yourself, and divide into three parts the territory of your land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, that any manslayer may flee there.

And this is the case of the manslayer who flees there, that he may live: Whoever kills his neighbor unintentionally, not having hated him in time past – as when a man goes to the woods with his neighbor to cut timber, and his hand swings a stroke with the ax to cut down the tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies – he shall flee to one of these cities and live; lest the avenger of blood, while his anger is hot pursue the manslayer and overtake him, because the way is long, and kill him, though he was not worthy of death, since he had not hated the victim in time past. Therefore I command you, saying: You shall separate three cities for yourself.

Now if the Lord your God enlarges your territory, as he swore to your fathers, and gives you the land which He promised to give to your fathers; and if you keep all these commandments and do them, which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and to walk always in His ways,, then you shall add three more cities for yourself beside these three, lest innocent blood be shed in the midst of your land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance; and this blood-guiltiness be upon you" (Deut. 19:1-10).

Not every killing is a crime. Every case should be diligently investigated separately. The Law discerned between two kinds of killing:

a. **Unintentional killing**: (4-6): In this case the manslayer can get away from his avenger of blood by fleeing to one of the refuge cities (see Numbers 35:9-34).

b. **Intentional killing**: In which the avenger has the right to have his revenge

against him (11-13).

One of the commandments to the children of Noah was: "*Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human, shall that person's blood be shed"* (Genesis 9:6). Now that statute is established. But what if the killing was unintentional; for this God commanded to separate the cities of refuge; as we previously saw in our study of the books of Exodus 21:13, and of Numbers 35:10; etc. The book of Numbers dealt with this issue in detail. But now, as the people were about to enter into the Promised Land, they were instructed to separate those three cities on the East Bank.

(1) After Moses set three cities on the East Bank (1:3-7), three more cities were separated in the land of Canaan on the West Bank. The whole region is to be divided into three equal sections as far as possible; the city of refuge to be the center of each section. So that everyone wherever he is, can find near him a city of refuge, which may be considered as a location to which a manslayer can be kept until he can have a just trial, to decide if he is an intentional or an unintentional killer. The city of refuge is thus a protection for the innocent and not for the guilty.

We find no record of this increase in the number of cities of refuge sought by Moses; which is an unintentional proof of the authenticity of this book, as any later author would not be able to bring this up.

The city of refuge refers to the Lord Christ, the Savior of the world, who came down to our earth, and is not any more far from us, but is very near to us. We do not have to seek for whom to ascend to heaven to bring Him down; nor for whom to descend to Hades to bring Him up to us; As He is actually in our hearts (Romans 10:8). Our gospel came up with the salvation, and made it at our hands. He knocks on our inner doors hoping that we receive Him; that we open them to let the Groom of our souls in to dine with us. Our Christ came to our earth to become our stronghold, in whom we are liberated from judgment (Romans 8:1), and be free from any condemnation in an exalted divine protection (Romans 5:1, 9, 10; 8:31-39). Isaiah seeing this unique city says: *We have a strong city. God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks"* (Isaiah 26:1); which is also confirmed by the apostle by saying: "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; and you will be saved, you and your household"* (Acts 16:31).

In the old days, the manslayer used to resort to the city of refuge and stay there until he is tried. And if found innocent, he would remain there until the high priest dies. In the New Testament, on the other hand, the Lord Jesus, being both the Avenger and the Judge; instead of revenge, he will open up for us His divine heart as a refuge to find comfort; and to stay in Him forever; to enjoy, not only the verdict of innocence, but the fellowship of His glories.

He is not only the City of refuge, but He is the road open before us. Hence, it is fitting for us to hasten to His Holy Spirit, to enter into Him without delay, lest the sword would catch-up with us, and our souls would perish.

(2) This chapter answered the following question: How can the manslayer recognize the way to the city of refuge? We know that many of the roads in the old days were formed through the treading of the beasts carrying the heavy loads, especially those in caravans. Paved roads were virtually unknown to the Jews who live in the wilderness for as long as forty years. Then it was the responsibility of the officials to prepare the roads leading to the cities of refuge; to remove every obstacle that might hinder the setting forth to them; to build bridges to cross over to these cities; to put at the crossroads signs with the words 'Refuge! Refuge!,' and to maintain those roads on the month of March of every year.

It is likewise fitting for the ministers of the word to prepare the way for every

soul to encounter with the Savior as its refuge; to be committed to remove every obstacle; to open up the door of hope before them to enjoy the righteousness of Christ and His holiness, instead of their sins; and the non-corruption instead of their corruption.

As those responsible are committed to prepare the ways everywhere toward the cities of refuge; so also God, in His love, prepared for humanity the road toward Jesus Christ. He proclaimed it to our early parents 'Adam and Eve' on His first encounter with them following their fall; then paved the way to know Him through the patriarchs, the prophets, the events, and the Law; in order to cancel any excuse for those who refuse to resort to Him. He sent us very clear prophecies, like signs pointing toward the Person of the Savior; our City of refuge.

The escapee was committed to stay in the city until the death of the high priest; then gets out (Numbers 35:25-29). Our Christ – the greatest High Priest – died once to bring us into Him. He will not die again, but stay alive after His resurrection; so that no one will come out of Him; but we shall eternally abide in Him, and He in us (John 15:4; Colossians 1:23; Hebrew 3:14; 10:38, 39). In short, He set before us a refuge for our salvation (Hebrew 6:18).

(3) The crime of bloodshed had its serious consequences (Proverb 28:17), whereas in the New Testament, mere anger would lead one to the fire of hell. And although un-intention is considered a sin for which a sacrifice is offered; yet killing unintentionally is not counted as a crime that warrants punishment. But the one who committed it is allowed to flee to one of the cities of refuge, to protect him against his avenger of blood.

Saul of Tarsus killed many; but having done that in ignorance, the Lord Christ Himself appeared to him proclaiming the truth, which made him long to die for His sake. The Lord likewise forgave those who crucified Him because they did that in ignorance.

(4) The idea of the cities of refuge came to reveal the intention of God, the compassionate toward His people; who brings up the believing souls, fleeing the judgment, into His side, through faith in the blood of Christ. Whoever flees from sin to the Lord Christ, will find Him opening the doors of His love, as a city of refuge for him.

(5) There is no refuge for those who kill intentionally, who persist on walking by the spirit of Satan the murderer. The manslayer by intention has no right to find mercy in the judge who does not carry the sword of justice without purpose; but to avenge the blood-shedders. Whoever persists on sin will not enjoy forgiveness (Hebrew 10:26).

The Jews tell us that the roads leading to the cities of refuge used to be very spacious; about 32 yards wide; and always kept in a good shape[1].

(6) It is to be noticed that the Law did not count all the towns of the Levites as cities of refuge; but only three cities were so chosen on each Bank; in order to confirm that the Levites were treated the same as the rest of the people. In case a Levite unintentionally killed someone, his city would not give him protection, but he will have to resort to one of the cities of refuge until he is tried. That is what the Law always confirms; that the priest, although is honored with the ministry of God, yet he stands together with the people before God; and his judgment would be harsher and more firm because of his more knowledge.

(7) Some may probably ask whether the Mosaic Law has allowed the avenger

[1] *Adam Clarke Commentary.*

to take action against someone who killed his relative. We say here that the Law intended to limit that as far it possible could. Now, and until very recently, in higher Egypt, as well as in the desert regions, if someone is killed, his family would not be satisfied with killing the one responsible, but would include his children and his relatives; and the situation may turn into a kind of civil war between the families of the whole region; that may last for decades with no end or control. That is why the Mosaic Law came to limit the right of revenge only to one immediate avenger, and not to his household and relatives.

The Law came to realize the following:

a. To keep the believer from living with no control concerning revenge.

b. To confirm the sanctity of man's life; both of the killer and his victim.

c. There is no one above the Law; whether a priest or a layman.

d. The commitment of the congregation to hold just trials, without haste.

(8) Although God of heaven and earth, has granted His people the Promised Land with all its cities; yet He sought to have three on every Bank to be referred to Him. Although all the cities are His, and He has granted them to men; yet he sought back that few, to be dedicated to His divine purpose for human life.

I wish that our God would find in our depths a city of refuge, to receive and refer to Him; where His love and grace would be realized.

(9) On the crossroads, signs are set with the word 'Refuge' (*miklot*); for the escapee to see clearly and without any doubt; to hasten toward the city, having little time to linger, because he is in great danger!

What are these signs but the Holy Bible that directs us to our Savior Jesus Christ? There is no time for foolish disputes, but we should set forth with haste, to throw ourselves in His bosom, to hide in Him from the enemy who chases us.

Our gospel is the signs that direct us to the unique City of refuge "Jesus Christ." And having ourselves become the message of Christ, read by all men, it is fitting for us, as an open gospel, for all to read in us the word '*miklot*,' and to find in our depths a road that leads to the Savior. It is the case of the living Church, to be a sign bearing the same word; to lead every soul along the road of the truth, to bring him over to the divine refuge; to enjoy the freedom of the glory of the children of God; the peace of God that surpasses every mind; and the incessant joy of heaven. The Church is the 'minaret' or the tower that bears the splendor of Christ that shines on souls, calling on everyone to flee to the refuge, and to the hope, provided by the gospel.

It is fitting for the believers to strive with the spirit of truth, because, as members in the Church of Christ, they realize that their life is nothing but hiding in Jesus Christ, their refuge.

The right to resort to the altar:

In the days of Emperor Constantine, a church system appeared that was similar to the cities of refuge; that if the accused resorts to the altar and holds its horns; he would not be killed before he gets a just trial. In the days of **St. John Chrysostom**, a man called Eutropius opposed that system, and challenged the church. And when he was accused of treason against the emperor and of plotting to have him killed, he resorted to the altar. The police and the people expected that **St. John Chrysostom** would drive him out of the church, and to deliver him to death. But **St. John Chrysostom** proclaiming his love toward his adversaries gave two speeches before the congregation, on the concept of the church and her message, even toward her

adversaries, and proclaimed that the beauty of the altar is to love its enemies[1].

That tradition was developed in Europe that allowed some to protect the accused who resort to the altar, the church, or any sacred place, for the duration of a month, and sometimes for three days, until they are given a chance for a fair trial. That does not mean protection of the criminals and the murderers; but giving an ample chance for a fair trial. It was likewise an opportunity for the repentance of the sinners and their return to God. And it also gave the bishops to intercede on behalf of some of those.

"But if anyone hates his neighbor, lies in wait for him, rises against him and strikes him mortally, so that he dies, and he flees to one of these cities, then the elders of his city shall send and bring him from there. And deliver him over to the hand of the avenger of blood that he might die. Your eye shall not pity him, but you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with you" (Deut. 19:11-13).

The Law was keen on protecting those with pure heart and intention, who unintentionally cause the death of others; and set for them cities of refuge. But at the same time, it refused the protection of those with evil hearts, who harbored hatred toward their brethren, and killed them. The cities of refuge were not meant for them; and if they flee to one of them, they would be taken away and killed.

This is a bitter portrait of some of the wicked persons who hide their hateful wolf-like hearts under a garment of religion. This garment should be torn off, to expose such a person, and to let him have the fruit of his wickedness, as long as he did not repent.

There is no city of refuge for the hateful hearts. Our Christ, with His great love, opens the doors of His heart before those who desire to live by love. As to those who harbor hatred, they have no place in Him. Our Christ is a City of refuge for those who wash themselves up in His blood. Through the divine mercy, melded with justice, the believer settles down in Christ, and become glorified together with Him forever. He embraces the repenting sinners, who confess their sins, and those who are justified by faith.

2. REMOVING THE LANDMARKS

The book of Deuteronomy cared for the land to be inherited by the people of God. After confirming "***You shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with you***" (13), goes on to say:

"You shall not remove your neighbor's landmark, which the men of old have set, in your inheritance which you will inherit in the land that the lord your God is giving you to possess" (Deut. 19:14).

It is as though removing the landmarks to confiscate a part of the portion of others is not less serious than shedding innocent blood. For the Promised Land was a symbol of the promised heavenly life. It is as though shedding innocent blood is not less than causing someone to lose his eternal portion, or the salvation of his soul through offense.

The issue of the land gained by every tribe as a permanent inheritance, represents to it a matter of life or death. Whoever removes the landmarks of someone, to confiscate a part of his land, would be like confiscating the blessing of the Lord, which is to him his whole life; or like confiscating his inheritance in the divine covenant.

By plot, every tribe and every family, have got its portion in the land. God's

[1] *Two Letters on Eutropius.*

will is, for every man to realize the riches of God's grace on him, without coveting what is not his; he has no right to confiscate what belongs to others.

By this God gives us an important lesson; that every man should respect his limits and possessions; and respect as well, the limits and possessions of others. Removing landmarks constitutes dishonesty, deceit, greed, and causing others harm. This is what is fitting to raise our children on, in their dealing with others, even their parents and the rest of the family. Together with generosity in giving a child, he should be trained on realizing the limits of his possessions, and on satisfaction with what he is given.

3. FALSE TESTIMONY

"One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established. If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, then both men in the controversy shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days.

And the judges shall make diligent inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother, so you shall put away the evil person from among you. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you.

Your eye shall not pity, but life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, and foot for foot" (Deut. 19:15-21).

Because there is a probability of controversy, whether a killing is intentionally or unintentionally committed; and whether there is a past animosity between the killer and the victim; or a controversy on the limits of territories of tribes and families; there would be need for hearing testimonies. That is why the Law is dealing with the issue of false testimony. The Law rejects setting a testimony on a single witness (Numbers 35:30; Deut. 17:6); but it should be set on the testimony of at least two witnesses (15-19). A false testimony is counted as treason against the covenant with God Himself, who hates oppression and deceit (19-21).

- Although iniquities are secretly committed; yet it would be enough to hear the testimony of two witnesses, as a proof of diligent inquiry[1].
- A sign over the cross of the Savior was written in three tongues: in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, saying "The King of Jews" (John 19:19), in accordance with the principle that, on the mouth of two or three witnesses, a word is established[2].

St. Augustine

The Mosaic Law came to seek: " *life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, foot for foot"* (21). By that it raised man up, at the beginning of his spiritual life, from the spirit of revenge, by more harm than is done to him; as it is his tendency by nature to pay back evil with greater evil. By that the Law lifted man up, to prepare him gradually for love, to practice, by the divine grace, loving the enemy, and confronting evil by goodness. It brings man up to love and forgiveness by gradually training him on controlling himself.

The Law is firm and just. Who can be justified before it?! Thanks to God, who moved us up, by the richness of His love, from under the Law to the era of grace; to let us stand before the chair of mercy; to be covered by the precious blood of our Christ; to be justified before God. Our Christ has paid the price; realized the

[1] *In 1 Tim. Hom. 15.*
[2] *St. Augustine: Ps. 56.*

requirement of the Law; and presented to us the consummation of freedom, for the new life, blameless before God.

Whoever gives a false testimony would be tried before a superior tribunal, before the priests and judges who stand before the Lord. As the judges used to sit for judgment at the gates of the city, so also the priests and judges sit before the gates of the temple to judge according to the will of God (Deut. 17:12).

If indeed the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, it shall be done to him, as he thought to have done to his brother. Some may think this as cruel; as a false witness may face the death penalty; yet, whoever digs a pit for his brother, would fall into it. By that, God presents a practical lesson, by putting the spirit of fear in them.

St. Augustine[1] sees that this expression hints to the mystery of the Holy Trinity. In the episode of Susanna, there were two elderly witnesses with false testimony (Daniel 13:36-62). And in the trial of the Lord Christ, although the whole multitude testified against Him, yet their testimony was false and vain (Luke 23:1). What does it mean that a matter may be established by two or three witnesses, but the true testimony of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (John 8:18).

[1] *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tract. 36:10.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 19)

YOU ARE MY REFUGE AND SUPPORT

❖ Sin has embittered my life and made me lose my peace.
Who will protect me from perdition but You?!
You are the City of refuge that can accommodate all the sinners.
You are the Way to the city of refuge,
Who brings me over to the perfect peace.
You are the sign that refers to security.
You dwell deep inside me, deeper than my soul.
You are nearer to me than my own soul.
So why should I seek another refuge?!

❖ My God, You are the Refuge of my soul.
Grant me to fly and enter into Your bosom.
Let me carry You inside me.
Let me bring others over to You.
With Your fiery Spirit, engrave on my heart the name "To the Refuge;"
So as to become a living sign that leads others to You.

❖ I often overrode my territory.
Confiscated the rights of my brethren.
Give me back Your righteousness,
To respect the right of even a little kid.
And to respect the feelings of every weak and needy.
Teach me and guide me, not to override the territory You have given me.

❖ Who would not need a witness to confirm the truth of his words?!
Your Law seeks two or three witnesses, to guarantee the fairness of justice.
The whole world resort to the testimony of witnesses.
Who will testify to me?!
Who knows my hidden thoughts?!
Only You, O my Savior, Your heavenly Father, and Your Holy Spirit, are the true witnesses.
Who testify to the richness of Your grace, working in me.
Let me say together with Simon Peter:
Lord, You know how I love You!
You are a true Witness to what floods in my depths.

CHAPTER 20

THE MILITARY LAW

As the people were on their way to enjoy the Promised Land according to the promise of God to their fathers, Israel represented then a military camp more than a kingdom. There is no doubt that the question that preoccupied the minds of everyone: priests and people, men and women, and probably also children, has been: 'What is our role in the coming battles? That is why they were in need of God's counsel to set for them a special system of behavior, concerning their wars against the nations whose land they occupy, and also the neighboring nations. It is to be noticed that the essence of this system of behavior was the realization of the presence of God in their midst, to consummate His plan with them, to set a holy nation free of all the abominations that were practiced by the pagan nations, until the coming of the Savior of the whole world.

The Law here is suitable for the stage of conquering the land, to remind them "*the battle is the Lord's"* (1 Samuel 17; 47).

Dr. Jameson clarifies that there is no comparison between what was presented here by the Law, and the ways and habits concerning wars, as were practiced by the nations at that time[1].

1. Going out to battle **1–9.**
2. Besieging the cities outside Canaan **1–15.**
3. The cities to be destroyed **16–18.**
4. Dealing with the trees of the cities **19 –20.**

1. GOING OUT TO BATTLE

This Law concerning battles was put until the people possess the land of the pagan nations. But God's intention, even in the Old Testament, has been that He prefers peace rather than war. And as the Psalmist says, praising the exalted works of God: "*Come, behold the works of the Lord... who makes wars cease to the end of the earth. He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two. He burns the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God"* (Psalm 46:9-10). And in a vision to the prophet Isaiah about the work of the Messiah, it came: "*It shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains… Many people shall come… they shall beat their swords into plowshares… nations shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore"* (Isaiah 2:2-4). And for the birth of the Lord Christ, it is said: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men"* (Luke 2:14).

The military Law starts by a confirmation by God Himself, that He is the Leader of the army of His people, and that He is the Grantor of victory (1-4). That is why He relieves His ministers of practicing military actions; not despising them, but to free them to worship God who grants the conquest; as without them, neither the people nor the soldiers would be sanctified; and consequently, there would be no victory (5-9).

Here he speaks about the present war, to let the people inherit the land of Canaan. It should not be applied to the political wars, but it could be symbolically applied to the spiritual wars and the strife for the sake of the heavenly Canaan, when the believers occupy the position of Satan, out of which he fell from among the heavenly hosts.

[1] *Pulpit Commentary, Deuteronomy, p. 331.*

Although the enemy would be superior to the people of God concerning his number and military equipments, yet this should not cause the believers to tremble or be terrified.

"When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses, chariots, and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them, for the Lord your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt" (Deut. 20:1).

The people of Israel certainly, until the departure of the prophet Moses, and probably till the time of King Solomon, had no horses or chariots. That is why Moses spoke generally about what would be when they will have them. However, that would not necessarily mean that the people would literally have less horses and chariots, but military equipments in the general sense.

The first principle in spiritual strife is 'not to be fearful.' "***What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faint like his heart***" (8). The voice of the fearful would make the hearts of the others faint, and destroy then psychologically. Whereas, the voice of the Lord of hosts would melt the solid mountains, destroys the forces of evil, and grants victory to His believers.

The source of courage is trusting God the Leader of the spiritual battle: "***For the Lord your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you***" (4). Whereas the source of fear is that the heart is bound to the temporal things. That is why he asks him who built a new house and has not dedicated it; or him who has planted a vineyard and has not yet eaten of it; or him who is betrothed to a woman and has not yet married her, to return to his house. All this is a symbolic portrait of the weak souls that are attached to the world, and are not capable of spiritual giving; they are an offense to others.

The commandment "***Do not be fearful***" came several times in the Holy Bible; because fear is a sign of lack of faith and trust in God's fatherhood, wisdom, and ability to save. It is actually a hidden sin of blasphemy. That is why he repeats:

"Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them" (Deut. 20:3).

As to the source of courage and not being fearful, it lies in the following:

(1) The divine presence in the midst of His people, "***For the Lord your God is with you;" "For the Lord your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you***" (4). And as it came in the prophet Isaiah: "*Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God, I will strengthen you. Yes I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand… For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you'"* (Isaiah 41:10, 13).

(2) Our experiences and those of our fathers with God our Savior, who says: "***who brought you up from the land of Egypt***" (1). It came in the book of Exodus: "*Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the Lord looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians. And He took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty; and the Egyptians said, 'Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians'"* (Exodus 14:24, 25). It is also said: "*The Lord is a man of war. The Lord is His name. Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea"* (Exodus 15:3, 4). And Miriam sang, saying: "*Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea"* (Exodus 15:21).

(3) Everyone participates in this war according to his talents and abilities; As

the people are committed to fight, the priest has his own role, he shall approach and speaks to the people confirming the presence of the Lord, and presenting to them the Lord's commandment not to fear. And the officers, in their turn, separate the fainthearted for fear that they would badly influence their brethren. It was the custom of the nations to carry with them the statues of their gods, accompanied by the priests as representatives of the gods, who were credited for every conquest realized. That is why the Lord God had to proclaim His presence among His people during the battle; and the priests had to support them as representative of the true God.

"So it shall be, when you are on the verge of battle, that the priest shall approach and speak to the people. And he shall say to them, 'Hear, O Israel: Today you are on the verge of battle with your enemies; do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them" (Deut. 20:2,3).

Here, he does not speak about the high priest, or the priests as a whole, but about the priest who accompanies the troops in battle. In the battle against the Moabites in the days of the prophet Moses, we read: "*Moses sent them to the war, one thousand from each tribe, he sent them to the war with Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, with the holy articles and the signal trumpets in his hand"* (Numbers 31:6). Also see 1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Chronicles 13:12. The main task of the priest was to encourage the men, and to confirm to them that the Lord their leader will support them and grant them victory.

It is fitting for us not to be fearful in our spiritual war; and as **St. John Cassian** says:

[Let us in everything learn to feel our natural weakness. Yet, at the same time, let us realize His help; and say together with the saints: "*You pushed me violently, that I might fall, But the Lord helped me. The Lord is my strength; And He has become my salvation"* (Psalm 118:13, 14). "*Unless the Lord has been my help, my soul would soon have settled in silence. If I say, 'My foot slips, Your mercy, O Lord, will help me up"* (Psalm 94:17, 18).

Being sure that our hearts are strengthened in the fear of God and in patience, to say, "*The Lord was my support. He brought me out into a broad place"* (Psalm 18:18, 19).

Knowing that knowledge grows by progress in work, we say: "*Because, O Lord, You light my lamp; My God, light my darkness; as in you I will be saved from temptation; and in You I take my refuge*." Then, we ourselves, would feel that we acquire courage and patience, and walk along the way of virtue, directly, with great ease, and without effort; to say: "*It is God who gird me with power, and make my ways perfect; who makes my feet like those of a deer, makes me sit in the highest, and teach my hands war*."

We would also have the spirit of discernment; to be strengthened by Him by whom we can overcome our enemies; and dare to cry out to God: "*I have pursued my enemies and overtaken them. Neither did I turn back again till they were destroyed. I have wounded them, so that they were not able to rise; they have fallen under my feet"* (Psalm 18:37, 38).

Again, taking into consideration our own weakness; and realizing the fact that, while we stay burdened with our bodily weakness, and cannot without His help overcome those enemies (our sins), we say: "*I will not trust my bow, nor shall my sword save me. But You have saved us from our enemies; and have put to shame those who hated us"* (Psalm 44:6-8). And moreover, "*You have armed me with strength for the battle; You have subdued under me those who rose up against me. You have also given me the necks of my enemies, so that I destroyed those who hated me"* (Psalm

18:39-40).

As we contemplate on the fact that we, by our own weapons, cannot conquer, we say: *"Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for my help. Also draw out the spear, and stop those who pursue me. Say to my soul: 'I am your salvation'"* (Psalm 35:2, 3). *"He teaches my hand to make war, so that my arm can bend a bow of bronze. You have also given me the shield of Your salvation; Your right hand has held me up"* (Psalm 18:34, 35).

"Our fathers have told us… They did not gain possession of the land by their own sword. Nor did their own arm save them; but it was your right hand. Your arm, and the light of Your countenance, Because You favored them" (Psalm 44:1, 3).

Finally, with a mind full of zeal, contemplating on all His blessings with thanksgiving, we cry out to Him, for the sake of these things, with deep feelings of the heart; because we fought, took from Him the light of knowledge, self-control, and discernment; because He provided us with His own weapons; girded us with virtue; made our enemies flee before us; gave us the strength to destroy them, and to make them like ashes before the wind; we cry out to Him, saying: *"I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer. My God, my strength, in whom I trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies"* (Psalm 18:1-3)[1].]

As we enter into an incessant series of battles, followed by continuous conquests, and a renewed enjoyment of the power of God, conquering by and in us; we say together with the apostle: *"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"* (2 Corinthians 10:4, 5); and with the Psalmist: *"A thousand will fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you"* (Psalm 91:7)[2].

St. Gregory of Nyssa believes that St. Paul, like the prophet David in his fight against his enemy, so he used to run quickly before him. [Paul was an active and swift-moving fighter, just like David, who used to make his steps wider when chased by his enemy; and like the groom in the book of the songs, who, like a gazelle or a young stag *comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills"* (Songs 2:8, 9)[3].]

❖ God taught me how to be clever in fighting against the adversaries (the demons), who intend to create a wall between the kingdom of heaven and me [4].

St. Augustine

❖ When you pray against your sufferings (your evil lusts), and the demons that attack you, remember that man saying: *"I have pursued my enemies and overtaken them, neither did I turn back again till they are destroyed. I have wounded them, so that they were not able to rise; they have fallen under my feet"* (Psalm 18:37, 38). Say this at the right moment, as you arm yourself against your adversary, with humility[5].

St. Evagrius of Pontus

Sending away the fearful and faint-hearted:

[1] *St. John Cassian: Institutions, 12:17.*
[2] *Cf. The author: Commentary on Psalms, Ps. 18 (in Arabic).*
[3] *The Beatitudes, Sermon 2.*
[4] *On Ps 17 (18).*
[5] *Chapters on Prayer, 135.*

What preoccupies God's mind, is not the size of the army, but the faith of its members. Conquest is not by number nor by strength, but by the Lord of hosts Himself. That is why He sent away all the categories that might corrupt the sanctity of the army, through harboring the spirit of fear and failure. One can be better than a thousand who are filled by fear and cowardice.

"Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying, 'What man is there who built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he dies in the battle and another man dedicate it.

And what man is there who has planted a vineyard and has not yet eaten of it? Let him also go and return to his house, lest he dies in the battle and another man eats of it.

And what man is there who is betrothed to a woman and has not yet married her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man marries her.'

Then the officers shall speak further to the people, and say, 'What man is there who is fearful and faint-hearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faints like his heart.'

And so it shall be, when the officers have finished speaking to the people, that they shall make captains of the armies to lead the people" (Deut. 20:5-9).

The Law sought the exemption of four categories from taking part in the battle; for fear that they would be overcome by fear, and be disturbed during the fight. The fourth of those categories are the fearful and fainthearted; who should be completely separated, because they are like a plague that spreads and destroys others. That is what Gideon has done, when he proclaimed by God's command in the hearing of the people, saying: "*Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead;' and twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained"* (Judges 7:3)

He requested from the following categories to depart from the camp, lest they corrupt the psyche of the army:

a. "***Whoever built or purchased a new house and did not yet dedicate it***" (5); namely, did not celebrate with his friends who come to congratulate him on the occasion. Let him return to his house, lest he would be preoccupied with it during the battle. The true warrior has no house to be preoccupied with it; but lives like a stranger on earth, until he gets to settle down in the bosom of God, in his heavenly house.

By him who built a new house and did not yet dedicate it, he probably meant him who is preoccupied with carnal comfort and temporal blessings; who did not turn his house into a holy church; did not dedicate it, and did not celebrate the dwelling of God in it. Such a man cannot strife spiritually.

It is clear from the title of Psalm 30, '*A song at the dedication of the house of David,*' that it was the custom in Israel to dedicate the new house to the Lord by prayers, praise, and thanksgiving, to confirm delivering the new house to God to dwell among the family and bless them. The believer could never dwell in a house and feel secure in it, unless he was sure of God's care and protection of it. We should not forget that in many of the old nations, the family used to dedicate a section of the house for worship. For example, those who lived in Bonny (in Africa) used almost to divide the house into three sections: one as a living quarter for the owner and his family; the second as a place of hospitality to strangers; and the third was dedicated to '*Juju,*' the (serpent-god), they used to worship. Even those barbarians used to believe that, in every house, their god should have a temple.

Several Copts still have a beautiful tradition; which is that no one should dwell in a new house before he calls the priest to raise a prayer of '*Blessing of the house,'* in which he and the members of the family ask God to dwell among the family, bless the place, and consummate the mission of those who are to live in it. Yet, there are unfortunately others who invite their relatives, friends, and neighbors to hold what they call 'a house warming' party to celebrate their new house; forgetting all about praying and thanksgiving to God.

Many Christians of the East, affiliated to the apostolic churches, still dedicate a separate room, or at least a corner of a room, that they adorn with icons, to let everyone feel that the whole house is dedicated to the Lord.

b. "***Whoever planted a vineyard and has not yet eaten of it***" (6). The Hebrew word here means a field or a garden of fruit trees or olive trees, not necessarily a vineyard. As he is longing to enjoy eating of its fruits, of which he is banned by the Law for the duration of the first three years (Leviticus 19:23). Such man, who puts his heart in his stomach, longing to enjoy eating and drinking, even of the labor of his own hands, is not fit to partake of the battle of the Lord Christ. It is fitting for a soldier of Christ not to have vineyards, pressers, or tables to satisfy his lusts; but to eat of what he finds at his feet, in order to live and strive. It is fitting for him not to be preoccupied with anything, except to prepare himself to hear the voice of the trumpet that calls him to battle.

c. "***Whoever is betrothed to a woman and has not yet married her***" (7). Such man, whose mind is preoccupied with preparing a house for his bride, is not committed to participate in the battle. Such a man who represents someone who has not tasted the sweetness of the spiritual matrimonial union with his Savior God; and has not yet prepared a place for the heavenly matrimonial wedding where he would settle down, would not be able to strive in the spiritual battle. In the same book, it came: "*When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken*" (Deut. 24:5).

The Jewish authors have agreed that those exemptions were only allowed for wars that were made through the free will of Israel. Whereas for those wars to which God committed them, like that against Amalek and the Canaanites, all men without exception were committed to participate.

Having sent back the fearful and the fainthearted, the officers set captains of courage and certainty of God's work with them, to lead the people.

It is fitting for us here to discern between someone who, although feeling his weakness and inability, yet he trusts in God's possibilities with and by him; and someone who is feeble and fainthearted. God strongly works in the weak, but He does not support those who do not trust and lean upon Him.

This fear originates from a corruption of the conscience; hence it is said: "*The Lord of hosts, Him you shall hallow. Let Him be your fear*" (Isaiah 8:13). The danger of the fainthearted lies in that, when they occupy positions of leadership, they spread the spirit of failure to others; they would not do the work of God, and would not let the others do it. Their danger is far more bitter and cruel than that of the enemies, the adversaries to the truth, and to the Church of Christ. For the latter, it is said that God treats them with a rod of iron, whereas the fainthearted deny others the grace of God and His power.

The Lord Christ asks us to count the cost before getting into any battle, "*What king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty*

thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace" (Luke 14:31, 32). The prophet Elisha realized that those with him were greater than those against him. And the prophet David committed a great sin when he counted the cost the human way, disregarding the factor of faith; and made a census of his people (2 Samuel 24:2).

The goal of God's Law is to confirm that we are referred to God; what He loves we love; and what He does not stand of corruption, uncleanness, and darkness; would become to us the enemy. We have nothing in ourselves. Our battles are those of God against darkness. We are not a part of it; but we hide in God, to fight by and in us, proclaiming His exalted conquest.

2. BESIEGING THE CITIES OUTSIDE CANAAN

They should not go into a fight against a city afar, unless they proclaim to it an offer of peace.

"And it shall be that if they accept your offer of peace, and open to you, then all the people who are found in it shall be placed under tribute to you, and serve you.

Now if the city will not make peace with you, but would make war against you, than you shall besiege it. And when the Lord your God delivers it into your hands, you shall strike every male in it with the edge of the sword. But the women, the little ones, the livestock, and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall plunder for yourself, and you shall eat the enemies' plunder which the Lord your God gives you.

Thus you shall do to all the cities which are very far from you, which are not the cities of these nations" (Deut. 20:10-15).

The scholars differ in interpreting this statement. Some believe that it applies to the nations outside the Promised Land, and not to the seven nations within its boundaries; based on the assumption that leaving any of them among the people would be an offense to them, drawing them to idolatry and practicing abominations. Other scholars however, believe that it includes those seven nations as well. The conditions of peace would be:

a. Denial of idolatry, and entering into the worship of the living God.

b. Submission to the Jews.

c. Paying an annual tax.

If one of the cities outside Canaan refuses to abide to these conditions, all its males would be killed, but the women, the children, the livestock, and all the spoils, would be plundered; which symbolizes the inner wish of a spiritual man for peace, together with transferring all energies that were on account of evil to energies on account of the kingdom of God.

3. THE CITIES TO BE UTTERLY DESTROYED

"But of the cities of these people which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive. You shall utterly destroy: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the Lord your God has commanded you, lest they teach you to do according to their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the Lord your God" (Deut. 20:16-18).

As the nations whose land was given as an inheritance to the old people of God used to symbolize sin, their destruction referred to the demolition of all evil. Historically those extremely violent peoples used to offer the children as burnt offerings to their gods, and the women and girls to adultery on their account, beside

other horrible abominations. No mercy was allowed for those peoples whose corruption has destroyed their eternity forever and as protection for the people of Israel against any probability of diversion.

4. DEALING WITH THE TREES OF THOSE CITIES

The people of Israel were not allowed to cut down trees that give fruit to eat (20:19), being good creation of God. If such is the care of God for trees, how much would be His care for man?! Yet, in order to uproot every trace of idolatry, they were committed to destroy the fruitless green trees, under which the pagans used to worship their gods (Jeremiah 2:20). That is why the divine command of demolishing the idolaters was not as cruel as it may seem, having brought it upon themselves by their own evil and cruel hearts.

"When you besiege a city for a long time, while making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them; if you can eat of them, do not cut them to use in the siege, for the tree of the field is man's food. Only the trees which you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, to build siege works against the city that makes war with you, until it is subdued" (Deut. 20:19-20).

By that, God made it clear to the people, that war should not be for mere destruction; as soldiers in their zeal tend to cut down the fruitful trees to use their wood to build obstacles to protect themselves against the enemies; and in such case they are destroying the fields and trees which they would use later on for their own sustenance and life. The army should act with prudence and wisdom for their own edification.

The Jews understood this commandment in a broader sense, to apply as well to useful vessels, clothes, wells, and buildings, etc. As for us, it is fitting to follow the example of the Lord Christ who was keen on gathering the fragments of bread that were left after feeding the multitudes (Matthew 15:27).

If life in its essence is a battle or a series of battles during which the believer enjoy perpetual conquest, it is fitting for him in his strife to be prudent and not impulsive; he should discern between what is for edification and what is for destruction. Man may wrongly assume that he has the power and the free hand to cut down fruitful trees, disregarding the fact that refraining from doing that and protecting them even in the heat of a battle, would require a greater power; as to destroy is easier than to build.

I wish that in our spiritual strife, we would not offend or destroy the soul of anyone; as in this case we would be uprooting a fruitful tree instead of protecting it.

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 20)

ACCEPT ME AS A SOLDIER IN YOUR SALVATION ARMY

❖ Accept me a soldier in your salvation army.
I will never fear the devil or his hosts.
As long as You are the Leader, the Grantor of conquest
Even if the enemy is more numerous, mighty and deceptive;
Yet, He who is with us is stronger and mightier!
I will never retreat, and will never lose heart; as long as you dwell in me.
You are in me; and I am in you.
You walk before me, to fight for me.

❖ Let me join your salvation army.
My heart is not preoccupied with a new house, a vineyard, or a wife.
I am not preoccupied with any house but with Your church set in me.
It is both old and new; as you dwell in it, O the Old of days; and the Grantor of renewal.
You are my House; you are my joy;
You are the Groom of my soul!
I will never fear; because You are my life.

❖ How could I fear, when You dwell among us?!
The experience of our fathers proclaims your exalted conquest!
I shall give every talent and possibility that you have given me!
I shall uproot every fear from my heart.

❖ Grant me as far as possible to make peace with everyone;
Do not allow me to make a covenant with evil.
Let me be compassionate to every sinner.
Let me see him, as he comes with glory in the great day of the Lord.
As you is the Savior of sinners!
Yet, do not let me be compassionate to sin.
But to destroy its kingdom that tries to infiltrate in my depths.

❖ You commanded your people to be compassionate to trees.
Grant me a merciful heart to be compassionate to all your creation.
You have created for me the world, not to destroy it.
But to work in it, so that you will bless it with fruits.
Grant me to care for every newly planted tree.
To make Your paradise be filled with the fruitful trees of saints!
Let me be both a mighty warrior and a compassionate soldier.
Let me love the truth, and be compassionate to every weak.

CHAPTER 21

RIGHTS OF THE OUTCASTS

**SPECIAL STATUTES FOR
THE SLAIN WITH AN UNKNOWN HAND;
THE CAPTIVE WOMEN; THE FIRSTBORN; THE REBELLIOUS SON;
AND THE ONE HUNG ON A TREE**

In the last chapter, he spoke of the believer as a true soldier who enters into the battle under the leadership of God Himself; fights evil with his whole might and firmness. Bearing the Spirit of God, the Grantor of love, he becomes compassionate even to trees; and does not destroy them during the battle. Now, He sets forth to the circle of mercy; to present us, through His Law, with living examples of the true mercy that might not be separated from justice, so as not to turn into a kind of licentiousness. The Legislator intends to confirm two important facts in this chapter; namely, honoring the human life; and caring for the rights of man; especially the one, helpless to enjoy his rights.

Here he speaks of the outcasts, the despised, and the oppressed, so that we may take a fitting faith position. He speaks of the blood of the unknown victim of murder; of the captive woman, who is taken as a wife, then sent away by her husband; of the firstborn son from an unloved wife; of the father of a rebellious son; and of the corpse of the one condemned and hung on a tree. These are all various examples of outcast and oppressed categories.

1. The slain with an unknown hand1–9.
2. The captive woman taken as a wife 10–14.
3. The right of the firstborn 15–17.
4. The rebellious son 18–21.
5. The man hanged on a tree 22–23.

1. THE SLAIN WITH AN UNKNOWN HAND

"If a man is found slain, lying in a field in the land of the Lord your God is giving you to possess, and it is not known who killed him, your elders and judges shall go out and measure the distance from the body to the neighboring towns" (Deut. 21:1, 2)

No one can appreciate the significance of this statute, concerning the blood shed by an unknown hand, more than a scholar who studies the customs of the nations in that time; when the blood of man had no real value. Here, however, it is counted as a crime on earth, and a sin in the sight of heaven, not to be forgiven unless the congregation seriously searches for the killer. Every man's life is the object of divine care.

He previously introduced the statute of the killer by intention (19:11); and how he should be delivered into the hand of the blood-avenger to die; in order to purge from Israel the guilt of shedding innocent blood. In the present chapter, He deals with the situation in case the killer is unknown. If someone is found killed, it should not be taken lightly, but a serious search for the one responsible for the killing should be conducted, in order that the earth does not get defiled through the shedding of innocent blood. And as it came in the book of Isaiah: *"See, the Lord is coming out of His dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will disclose the blood shed upon her; she will conceal her slain no longer"* (Isaiah 26:21). The whole congregation around the location where the murder took place is considered guilty before God, unless it does every possible effort to discover the murderer and condemn him. For this purpose the elders and judges of the neighboring towns would

come together to discuss the case[1].

God inclined His ear to hear the voice of Abel's blood crying out to Him from the ground (Genesis 4:10). He does not accept any human excuses, saying, *"I don't know; Am I my brother's keeper?"* (Genesis 4:9).

The Law came to confirm the following:

a. The importance of a serious search for the killer, hearing the witnesses, and investigating the circumstances around the crime; in order to expose the one responsible for it. Yet, in case that proves to be difficult, no one should be hastily and wrongly accused.

b. The elders should follow the following ritual:

"The elders of the town nearest the body shall take a heifer that has never been worked and has never worn a yoke, and lead her down to a valley that has not been plowed or planted, and where there is a flowing stream. There in the valley they are to break the heifer's neck" (Deut. 21:3- 4)

In the book of Exodus (13:13) it came: *"Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck."* This ritual is not a sacrifice offered to God, but it is a symbolic act in which the elders of the town close to where the murder took place proclaim that if the killer ever falls in their hands, they will not hesitate to break his neck. Choosing a valley that has not been plowed or planted, refers to that, because of this crime, the land shall become barren and unfit for plantation. Some Jews believe that, unless the murderer is discovered and put to death, that land in which the heifer's neck was broken would be left barren and not planted.

"The priests, the sons of Levi, shall step forward, for the Lord your God has chosen them to minister and to pronounce blessings in the name of the Lord and to decide all cases of dispute and assault" (Deut. 21:5)

The shedding of a man's blood, thus brings confusion to everyone: the rulers, (elders), the judges, and the priests; all will cooperate together to look for the killer.

"*The priests, the sons of Levi,"* being the ministers of God, the King of Israel, committed to consummate faithfully His divine Law, shall step forward. Here, the priests who dwell in the town of Levites, closest to the place where the body of the victim was found, will be present. Their presence would add to the holiness to the situation, would reveal its seriousness, and would proclaim the presence of God to decide the case, and would show that God Himself cares for it.

c. ***"Then all the elders of the town nearest the body shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley, and they shall declare: 'Our hands did not shed this blood, nor our eyes see it done. Accept this atonement for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, O Lord, and do not hold your people guilty of the blood of an innocent man..' And the bloodshed will be atoned for. So will purge from yourselves the guilt of shedding innocent blood, since you have done the right in the eyes of the Lord" (Deut. 21:6-9)***

By washing their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken, they proclaim that they are innocent of the blood shed; and that the whole town is committed to proclaim the truth, and expose the killer; as toughly they say together with the Psalmist: *"I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, O Lord"* (Psalm 26:6). "*Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence"* (psalm 73:13). They declare that they, not only have not shed that innocent blood, but they also are not able to discover the killer to deliver him to the

[1] *Josephus: Antiq. 4:8:16.*

blood avenger.

On the other hand, when Pilate washed his hands, saying: "*I am innocent of this man's blood"* (Matthew 27:24); his words did not relieve him of the responsibility; he will not be able to stand before God and say: "*Our hands did not shed this blood nor our eyes see it done*." Washing his hands would not make him innocent of the blood of the Lord Christ.

d. The elders (and the priests) pray to God to forgive His people; and would not count them responsible for a crime, committed by someone in secret. Although everyone should be only responsible for his own sin, and not for the sins of others; yet the congregation as a whole is committed to act and to pray for the sake of the collective holy life.

When the Corinthians grieved for the sake of one man who fell in the sin of adultery, the apostle Paul said to them: "*See what this godly sorrow has produced in you; what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter"* (2 Corinthians 7:11).

Who is that victim but humanity destroyed by sin? And what would remove its iniquity but the sacrifice of the righteous Lord Christ?

We should not marvel at the pressure that the Law puts upon the leaders of the towns close to the location of the crime. The modern science of criminal Psychology has revealed that the one, who committed the crime, would most probably tend to come back to the crime scene to look around; and it happens that secretly watching that scene would often help catching the criminal.

As the crimes of murder mostly happen in secret; being the work of the devil, the ruler of the kingdom of darkness; according to the Law, the search for the criminal should be conducted publicly and in the light; so that everything would be rightly done.

2. THE CAPTIVE WOMAN TAKEN AS A WIFE

To deal with the issue of marriage to captive women, the Law sets the rights of a wife in case of polygamy. Although not acceptable, yet we can say that for the sake of the hardness of their hearts, the Mosaic Law, allowed a soldier to marry the woman whom he takes captive at war, if he so desired, to keep him from falling into adultery with her, which could lead to destruction among Israel, and for God's wrath to fall upon the whole army. Yet, this allowance was within certain conditions and limitations.

It is obvious that, as the man here is most probably a married man, he would be allowed to have a second wife, to keep his heart from going after a beautiful captive woman to covet her. In the New Testament, however, he, who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery; the Law of the Lord Christ commands us not to look with lust at a woman; to keep the heart from going after the sinful look.

a. Whatever is the desire of the soldier, and however beautiful the captive woman is, he should not hasten to get attached to her, before taking her first as wife (11).

"When you go to war against your enemies and the Lord your God delivers them into your hands and you take captives. If you notice among the captives a beautiful woman and are attached to her, you may take her as your wife" (Deut. 21:10-11)

b. As the woman is a captive, he has the right to marry her without seeking the

consent of her parents, yet he is committed not to go to her before a full month.

"Bring her into your home and have her shave her head, trim her nails, and put aside the clothing she was wearing when she was captured. After she has lived in your house and mourned her father and mother for a full month, then you may go to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife" (Deut. 21:12, 13)

Shaving the head and trimming the nails were signs of mourning at that time in the countries of the East. This was sought so that beauty of the body should not be a motive of hastening to marry her. On another aspect, he should not satisfy his carnal lust on the expense of her personal feelings; he should leave her alone for a full month to mourn her parents whom she left behind. Some believe that having her head shaved is a sign of her denial of her idolatry and of her entering into faith in the living God. Yet, beside the change in her outer appearance, she has to demonstrate another inner change by the true faith. That is why Jews believe that a captive woman, who refuses faith, would not be taken as a wife.

She does mourn her practicing idolatry; as much as her attachment to her parents and getting their consent and blessing of her marriage; beside her deprivation of the rest of her family.

The duration of her mourning is a full month. The regular duration of mourning by the Jews has been 40 days (Genesis 50:3). As the figure 40 refers to the days of our sojourn in this world, the prophets Moses, Elijah, and the Lord Christ fasted 40 days, as a sign of the (ascetic) life all along our life. Although not disregarding her human feelings, yet letting the captive woman mourn for a duration less than 40 days, is on account that her husband will make up for her loss, and will care for her happiness. She can mourn, yet with hope that her new life would make up for what she has lost, and probably for more than that. She would be treated, not as a captive woman, but as a wife and as one of the family; and she would enter into membership of the holy people of God.

c. *"And if you are not pleased with her, let her go wherever she wishes. You must not sell her or treat her as a slave, since you have dishonored her"* (Deut. 21:14)

He took her as his wife; so in case he is not pleased with her, he should not deal with her as a piece of furniture, sell her as a slave, or turn her as a captive to another; but, since he has dishonored her, he should let her go, completely free, even to go back to her own country,

Some Church Fathers, like **Origen** and **St. Jerome**, believe that this beautiful captive woman is the temporal philosophy and human wisdom. Although it is fitting for the believer to use either of them, yet on condition of taking away from them every wrong and dead thought they may bear; as symbolized by having the head shaved and the nails trimmed.

- ❖ In the book of Deuteronomy we read God's command that the captive woman should have her head shaved, her eyebrows removed, and her nails trimmed, before taking her as a wife.

There is no wonder! When I admire the beauty of the temporal wisdom and the grace of its eloquence, and long to make this captive of mine, a wife of the true Israel, **I tend to shave off and to cut down everything dead in it**; whether it is idolatry, or lust; to take her pure, and to beget from her ministers to the Lord of hosts!

The prophet Isaiah speaks of a sharp razor to shave by it the head and the hair of legs of sinners (Isaiah 7:20). And the prophet Ezekiel shaves his head as a symbol of Jerusalem who became a harlot, as a sign of commitment to take away from her

everything with no sense or life[1].

St. Jerome

Although war, no doubt, cause many confusions and disturbances, during and after battles, yet this should not give the soldier an excuse not to deal properly with a captive girl. The outside confusion should not touch his heart, mind, or behavior; everything he does, should be with prudence and wisdom. War should not corrupt his principles or his values.

There is no comparison between what came here of the rights of a captive woman, taken as a wife; and how the Gentile nations used to deal with captive women. The Jewish Law presented the most a man, who acquired a captive woman, could bear, to honor her dignity. Taking her as a wife, he had to realize that she is not a toy to play with, according to his body lusts; but should honor her as though a daughter of Israel, who shares with him his worship of the living God, and his submission of the divine Law. And in case he does not give her these rights, he should let her go to enjoy the most valuable human gift; namely, "*freedom from servitude*."

The Law provided a living foundation, for man to receive later on, the Christian thought, that in Jesus Christ, there is no man or woman, but all are members of equal honor in the one body of Christ.

The Law here presents a living portrait of the power of love. As even in war, when anger and lust for blood shedding prevail on many; when a girl falls captive into the hand of a soldier; in case he loves her, love would liberate her! Love should remove the spirit of servitude, and replace with that of freedom.

Now, if the love of a soldier - an adversary and an enemy - could take away from that captive woman the spirit of servitude, and bring her on, into "*the house of Israel*" to practice life with complete freedom; what would the divine love do to the soul, submitted to the servitude of sin? God's love has liberated us from the servitude of the devil, and brought us into the "*the household of God*."

3. THE RIGHT OF THE FIRSTBORN

After speaking of the rights of the captive woman, loved by the believer, He refers to the rights of the firstborn from a wife hated by her man. By the spirit of justice man should not treat his oldest son according to his feelings toward his mother; but he is committed to honor his right as a firstborn.

"If a man has two wives, and he loves one and not the other, and both bear him sons, but the firstborn is the son of the wife he does not love, when he wills his property to his sons, he must not give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the wife he loves in preference to his natural firstborn, the son of the wife he does not love. He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has. That son is the first sign of his father's strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him" (Deut. 21:15-17)

a. This statute reveals the drawbacks of polygamy; and how it causes man troubles in his relationships with his children.

b. This statute reveals God's amazing care. As God often grants man his firstborn from the woman he does not love, to make him love her for the sake of his firstborn. That is what we see in the story of Jacob who used to love Rachel more than Leah (Genesis 29:31). So God opened up Leah's womb and granted her children, and made her the mother of Jacob's firstborn.

c. It is fitting for the parents not to be partial in dealing with their children. Jacob has indeed deprived his son Reuben his right as a firstborn, but that was not

[1] *St. Jerome: Letter 70:2.*

because he did not love his mother, but because that son insulted his firstborn status by his disgraceful behavior. If the parents are not able to practice complete love toward each other; which has its drastic effect, even on their children, yet they are at least committed not to deal unjustly with their children, as far as their inheritance after their departure from this world is concerned. They should take this in consideration when they write their will.

d. The father has no right to count the son of his beloved wife, as a firstborn, disregarding his lawful firstborn from the one he does not love. The translation came as "*he cannot*;" namely, that the divine statute does not allow him to execute his faulty feelings. It is to be noticed that some of the Gentile nations used to give the firstborn the right to take the whole inheritance, to act like a father to his siblings, for all to live under his shadow in a 'mass family.'

e. The spiritual man loves others as though his firstborns, wishing to give them a double portion in his farewell will. That is what the prophet Elisha desired when he asked his master, the prophet Elijah to let him inherit a double portion of his spirit (2 Kings 2:9).

If Israel has become like an unloved wife because of her insistence on her sins; so that God gave her the certificate of her divorce through the prophets; however the Lord Christ came as a Son of that nation, "*He came to that which was His own, but his own did not receive Him"* (John 1:11). He is the Firstborn, the true Heir; and whoever connects to Him will inherit together with Him, even if his family or his parents are wicked. In a similar way, we should not fear our reference to a father or mother who are not holy; as we are in the sight of the heavenly Father, His firstborn children, who have the right for a double portion of inheritance.

The believer should be proud of his firstborn status, having become a member in the Church of the firstborns; concerning this **St. Clement of Alexandria** says:

❖ This is the Church of the firstborn (Hebrew 12:23), that embraces many good children; these are the firstborns whose names are written in heaven, who celebrate an exalted feast together with the ten thousands of angels. We are likewise firstborn children who are raised by God. We are the true friends of the Firstborn Son, who are granted the knowledge of God, first and before anything else[1].

St. Clement of Alexandria

4. THE REBELLIOUS SON

"If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him. His father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders, 'This so of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard. Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid" (Deut. 21:18-20)

The statute concerning the trial of the rebellious son came only after presenting much about the responsibility of the parents to practice the true love, to behave as a holy family, to present their life as a living role model to their children, together with creating a suitable atmosphere for raising as is fitting for prophets. The statute concentrated on the responsibility of the parents before condemning the children.

This statute came to confirm an important fact, that in every society and in every generation, there are both good and evil children. As if all are good, there would

[1] *Paedagogus 1:5.*

be no need for this statute, and if all were evil, there would likewise be no benefit of it.

We have already talked about the punishment of insulting the parents[1]. According to **Origen**, the rebellion against the biological parents is a shadow of the rebellion against the heavenly parents - God the Father and the high Jerusalem our mother. He says:

[If such is the verdict for him who insults his biological family; how much more will be for him who insults God, by denying that He is the Creator of the world? Or for him who speaks bad about the heavenly Jerusalem, who is the mother of us all (Galatians 4:26)?[2]]

Rebellion and stubbornness are like blasphemy; and should be accordingly punished. Yet that should be after the failure of the parents to put him right. In the punishment here, the following should be noticed:

a. **The crime of rebellion takes place, not because of the inability of the son to execute the commands of his parents, or to realize their significance**; but out of an evil will and stubbornness; he hates to be amended, or is ashamed to be referred to his parents or his family; something that grieves their hearts and devastates them.

b. **He concentrates on the sin of profligacy and drunkenness** (20); as they make the son lose his mind and rebel against the authority of his parents. The drunkenness makes man forget about all the laws, hence the commandment of king Lemuel's mother to her son: "*It is not for kings, O Lemuel – not for kings to drink wine, not for rulers to crave beer, lest they drink and forget what the Law decrees, and deprive all the oppressed of their rights"* (Proverb 31:4-5). The context connects between rebellion on the one hand, and both profligacy and drunkenness on the other hand; which were in the sight of Jews a great crime. When the Lord Christ spoke about the prodigal son, he mentioned that he "*squandered his wealth on wild living"* (Luke 15:13). And in the book of proverbs it is written: "*Who has woe?… Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine"* (Proverb 23:30); and, "*He who keeps the Law is a discerning son, but a companion of gluttons disgraces his father"* (Proverb 28:7).

c. **The father or the mother do not individually act against their son**; but are committed to agree together that he is rebellious, profligate, and a drunkard. And even if they so agree, they have to resort to the elders of their town, who will investigate the matter thoroughly before issuing their verdict.

d. The parents will bring their son to the elders; "***Then all the men of the town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid***" (21). It is very hard on the parents to complain against their rebellious son, knowing that he may probably be condemned to death. But God allowed it in the Old Testament, for all to realize the seriousness of raising the children. If, according to their natural feelings, it is difficult for man to accept that, what would be his position, when he realize that, through his negligence, he may deliver his children, not only to be stoned, but even to eternal fire?! God does not preoccupy Himself with mere human feelings, but with the eternal salvation, and with the ultimate destiny of man. The Law sought that the trial by the elders be public, to give the chance to the people of the town to testify, whether that rebellion was because of the negligence of the parents, their violence, or their personal failings; in order that the children would not be oppressed.

e. This Law was set to give man the chance to re-evaluate his position. If

[1] *Cf. The author: Leviticus, p.208-209 (in Arabic).*
[2] *In Lev. Hom. 11:2.*

rebellion against parents can bring death on man, how would be the rebellion against God Himself?!

f. The sin, especially rebellion, can corrupt the earth; so it is said: "***You must purge the evil from among you**,"* and the Psalmist says: "*Early I will destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all the evildoers from the city of the Lord"* (Psalm 101:8). The sin of rebellion, together with profligacy and drunkenness, are not only directed against parents, but against the whole congregation. That is why the punishment is done publicly before the congregation against whom that rebellious son erred. Such a rebellious person destroys the peace of his home; and his bad example influences others. The apostle Paul warns us against the behavior of parents that may cause such a plague, saying: "*Fathers, do not embitter your children"* (Colossians 3:21). A son needs to live in an atmosphere of love, so as not to divert to violence and corruption. It is truly a primary responsibility of the parents.

g. The rebellious son is condemned to be stoned to death (18-21), which reveals the seriousness of this sin.

5- THE MAN HANGED ON A TREE

"If a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God" (Deut. 21:22-23)

Death penalty, and leaving the body hanged on a tree (on a cross), was meant to reveal the seriousness and horror of the crime. The Law allowed for hanging the body of a criminal on a tree, not to make a scene of him, but in order to make him an example to others, and to put fear in the hearts of all. Yet, the Law did not allow for the body of the one hanged on a tree to remain there after dark, but it has to be buried the same day.

Several scholars believe that hanging on a tree used to happen after the criminal dies, and not as a way to kill him.

When the people started to commit harlotry with the girls of Moab who drew them to sacrifice to the idol 'Baal of Peor,' God commanded the prophet Moses: "*Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the Lord, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel"* (Numbers 25:5)

The custom of hanging on a tree has been known among the Gentiles. When 'Joseph' tended to interpret the dream of the baker of Pharaoh king of Egypt, he said to him, "*Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head – from you – and hang you on a pole, and the birds will eat the flesh from you"* (Genesis 40:19). It is obvious here that **the verdict was first to cut his head before hanging his body on a pole, for the following reasons:**

a. Whatever the horror of the sin, God cares for burying the bodies in graves; intends to honor the human bodies, even of the worst of criminals. God indeed allows for chastisement, yet within limits, so as not to insult the human nature. He allows scourging, yet within limits; and allows for the death penalty when necessary; but on condition that the bodies should not remain unburied for more than one day.

b. If God allows for the bodies to be hanged during the day; Yet He wants us not to exaggerate our fear of the sin, Let us remember our sins in order to repent; yet let us bury them as well; and be preoccupied with God, the Forgiver of sins.

c. The Law presents a religious rite: According to the Law, the dead body bears uncleanness; as death came to the world as a fruit of sin. Therefore the dead

body should not be left unburied, so that the whole land wouldn't be defiled.

d. That Law came to touch the issue of our salvation; there is no curse worse than that, to which the Lord Christ our Savior descended (Galatians 3:13). The Jewish rulers tried in vain to avoid the curse through holding fast to the letter of that Law (John 19:31). The Lord Christ accepted to die crucified; He, who knew no sin, became a sin for our sake. The Grantor of blessing became a Bearer of the curse of the Law for us. He was hanged on a tree, as though not worthy to be neither in heaven nor on earth. But He was buried before sunset to kill the curse, and to grant us in Him the risen life. And according to the apostle Paul: "*Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'); that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith"* (Galatians 3:13, 14). Our Christ accepted the curse to sanctify us; and St. Peter says: "*Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness"* (2 Peter 2:24). And according to St. John the Baptist: "*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*

Our Savior took our place, for us to take His; He was pleased to receive the cross. "*Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Hebrews 12:2). That amazing act of redemption is the pleasure of God the Father: "*It pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief, to make His soul an offering for sin"* (Isaiah 53:10). God the Father was pleased to offer His beloved Son as an offering for sin, to let Him bear the curse for us, to bring us into His righteousness and His glory. The Evangelist St. John tells us: "*Therefore, because it was the preparation day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away"* (John 19:31).

❖ If one of our congregation asks, for the sake of knowledge, 'Why would He not bear death by some other way? Let him be told that there is no other way for our benefit. It is good that the Lord bore that for our sake. He came to bear our curse; so, how could He Himself be a curse for us (Galatians 3:13), unless He receives the kind of death that bears a curse? Which is the cross?![1]

Pope St. Athanasius the Apostolic

❖ Death on the cross was according to them a great curse. Yet they did not realize that it was a prophecy… That death, which was meant for us, whose origin was in the sin; He bore it Himself, and nailed it on the tree[2].

St. Augustine

Finally, what this chapter confirms concerning all the situations mentioned; that, even in the Old Testament, God cares for every man personally. For the sake of a single victim of murder, His wrath would dwell upon all the neighboring towns; if they were negligent in searching for the killer. And for the sake of the body of a criminal hanged on a tree, if it remains there after dark, the whole land would be defiled! In the New Testament, the Lord Christ proclaims that "*it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish*" (Matthew 18:14); and "*There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents"* (Luke 15:10); and, "*Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me"* (Matthew 18:5).

The Lord Christ was not preoccupied with the multitudes that crowded around

[1] *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei, 25:1-2.*
[2] *St. Augustine: On Ps. 38.*

Him, to stop the whole procession to invite Him to enter into the house of Zacchaeus, who sought to see who Jesus was (Luke 19:2). He also cared among the crowd around Him for the woman who had a flow of blood, and asked: "*Who touched Me?"* to which Peter and those with him said: "*Master, the multitudes throng You and press You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?"* (Luke 8:45)

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 21)

LET ME ENCOUNTER YOU THROUGH THE OUTCASTS

❖ Let me encounter you; who was crucified outside the camp.
You have become an expelled and an outcast!
To have the expelled and the outcasts encounter you.
And those who have no one to care for them.
I see You encountering me.
No one would embrace me but You.
You seek my weakness as an outcast.
Let me also seek you, to find You among the outcasts.
To encounter You among the expelled!

❖ You care for the innocent blood shed by an unknown hand!
You do not let oppression defile the earth.
You command Your people to care for the blood shed.
Yet, at the same time, not to hasten to accuse anyone.
To wash their hands in purity.
Not to cover up those who shed blood.
And not to accuse anyone unjustly.

❖ Sin has put me to death and has thrown me on the ground;
I became a lifeless corpse.
With nobody to look at me, or to care for me.
You came down to me and looked at me.
You avenged my blood by Your cross.
And nailed down the sin, and made a spectacle of the evil one.
You have revived me and granted me the resurrection.
I am no longer a corpse cast in his blood on the ground.
But became a child of God, enjoying the glories.

❖ You care for a pagan captive woman, who lost her family and her country.
You ask her to mourn her parents, and not her idols.
You keep her rights, and protect her from being destroyed by the one who captivated her.
You are such a wise God, and a very gentle One.
You care for my soul,
That was captivated by sin, and humiliated by the evil one.
You have liberated me, and brought me into Your secret place.
You have poured on me Your splendor!
And set a queen out of me!

❖ You care for the wife who is not loved by her man.
You make up for her by granting her the firstborn son.
You care likewise for the feelings of her son.

❖ You made me a firstborn, O You, the Only and Unique in first birth.
My mother, the Church, is very beloved by her Groom.
All her sons became firstborns.
All enjoy a double portion of eternal inheritance.

❖ You care for the rebellious son.
You allow for firmness with him for the sake of his eternity.

You proclaim to his parents the danger of his eternal perdition.
While his parents deliver him to the elders to be stoned to death;
You have taken my rebellion away from me.
You did not deliver me to the elders to come against me.
But You brought me up to settle down in the bosom of the heavenly Father.
You clothed me with Your righteousness,
And made me a partner in Your obedience.

❖ I confess to You that I have broken Your Law.
I have fallen under the curse of the Law.
And came to be under the verdict of death, imprisoned within the circle of the curse.
But by Your love, You entered by the cross into the circle of the curse.
You have blown the curse up and destroyed its gates.
You have blessed me and set me free.
You have lifted up from me the curse of the Law
And granted me the blessings of the eternal glory.

❖ The criminal may be worthy of being hanged on a tree;
Yet You care for his body not to remain after sunset.
By this, You confirm to us, that You honor both the soul and the body.
You care for man as a whole, O our Creator.

❖ Millions and millions of millions of earthly and heavenly creatures throng You.
And yet, with Your love, You care for me personally.
I say together with Your saint Augustine:
It is as though I do not see in the world except You and my humble person.
You are giving me all the love.
And I give You all the heart.
Is there anybody whom You love like You do me?
Is there anybody who loves You like I do?
I am Yours my Beloved; and You are mine, O You the desire of my heart!

CHAPTER 22
SPECIAL STATUTES FOR COMPASSION AND HOLINESS

This chapter is considered as a consummation of the last one; in which God's care for the outcasts is revealed; namely, those whom no one cares for. Here the Law reveals its goal, the compassion toward all, together with holiness. The believer's heart is full of love and compassion toward his brother, as well as toward the animals and birds; a compassion that binds with holiness. It is fitting for the congregation of believers to be firm to keep uncleanness away.

1. Caring for everything that belongs to a neighbor or to a stranger 1–4.
2. Banning sexual anomaly 5.
3. Compassion toward a bird sitting on a nest with eggs or young 6–7.
4. Protecting the life of others 8.
5. Not mixing odd things together 9–11.
6. Tassels for garments 12.
7. Charging a wife that she was not a virgin 13–19.
8. Statute of a wife who lost her virginity 20–21.
9. Matrimonial adultery 22.
10. Adultery with a betrothed virgin 23–27.
11. Adultery with an un-betrothed virgin 28–29.
12. Adultery with a father's wife 30.

1. CARING FOR EVERYTHING THAT BELONG TO A NEIGHBOR OR TO A STRANGER

It is not fitting for a believer to hide himself (ignore) from anything lost from his neighbor. He should bring them back to his neighbor. He should even care for the animal fallen down along the road.

"You shall not see your brother's ox or his sheep going astray, and hide yourself from them; you shall certainly bring them back to your brother. And if your brother is not near you, or if you do not know him, then you shall bring it to your own house, and it shall remain with you until your brother seeks it; then you shall restore it to him. You shall do the same with his donkey, and so shall you do with his garment; with any lost thing of your brother's, which he has lost and you have found, you shall do likewise; you must not hide yourself. You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fall down along the road, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely help him lift them up again" (Deut. 22:1-4)

That is how God cares, even for our care for animals. In Exodus 23:4, the statute commands man to care for the donkey of his enemy or adversary; whatever is the animosity between humans, we are commanded to be compassionate toward the innocent animal. And if this is the case concerning the enemy, how much more should it be concerning the neighbor or the stranger, whether he is a Jew or a Gentile. In this statute, it is to be noticed:

1- The word "***brother"*** here, is to be considered in the wide sense. It does not only mean a brother according to the flesh; as is obvious from the second verse, "***if you do not know him."*** This care is an act of mercy offered to the animal or bird, whoever his owner may be.

❖ The Law teaches us how to love our enemy. If his animal falls down along the

road, we are committed to lift it up[1].

St. Jerome

2- Man is committed to bring back an animal that has gone astray to its owner or to its pasture, for the sake of the right of neighborhood, and for the sake of compassion toward the animal itself. A believer cannot ignore or hide himself from the animal of his neighbor that has gone astray; but, through his natural love to do good, he should bring it back.

If God so cares for the animal that has gone astray, how much more will He care for the souls that forsook her heavenly home, went astray from the divine pasture, and lost their way in the middle of the whirlpool of this world. The Word of God Himself came down to our earth to bring back the lost sheep, and to bring joy to heaven by its return. We, as members in the body of Christ, our heart will not find comfort until we bring back every soul to her heavenly Shepherd, and bring back every man into the bosom of the eternal Father.

3- The Law commits us to go and take the lost ox or sheep ourselves, and not to send a message to its owner to come and collect it, as the factor of time here is of utmost importance. Any delay in bringing the lost animal back to its owner or to its pasture, may cause it harm.

4- In case we do not know its owner or its pasture, we should bring the lost animal to our own house or our own pasture, and keep it there safe, until its owner seeks it.

5- The literal translation of the word '***gone astray***[2]' also came to mean 'taken away; namely, if we see someone dragging away our neighbor's animal, we should not stand passively; but should act as is fitting of faithfulness toward its rightful owner. In the same way God did not stand passively, when we collapsed, and delivered ourselves to the evil one, to be like a sheep he dragged away from its fold. Then came the Good Shepherd and delivered Himself for the sake of each lamb, to bring it back to the heavenly fold. So we should not stand passively if we see one of our neighbor's animal dragged away. And we should not stand passively if we see the evil one dragging his soul, mind, or will, away from the heavenly pasture, down to hell.

So we should rise up above the requirements of the Law. But unfortunately we do not even do what it requires. If the book of Deuteronomy incites us to care even for the donkey or ox of our neighbor; how could we ignore his mind, heart, and inner being, when we see him being dragged by the devil down to hell; and present several vain and unfitting excuses for our slothfulness?

If we should not stand passively when we see the donkey of our neighbor gone astray, what would be the case if it were the owner of the donkey himself, who is gone astray? Let us then rise above excuses, and make peace with our neighbor, whatever that may cost us; and seek the soul of our lost brother wherever he may be, as this is what even the Law of the Old Testament requires.

- If you should help in lifting up the donkey of an enemy; is it not more important to lift up the souls of friends; especially if their fall is of serious nature? The souls do not normally fall in much, but in the fire of hell.

When you see your brother fall under a heavy burden, and the devil is standing putting it on fire; you should not cruelly and mercilessly ignore him, something that is not fitting to do even to animals!

When the good Samaritan saw a wounded man whom he does not know nor

[1] *St. Jerome: Against the Pelagians, Book 1:30.*
[2] *The People's Bible, vol. 4, p. 305.*

referred to; he stopped, put him on his donkey, brought him over to a hotel, hired a physician, gave him money, and promised to give him more on his way back. Yet you see someone, not fallen to robbers, but to the devil, not in the wilderness, but on the road. You are not required to spend money on him, to hire a donkey to carry him, nor to go out of your way to accompany him; but only to comfort him with some few nice words. But you ignore him, give him your back, and go away cruelly and mercilessly! How can you expect to find compassion when you ask something from God?[1]

St. John Chrysostom

We are required by the Law to restore to our brother the garment he lost, with which he covers his body, what would we rather do to restore to him his reputation, that covers up his human dignity. Whoever enjoys hearing something bad about his brother, would be like not bringing him back his lost belongings; he would be like leaving him naked, not of his material clothing, but of his heavenly dignity.

Our Christianity is an invitation, not to close our eyes, or to look through a narrow scope; saying, 'This concerns me; and that concerns my brother;' But it is an invitation to act with the spirit of love, spaciousness of heart and unity, on account of all mankind; caring for their rights and edification; and as said by the apostle: "*Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being"* (1 Corinthians 10:24).

2. BANNING SEXUAL ANOMALY

"A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all who do so are abomination to the Lord your God" (Deut. 22:5)

It is unfitting for man to wear garments that pertain to the opposite sex; namely, every sex should be proud of what God created him for. No one should covet to be of the other sex. Nature itself teaches man to be distinguished by his sex, even by the hair (1 Corinthians 11:14). The reasons for this are:

a. **St. John Chrysostom** believes that this commandment implies that every one should be proud of the sex granted to him by God. The man should be proud of his manhood, and the woman of her femininity; the man should not covet to be a woman, and the woman should not covet to be a man. The beauty and goodness of each sex is in its pride of what God granted it; together with appreciation and respect toward the other sex, as a complementary to its own, and not as an opponent or a competitor. He or she should not despise nor feel haughty toward the other sex; but should see an integration between the sexes; but for the benefit and edification of humanity; he or she would behold the amazing hand of God and His exalted plan.

❖ Whoever does that, would cause confusion, betray the gifts of God, and throw on the ground the dignity granted to him by the Most High. Not only for the man but also for the woman, who would be more honored if she keeps her rank; Rebelling against it, would be indeed an insult for her[2].

St. John Chrysostom

b. Every sex should feel its responsibilities; a man should undergo his with no femininity; and the woman undergoes her vital role; and by so doing, the society would be integral.

c. Some see in this commandment what is deeper than the outer appearance; namely, keeping away from sexual immorality; as putting on garments of the opposite sex, implies a hidden desire to take its role in sexual relationships.

St. Clement of Alexandria, condemning the practice of sexual anomaly, says:

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[1] *In Matt. Hom. 15:15.*
[2] *In 1 Cor. hom. 26:4.*

[The Logos proclaims loud and clear, through the prophet Moses: *"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination"* (Leviticus 18:22).

When the wise Plato advised: 'Keep away from the field of any woman who is not yours[1];' he was quoting from his readings in the holy Scripture, saying: *"You shall not have intercourse with your neighbor's wife, to defile yourself with her"* (Leviticus 18:20).

"You should not plant what is not fruitful, an illegal seed with an (woman's) egg[2]." Don't plant a seed where you don't wish it to grow up[3]." Don't touch a woman b your wife whom you married[4]."

With her alone you are allowed to have physical pleasure for the sake of begetting offspring. This is what the Logos only allows. We, who are so partaking of the divine creation, are committed not to scatter our seeds sporadically where they should not be, nor to act dishonorably[5].]

d. Some believe that such behavior is actually pagan; as, in the temple of Venus, women used to appear armed like mighty warriors; while men used to be clothed like women.

3. HAVING COMPASSION TOWARD A BIRD SITTING ON A NEST WITH EGGS AND YOUNG ONES

"If a bird's nest happens to be before you along the way, in any tree or on the ground with young ones or eggs, with a mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young. You shall surely let the mother go, and take the young for yourself, that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days" (Deut. 22:6, 7)

Some justify the talk about letting the nursing mother go, following the talk about confirming the discernment between the two sexes: men and women; by the fact that the Law intends to confirm the importance of the mother's role in keeping the race, even in birds.

God granted man the authority upon the birds of the sky, the fish of the sea, and the beasts on the earth (Genesis 1:26); not to practice it without control, but with the spirit of compassion and mercy on the creation. In the book of Isaiah it came: *"As the new wine is found in the cluster… Do not destroy it, For a blessing is in it"* (Isaiah 65:8).

That statute is important, wise, and humane, for keeping the race (Matthew 10:29).

The Jews say that, although these commandments are the smallest in the Mosaic Law, that cares even for the bird that is sitting on eggs or young ones, allowing for taking the eggs and the young, but letting the mother to go; yet it is amazing that its reward is the same as that of honoring a father or a mother; namely, "prolonging the days of the one who keeps it."

The Lord always proclaims His care for His creation, even for bird that seems of little value (Luke 12:6).

4. PROTECTING THE LIFE OF OTHERS

This statute provides us with a straightforward concept of freedom. Although, man is completely free to build a house with a roof, yet he is committed not to have

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[1] *Laws 8:839 A.*
[2] *Laws 8:841 D.*
[3] *Laws 8:839 A.*
[4] *Laws 8:841 D.*
[5] *Paedagogus 2:10:91. Cf. David G. Hunter: Marriage in the Early Church, Minneapolis, 1992, p. 42.*

pleasure on the expense of his brother. He may be cautious, or he probably have no children to fear for their safety. But he may think about the chance that a relative may come to visit him with little children, grandchildren, or servants, who may not be as cautious, and one of them may fall from the roof. So, he has to provide it with a parapet, that he may not bring on himself the blood of whoever falls from his roof.

"When you build a new house, then you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring blood-guiltiness on your house if anyone falls from it" (Deut. 22:8).

With His love for man, God does not only protect him by His divine care, but also through His Law. Man is very valuable in the sight of God, and should be as such in that of the believers.

In the region of the Middle East, the roofs of houses are usually flat, as owners to entertain their guests in the evenings often use them, and sometimes as sleeping quarters during the hot summer nights, They are committed to build a parapet for it, 3 ½ feet high to keep anyone from falling from it. In case of negligence, if someone falls, the owner of the house would be responsible for his blood.

According to this statute, the Jews believe that it also applies to everything that would keep the others safe, like covering wells, maintaining bridges, etc.

5. NOT MIXING ODD THINGS TOGETHER

"You shall not sow your vineyard with different kinds of seed, lest the yield of the seed which you have sown and the fruit of your vineyard be defiled.

You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. You shall not wear a garment of different sorts, such as wool and linen mixed together" (Deut. 22:9-11)

The un-natural mixing leads to chaos, the same way like mixing with the world. It is not easy to wash a garment made of different kinds of fabric.

a. **Not planting two kinds of seeds in one field:** Mixing seeds together before sowing will create difficulty in harvesting. This refers to mixing believers with non-believers in the church; and also refers to the heart not having the spirit of discernment, does not know simplicity or the one way and wavering between the way of light and that of darkness.

b. **Not using an ox and a donkey together on one plow:** The weak animal will keep the strong one back. In school, the weak students should be separated from the advanced ones. And in the church, it would be advisable to do the same with the new believers and the old ones, in order to offer each category what is suitable for its edification.

c. **Not using two different kinds of twines to weave one fabric:** as for example wool and linen. Besides probably causing some allergy, it would be difficult to wash it. The church should constitute one fabric in harmony, of one spirit and one thought.

All these constitute a symbolic portrait of the commitment not to mix between the truth and the vain philosophies of the world (See Leviticus 19:19). This statue probably intends to distinguish the people of God by their purity and straightness.

We have previously dealt with not mixing both in the literal sense, and in actual life, together with the symbols it carries, in our commentary on the book of Leviticus, chapter 19. The reasons behind it are:

a. **Keeping them away from such customs:** When the Lord warned His people against the odd foreign apparel, that mixes between wool and linen; not that it constitutes a sort of sin, but because of what it means of the fellowship with the idolaters. "*And it shall be, in the day of the Lord's sacrifice, that I will punish the*

princes and the king's children; and all such as are clothed with foreign apparel" (Zephaniah 1:8).

b. This statute bears a symbol of the commitment of the believers to be pure. There is no mixing between the believer and the non-believer; between the light and the darkness; and between Christ and Belial.

6. TASSELS FOR GARMENTS

"You shall make tassels on the four corners of the clothing with which you cover yourself" (Deut. 22:12)

These tassels were intended to distinguish His people from other peoples (Numbers 15:37-41). No one should be ashamed of being referred to the people of God. It refers as well to the importance of remembering the divine commandments, even of the things, that seem to be of little importance, like the tassels of garments. The goal of this statute is to make the believer distinguishable from the people of the world; everyone seeing him would know from his outer appearance, that he belongs to the people of God. Repeating the commandment here, is probably because the Jews probably took it lightly, on account that it barely touches their inner life, but is something apparently superficial. God intends for us to proclaim, that we are dedicated to Him, both by our inner life, and our outer appearance; and not to be ashamed of our connection to Him. Remember how by touching the border of Christ's garment, the woman with the flow of blood got healed (Luke 8:44).

7. CHARGING A WIFE THAT SHE WAS NOT A VIRGIN

The Law, caring for the holiness of matrimony, states:

"If a man takes a wife, and goes in to her, and detests her, and charges her with shameful conduct, and brings a bad name on her, and says, 'I took this woman, and when I came to her I found she was not a virgin.' Then the father and mother of the young woman shall take and bring out the evidence of the young woman's virginity to the elders of the city at the gate. And the young woman's father shall say to the elders: 'I gave my daughter to this man as a wife, and he detests her; now he has charged her with shameful conduct, saying: I found your daughter was not a virgin. And yet these are the evidences of my daughter's virginity.' And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city.

Then the elders of that city shall take that man and punish him; and they shall fine him one hundred shekels of silver and give them to the father of the young woman, because he has brought a bad name on a virgin of Israel. And she shall be his wife; he cannot divorce her all his days" (Deut. 22:13-19)

The deceitful wife would be stoned to death, as any corruption in the life of matrimony would touch the whole congregation. Yet, the elders of his city would punish whoever unjustly brings a bad name on his wife, and falsely charges her of not being a virgin on the day he married her, mostly by scourging, and by fining him one hundred shekels of silver to the father of his wife. So would be the public chastisement to mend the reputation of the wife's family. As to the husband who falsely charged his wife, she shall be his wife, and he cannot divorce her all his days.

The Law considers purity as an honored virtue. Whoever raises doubt on the purity of someone is insulting his reputation and his inner dignity, and is committing a great crime. The Psalmist says: "*You sit and speak against your brother. You slander your own mother's son"* (Psalm 50:20). If this is the case for a man's brother, how would it be for bringing a bad name on one's wife, who became with him one body? He would be like a bird that corrupts his own nest!

8. THE STATUTE OF A WIFE THAT LOST HER VIRGINITY

"But if the thing is true and evidences of virginity are not found for the young woman, then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of the city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done a disgraceful thing in Israel, to play the harlot in her father's house, so you shall put away the evil person from among you" (Deut. 22:20, 21)

As the wife who is wrongly charged, is publicly honored, together with her household, the adulteress wife is also publicly condemned. Adultery is a major crime, directed to the Holy God Himself, and condemned by stoning to death.

9. THE MATRIMONIAL ADULTERY

'If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman, so you shall put away the evil person from Israel" (Deut. 22:22)

Stoning was the punishment for adultery among the married and the betrothed to show how tremendous matrimonial adultery is.

10. ADULTERY WITH A BETROTHED VIRGIN

"If a woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of the city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor's house; so you shall put away the evil person from among you.

But if a man finds a betrothed young woman in the countryside, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. But you shall do nothing to the young woman; there is in the young woman no sin worthy of death, for just as when a man rises against his neighbor and kills him, even so is this matter. For he found her in the countryside, and the betrothed young woman cried out, but there was no one to save her" (Deut. 22:23-27)

Betrothal in the East has been considered equal to marriage; and the betrothed woman was usually called a wife (see Deuteronomy 22:24, 25; 20:7). In a talk by **St. Jerome** concerning the perpetuity of virginity of St. Mary, he wrote that, no wonder, she was called Joseph's wife, although she was only betrothed to him[1].

11. ADULTERY WITH A VIRGIN WHO IS NOT BETROTHED

If a man finds a young woman who is a virgin, who is not betrothed, and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are found out, then the man who lays with her will give the young woman's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife because he has humbled her, he shall not permitted to divorce her all his days" (Deut. 22:28, 29).

Whoever humbled a virgin was obliged to marry her, and he was not permitted to divorce her all his days.

12.ADULTERY WITH THE FATHER'S WIFE:

"A man shall not take his father's wife; nor uncover his father's bed" (Deut. 22:30)

Finally, the son is obligated to keep the sanctity of his father's bed.

[1] *St. Jerome: The Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary, 4.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 22)

YOU CARE FOR ME BY BOTH YOUR LOVE AND YOUR LAW

❖ By Your love, You wish me to be like You.
The evil one has dragged me away from my heavenly pasture.
You released me, and brought me back to the bosom of Your heavenly Father.
Grant me to care for my brother and everything that belongs to him.
Grant me to persist on praying for his sake,
And doing my best, until he returns to Your bosom.
Let me care for his soul, heart, mind, and will,
To be wholly holy.
Let me bring back to him his lost donkey;
namely, his body that got corrupted.
And his lost garments; namely, his dignity in the Lord.
And everything he lost, to become rich by You.
Grant me to follow Your example.
To work for the sake of my brethren with zeal.

❖ By Your divine care, You always embrace me'
By Your divine Law, You care for the details of my life.
By Your divine love, You are keen to make me love even the beasts and birds.
To make me have compassion on every creature, as much as I can.

❖ As a Father who is preoccupied with His children,
You commit every house-owner to build a parapet for his roof.
You teach us to care for the life of our brethren.

❖ Longing for my purity,
You command me not to mix seeds together,
Nor the twines in one fabric.
To realize that there is no mixing between light and darkness.
Nor a fellowship between Christ and Belial.

❖ You wish to make us distinguishable from the people of the world.
You wish us to be a Your holy people.
You wish us to have our own tongue, mind, and even appearance,
That suitable to children of God.
You care even for the tassels of our garment,
To let us always remember that we are dedicated only to You.

❖ You care for the reputation of every one of us.
You will not let anyone wrongly charge his wife.
You count that as a great crime.

❖ You call me to holiness, because You are Holy.
To make me faithful in my relationship with You.
To make me a bride, blameless and without blemish
To be sanctified by Your fiery Spirit.
And to be granted unity with You.

❖ Take any corruption away from me.
You are alone Holy.
By You I become holy;
And without You, I do not know holiness.

CHAPTER 23
THE CONGREGATION OF THE LORD, THE ARMY OF THE LORD AND THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

The Law, being keen on keeping the holiness of the believers, confirms to them that they are the congregation of the Holy Lord, the army of the Lord, and the house of the Holy Lord. It does not allow any uncleanness to dwell in the holy congregation; to infiltrate into the army in its holy wars; or into His house. This chapter is dedicated to warn against the true enemies of man; namely, the evil world, the carnal lusts and Satan, who fight against the believer during his daily life, and during every moment of his life.

It is to be noticed here, that the look of the Mosaic era at the four nations: the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Edomites, and the Egyptians differs completely from that in the later days of the kingdom.

1. Those denied from joining the congregation of the Lord 1–8.
2. A holy army 9–14.
3. The slave who has escaped from his master 15–16.
4. Rejection of corruption and uncleanness 17–18.
5. The usury 19–20.
6. It is advisable not to hasten to vow 21–23.
7. The Right of neighborhood 24–25.

1. THOSE DENIED FROM JOINING THE CONGREGATION OF THE LORD

The Law here, presents a list of certain categories, that are denied from entering the "congregation of the Lord;" in order to keep the congregation holy to the Lord. What does the "congregation of the Lord" mean? Some believe that this term means '**the people of God during their religious services**.' It does not mean to deny those categories, the chance to have their souls saved, or to deny them the right to worship the Lord, but to deny them the enjoyment of the whole packet of rights, like entering into the sanctuaries, to have a complete fellowship with the congregation; or **to occupy certain positions of leadership**; like being elected as one of the elders of Israel, or as a judge. Some others believe that it means just **denying them the privilege of mixed marriage among the children of Israel**.

The excluded categories are:

1. The emasculated and the mutilated: *"He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter the congregation of the Lord" (Deut. 23:1).*

That teaching concerning the exclusion of the emasculated from the congregation of the Lord, had its importance at that time; as it was common among the Gentiles to have groups of those emasculated to minister in the pagan temples, and to occupy leading positions in the royal palaces, especially in the quarters of the queen and the female royal entourage. However, the term "eunuchs" came later on to apply to the leading officers in the royal palace, even to those not physically emasculated[1].

Excluding the emasculated and their descendants to the tenth generation, from the priesthood (Leviticus 21:17-21), is a confirmation of the sanctity of all the body members. This statute came to forbid man from emasculating himself, especially if

[1] *Cf. The author: Daniel, p. 19 (in Arabic).*

that was because of his look at the genitalia as unclean members, or to the sexual relationships in marriage, as unclean acts. The church denied those who emasculate themselves, even those who are virgins, from occupying any clerical rank, on account of their erroneous look at what God created as good and holy.

Thus, - even in the Old Testament - an eunuch is not excluded from membership in the congregation of the Lord, if he is holy to Him. And as it came in the book of Isaiah: "*Do not let the son of the foreigner, who has joined himself to the Lord, speak saying, 'The Lord has utterly separated me from His people,'* ***nor let the eunuch say, 'Here I am, a dry tree.'*** *For thus says the Lord 'To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant. Even to them I will give in My house and within My walls a place and a name, better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off"* (Isaiah 56:3-5).

It is thus clear that God is not preoccupied with the outer appearance of man, like being an eunuch or not, but with his inner depths, like keeping the Sabbath, namely, enjoying the weekly feast, and the continual joy in the Lord. Keeping the Sabbath is a sign of keeping the whole life on account of the Lord. Whoever chooses to please the Lord and to hold fast to His covenant; namely, wishes to have a perpetual fellowship with Him, will be counted as a son or a daughter to God more than others; will have a portion in the house of the Lord; and will be protected by its walls.

2. One of illegitimate birth: *"**One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the congregation of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the congregation of the Lord forever**"* (Deut. 23:2)

What is the guilt of the son whose father errs? Why is he excluded from entering the congregation of the Lord? The illegitimate son would not be excluded from getting connected to the Lord, or from enjoying the eternal inheritance, if he leads a fitting life, holy in the Lord. But this statute is rather meant to let the adulterer feel and know that the fruit of his action will not enter the congregation of the Lord.

Among the men of faith, mentioned in the book of Judges (Judges 11), and included by the apostle Paul in the list of the men of faith (Hebrew 11:32), is 'Jephthah the Gileadite,' of whom is said: "*Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, but he was the son of a harlot, and Gilead begat Jephthah… they said to him, 'You shall have no inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman'"* (Judges 11:1, 2).

3. The descendants of Ammon and Moab: Because their father Lot separated himself from Abraham (Genesis 13:11), his descendants were deprived of what those of Abraham the man of faith enjoyed. Moreover, Ammon and Moab were born as fruits of the drunkenness of their father and his contact with his daughters. But, it can be said, 'what could be their guilt, and the guilt of their descendants after them? The answer came, that their descendants have later taken an offensive position against the people of God, as it is said:

"An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter the congregation of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the congregation of the Lord forever, because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pathor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. Nevertheless, the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam, but the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you. You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity forever" (Deut. 23:3-6)

No Ammonite or a Moabite has not the right to enter the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation, to protect the congregation from idolatry. Yet whoever withdraws away from the corruption of those nations, and will not attach himself to their pagan idols, could be received in the congregation. The Gentile 'Ruth' has surpassed many of the women of faith; has got a book after her name in the Holy Bible, and her name was included among the genealogy of Lord Christ.

Beside the fact that Ammon and Moab, the sons of Lot had their life far from God, their descendants consummated their measure. Those two peoples had followed two serious patterns in their confrontation of the people of God; namely, violence and envy. Their violence was demonstrated in their refusal to offer the Israelites bread and water in the wilderness, although they were ready to pay for them. When they refrained to do that human jest, God brought down to His people free bread from heaven, and gave them free water from the rock. Their envy showed when they asked Balaam to curse them; he, who, when he failed in his mission, offered them a plan to make the people of God fall into sin. Thus whoever deprives himself of the blessing of giving; is actually depriving himself of enjoying what is God's in the great day of the Lord; according to His words: *"Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me"* (Matthew 25:45).

The Moabites requested from Balaam to curse the people of God, but God turned the curse into a blessing. Yet that would not relieve them of the evil they had in their hearts; and as the Psalmist says: "*Give to them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavors. Give to them according to the work of their hands. Render to them what they deserve"* (Psalm 28:4)

St. Gregory of Nazianzus states that the refusal of the Moabites and the Ammonites to enter the house of God refers to the refusal of using the sophisticate arguments that ruins the true knowledge[1].

What is the portion of the Edomites and the Egyptians?

Whereas the Ammonites and the Moabites refused to let the people of God pass through their land; and accordingly, God instructed His people "*not to seek their peace nor their prosperity all their days forever"* (1-6); the Edomites and the Egyptians, having given them some hospitality, although they enslaved them later on; they were allowed to enjoy the covenant together with them (7, 8). Therefore, it is fitting for us not to disregard any good deed toward us however small it may be.

So as not, on account of what is said about the Ammonites and the Moabites, the people of God might bear a spirit of hatred toward all peoples, here they are commanded to take a gentle stand toward the Edomites and the Egyptians:

"You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land. The children of the third generation born to them may enter the congregation of the Lord" (Deut. 23:7, 8)

In case an Edomite or Egyptian becomes a proselyte; namely, if he forsakes his idols, and accepts faith in the true God, his grandchild would have the right to enter the congregation of the Lord.

Although the Edomites opposed them (Numbers 20:20); and the Egyptians enslaved them; yet it is fitting for the people of God to disregard all that, if an Edomite or Egyptian believes in God, and his faith was proved until the third generation. Then he would remember that the Edomite is his brother; and that the Egyptian has received him in his land for some time.

God has often reminded His people of their servitude to the Egyptians, not to

[1] *See The Last Farewell, 17.*

provoke animosity against them, but to let them remember the amazing divine work of salvation, and not to forget that it was the Egyptians who opened up their land, and gave them hospitality for four centuries.

In short, God sought the sanctity of His people through the following:

a. Exclusion of those who look at the human body as unclean, and who despises the good creation of God, from fellowship in the spiritual leadership of the congregation of the Lord.

b. Whoever bear the spirit of hatred and envy toward the children of God, and offend them, will not have a portion in the holy fellowship.

c. It is fitting for the holy congregation, to bear the spirit of love toward others; and not to disregard any good deed toward them, even for some time. They should treat them with love, mixed with wisdom.

2. A HOLY ARMY

As the people of God were about to enter into the Promised Land, and into a series of battles against the Canaanites, it was important to set certain rules concerning the members of the army, to prepare them to enjoy the life of conquest. After speaking of the "congregation of the Lord;" and of those who are to be excluded from fellowship of the people of God; then of the possibility of allowing the Edomites and the Egyptians to enter into it; he spoke of the army and of three ways to make it holy:

1. Holiness through purification from sin: *"**When the army goes out against your enemies, then keep yourself from every wicked thing**"* (Deut. 23:9)

Sin draws man's heart to cowardice; as it binds him to earth and to temporal life. Whereas the righteousness of Christ lifts his heart up to heaven; and grants it strength to challenge death. That is why it is fitting for the temporal battles to become living opportunities to enter into the inner battles, to get purified from every wicked thing. By this, the Holy Bible draws us toward God, who hears the prayers of the righteous, and grants them the spirit of success and conquest. And as the Psalmist says: *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear. But certainly God has heard me… Blessed be God, who has not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me"* (Psalm 66:18, 20). The prophet Samuel confirmed to the people that the sanctity of the heart is the way to conquest; saying: *"If you return to the Lord with all your hearts, put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you, prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only, He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines"* (1 Samuel 7:3).

2. A spiritual and ritual holiness, together with purification from any wickedness. They are committed to practice the rite pertaining to purification; even if uncleanness is involuntary by some occurrence while sleeping in the night.

"If there is any man among you who becomes unclean by some occurrence in the night, then he shall go outside the camp; he shall not come inside the camp. But it shall be, when evening comes, that he shall wash himself with water; and when the sun sets, he may come into the camp again" (Deut 23:10, 11)

As God is Holy, He wishes His people to be likewise, both internally and externally. Although an involuntary unclean dream is not counted as sin, the believer has to wash himself with water to purify his body; and to wash his garment as well, *"If any man has an emission of semen, then he shall wash all his body in water and be unclean until evening, and any garment and any leather on which there is semen, it shall be washed with water, and be unclean until evening"* (Leviticus 15:16).

Being in a camp, would not be an excuse for a soldier in such a situation to

disregard the statute of purifying his body and garment; the battle should rather commit him to be keen on following it more accurately. According to human measures, withdrawing from the battle that day to consummate such a ritual, would probably cause confusion and would have unwanted consequences on the performance of the army as a whole, but according to divine measures, this act would confirm a respect and care for the holiness of the army, and the Holy God Himself would grant them conquest.

If God cares for the holiness of all, even concerning what occurs involuntarily, how much more, would it be fitting for all to be holy, in body, mind, and feelings?

By saying: *"Also you shall have a place outside the camp, where you may go out"* (Deut. 23:12); confirms the importance of cleanness inside the camp, and of keeping the personal purity. The presence of the Lord in their midst is a perpetual motive toward holiness.

3. Personal hygiene: To confirm the presence of God in the midst of His people, especially during battles, which is His battle as well, against the devil and his works, He intends for them to be free of any probable source of impurity, even those concerning natural necessities, saying:

"And you shall have an implement among your equipment, and when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it and turn and cover your refuse.

For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy, that he may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you" (Deut. 23:13, 14)

Some may probably wonder: How does the divine statute care for such a minor thing, to be uttered by Moses, the great among the prophets?

a. He intended to confirm that, as nature itself teaches us to distinguish ourselves from animals. It is fitting for us to be pure in everything.

b. Through God's care for the cleanness of the location, we can realize the importance of purity and holiness in the sight of the Holy One. War is not meant to take over land or possessions, as much as to prepare the people of God as a leaven to sanctify the peoples of the world, not just through military equipments and systems, but through holy life internally and externally.

c. The Law as a whole reveals the unity of life. It does not discern between the statutes concerning worship, and those concerning behavior, between those concerning the ethics, and those concerning the general or individual hygiene; between those pertaining to the time of war, and those pertaining to that of peace. The believer, living in the Lord, cares for the spiritual, social, educational, health aspects of his life, as well as those pertaining to his country and his family. It is an integral, undivided life!

d. The Law reveals the divine presence, even in the time of war: " ***For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp****"* (14). It is as though, what preoccupies the mind of the believer, even in his care for his health aspects, is his preoccupation with the Holy One. If the high priest was committed to put on his forehead a golden plate with the inscription "Holy for the Lord," the believer, feeling the presence of God in his house, should care for every item in his house, as though he inscribes on it the words "Holy for the Lord." Wherever he may be, he should feel as though he is in a holy temple, where he encounters God the Holy.

e. Whereas God created the beautiful world for the sake of man, man loved the world more than its Creator. That is why, calling on him to deny the love of the world, God commands him to keep everything in it beautiful, and to live in a healthy atmosphere with no pollution. We hear nowadays, how the world cries out because of

the pollution of the air, the water, the food, and the whole environment of the earth. Having his heart polluted by sin; man polluted the world everywhere. We even here nowadays, have warnings against the probability of transferring the pollution to the other planets, to which we send satellites and space ships.

Let us, by the Spirit of the Lord, to keep our depths free of all pollutions and to care to live in an unpolluted world! Nowadays, while several countries establish separate ministries for the environment, to care for issues pertaining to pollution, let us start by caring for the purity of the inner self, besides caring for the outside environment!

f. As what one individual does, even without evil intention, may cause harm, grief, and probably destruction, to the whole world, it is fitting for every member to do, as much as possible, not only for his own sake, but for the sake of the whole congregation as well.

3. THE SLAVE WHO ESCAPED FROM HIS MASTER

After speaking about caring for purity, spiritually, physically, and ritually, even in natural necessities that may appear of little value; he presented to us statutes that pertain to every aspect of life. He started by speaking of the slave who escapes from his master because of oppression.

"You shall not give back to his master the slave who has escaped from his master to you. He may dwell with you in your midst, in the place, which he chooses within one of your gates, where it seems best to him. You shall not oppress him" (Deut. 23:15, 16)

It is obvious that the Mosaic Law, even if it did not cancel the system of slavery; yet it, with every way possible, incites the believer to have compassion on the slaves, and to treat them as brothers. If God has granted His people the Promised Land as a refuge, after liberating them from the bondage of Pharaoh, He wishes for His people to follow His lead, to open their hearts and homes up to every grieved or afflicted soul.

Is it just to protect an escapee?

a. We should not understand this statute as giving protection to an escapee from the law, especially if he has committed a crime. But saying: "***You shall not oppress him***" reveals that he speaks of a slave who escapes from oppression.

b. Some believe that the slave here, is most probably, one who escaped from a pagan master, at a neighboring country, who came to take refuge in the midst of the people of God, to worship and find his inner peace and comfort in the Lord.

c. God wishes for His people and His children, to become a refuge for everyone in affliction; to care for the oppressed and the weak. The kings of Israel were known for this virtue; as shown in what the slaves said to Ben-Hadad king of the Amorites (1 Kings 20).

d. Some believe that this statute reveals how God opposed slavery. In the same book God commands the believer to give back to his brother, whether a Hebrew or a Gentile, all his lost possessions, He commands him here, not to give back the slave to his master. It is not man's right to possess and enslave another. We have previously dealt with how the Holy Bible looks at the issue of slavery.

It does not stop at not giving back the slave to his master; but the believer should prepare for him a place to dwell and work.

e. While confirming that it is not man's right to possess another, the Holy Bible tells us that God alone Has the right to possess us: "*For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's"* (1

Corinthians 6:20). Whoever enslaves himself to God, will set himself free internally from every servitude. And according to **St. Arsanius**: [You would rather be a slave to one Master (God), than to be a slave to several masters.]

4. REJECTION OF CORRUPTION AND ABOMINATION

If it is fitting for the people of God to become a refuge, even to a slave running away from oppression; yet this should not be for the corrupt and unclean. Harlotry is utterly rejected, and any profit through it would not be acceptable as an offering to the Holy God (17, 18).

There shall be no ritual harlot of the daughters of Israel, or a perverted one of the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the hire of a harlot or the price of a dog to the house of the Lord your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are abomination to the Lord your God" (Deut. 23:17, 18)

It was not allowed for a daughter of Israel to practice adultery, or for a son of Israel to practice sexual perversion among the people, who should remain "a holy nation." When Amnon the son of David asked his sister Tamar to sleep with him, she said to him: "*No my brother, do not force me, for no such thing should be done in Israel. Do not do this disgraceful thing"* (2 Samuel 13:12).

No hire of a harlot or the price of sexual perversion (the price of a dog) should be offered to the house of the Lord. Here, those who practice sexual perversion are referred to as dogs, as it came in the book of Revelation: "*Outside are dogs and sorcerers…"* (Rev. 22:15). God does not accept the offering of a corrupt person. He desires a repentant heart returning to Him, more than offerings and sacrifices without a pure heart. God is not honored by what we offer Him, but is glorified by our holy life in Him. That is why He does not care for what we offer Him, but He cares for the heart that offers it. He is not bribed by money and offerings.

The wise Solomon warns us against the wicked woman who seduces the simple man under the pretension of religion; "*She caught him and kissed him; with an impudent face she said to him: 'I have peace offerings with me; today I have paid my vows. So I came out to meet you, diligently to seek your face; and I have found you'"*(Proverb 8:14, 15).

Contrary to the pagan atmosphere around them, God requests from His people to reject adultery, and homosexual immorality on account of the temple. It was the custom of some priestesses who used to dwell close to the temple of Venus, to offer their bodies for a price that they offer to the temple; and of some worshippers of both sexes, used to offer themselves for evil practices. According to the historian Herodotus, Abominations were an integral part of idolatry, especially that of the goddess Ashtaroth [1]. And in the book of Micah it came concerning the idolatry in Samaria: "*All her idols I will lay desolate, for she gathered it from the pay of a harlot, and they shall return to the pay of a harlot*" (Micah 1:7).

5. THE USURY

In order to become a stronghold for His people, and to grant them the spirit of conquest and victory, God commands them, not only to be holy in everything big and small, even in the offerings they bring to His house, but, together with the holiness, He seeks mutual love between them. By His love, He granted them the Promised Land, for all to live together by the spirit of fellowship, and not of greed; and for all to feel that what they have in their hands is a divine gift. That is why He commands them to refrain from usury, when a brother or a sister needs to borrow money or food

[1] *Herod. 1:99.*

or anything.

"You shall not lend upon usury to your brother – usury of money or food or anything that is lent out upon usury. To a foreigner you may lend upon usury, but your brother you shall not lend upon usury, that the Lord your God may bless you in all you set your hand in the land which you are entering to possess" (Deut. 23:19, 20)

On account of the fact that these people are asking for the loan out of need, the Lord Jesus, requests from us, not only to charge no interest on the loan, but even not to seek it back, saying: *"If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back"* (Luke 6:34). The apostle Paul also confirms that the greedy are not going to inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:10).

But as far as foreigners are concerned, loans can be given with interest; as it is supposed that they borrow for the sake of doing business, where benefit is mutual; the foreigner trades with the borrowed money, and the Jew gets a portion of this profit through the interest he takes.

6. NOT TO HASTEN TO VOW

Together with holiness and love, God seeks seriousness. Man should not utter a word in haste, especially when he vows something to the Lord. This issue of commitment to vows is previously dealt with in the book of Numbers, chapter 20.

"When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you. That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth" (Deut. 23:21-23)

As God is not in need of vows, it would not be counted as sin to abstain from vowing. God seeks seriousness in every word uttered by the lips, and not in what your heart vows, so as not for anyone to have doubts concerning any desire to dedicate or to give, that are sometimes beyond the ability of man to perform. He does not wish to put a burden on anybody's conscience.

The wise Solomon says: *"Do not be rash with your mouth, and do not let your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven and you on earth; therefore let your words be few… When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed"* (Ecclesiastes 5:2-4).

With complete will, we may vow or abstain to vow. God has no desire to put a burden on anyone. Whoever vows, let him vow with the joy of heart; then he has to consummate his vow. Concerning giving, the New Testament came to proclaim clearly: *"Let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity for God loves a cheerful giver"* (2 Corinthians 9:7).

7. THE RIGHT OF NEIGHBORHOOD

As the Law of the holy congregation is love, no one has the right to do anything against the possession, field, or vineyard of his neighbor. In case someone is hungry, it is his right, through love, to eat from his neighbor's field, yet, to carry anything from it with him, is an abuse of this right.

"When you come into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure, but you shall not put any in your container. When you come into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor's standing grain" (Deut. 23:24-25)

Fields and vineyards in Canaan were open to passersby. Fruits were so plenty,

that anyone could eat his fill at his pleasure; as whatever a neighbor may eat or drink, would represent nothing compared to the abundance that God gives to the owners of those fields and vineyards.

This right is still commonly practiced among the primitive societies, and is likewise practiced among several civilized ones. Workers at food and drink factories have the right to eat and drink from the products of these factories, but not to carry anything out of the premises.

When the disciples of Lord Jesus got hungry and started to pluck the heads of grain and eat them, rubbing them in their hands, some of the Pharisees said to them "*Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?*" (Matthew12: 2; Luke 6:1, 2) They did not criticize them for plucking the heads of grain from the field, as this was a right given by the Law to all; but for rubbing them in their hands, counting that as work not lawful to do on a Sabbath.

The Jews believe that this statute was meant for two categories: the workers on the field and vineyards, who have the right to eat and drink of what they have in their hands; and the poor passersby, lest they faint on their way.

This statute bears an important principle; that, together with being particular as far as his spiritual life is concerned, man should take it easy with his brethren, concerning material issues. Not worthy of getting preoccupied with; especially if they are doing them out of need, and within limits that do not abuse love and simplicity.

This statute gives man the chance to be generous with his brother, allowing him to eat or drink his fill in his field or vineyard. At the same time it requires from the neighbor not to abuse his right of friendship or of neighborhood.

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 23)

A HOLY CONGREGATION, A HOLY ARMY AND A HOLY HOUSE

❖ Grant me, O Holy One, to be keen to observe the holiness of Your congregation.
Who emasculates himself is excluded from practicing priesthood'
Grant me to honor every member of my body.
You have created nothing unclean in me.
I anticipate, when You will reflect Your splendor upon my soul, my body, and my whole being.
To bear Your likeness, and to become your icon.

❖ Let every lustful thought get away from my mind.
Let me harbor within me no Ammonite or a Moabite.
Let me love for everyone, with a spirit of discernment.
Let me open my heart for every Edomite and Egyptian;
To receive them through Your love.

❖ You have chosen me a soldier in Your salvation army.
I wish I become very serious in the purity of my heart and body.
To be always washed by the water of Your love.
To be perpetually sanctified by Your purifying blood.
To have Your camp in me completely pure.

❖ Countries set ministries to deal with the pollution of the environment.
Set Your Holy Spirit in me to purify me from all defilement.
Grant me to live unpolluted both inside and outside.
To smell the breaths of Your pure love.
And to drink out of Your living unpolluted springs.
You seek the cleanness of my depths;
The cleanness of my heart, mind, feelings, and senses.
You seek the cleanness of my body with all its energies.
You request from me to keep my surroundings clean.
To keep even the air I breathe clean.
And the earth I tread on.
Our cleanness is an integral part of the righteous life in You, O You the only Righteous One!

❖ Let me be a brave warrior in the spiritual battle.
And a compassionate father to every oppressed slave.
To mix my courage with my love and compassion.

❖ You have set Your temple inside me.
I shall never bring to it the hire of a harlot, nor the price of a dog.
I shall never mix my worship with uncleanness, nor my offering with any corruption.
I yearn to vow my whole life to You; yet with no haste.
Accept it as an offering of love to You.

❖ In every work, I shall always remember those who are afflicted.
I shall always care for every stranger and needy.

CHAPTER 24
KEEPING THE SOUNDNESS OF THE FAMILY AND MISCELLANEOUS LAWS

In the last chapter, he spoke of the holiness and protection of the congregation of the Lord; here, he speaks of statutes that touch the family and its soundness. He starts with making divorce more difficult; with caring for the happiness of the family, even in time of war; with the commitment to support the poor and needy families in different ways; and with the care for those who have to pawn, mentioning them three times in this chapter.

We can say that this chapter keeps the rights of man in general terms; defends the rights of a woman as far as divorce is concerned; and her rights during her first year of marriage; the rights of the poor borrower; the rights of the hired laborers; the right of man not to be punished for the sin of another, even of those closest to him; and finally the right of man to be free.

1. The family and divorce	**1–4.**
2. The family and draft in the army	**5.**
3. The family and the pawn	**6.**
4. The family and slavery	**7.**
5. The family and dissension	**8–9.**
6. The family and loans	**10–13.**
7. The hired laborer and his wages	**14–15.**
8. The personal responsibility	**16.**
9. The family and the pledging	**17–18.**
10. Caring for the needy when reaping the harvest	**19 – 22**

1. THE FAMILY AND DIVORCE

It is not possible to keep the holiness of the congregation of the Lord, without caring for that of the family and the matrimonial bond. It is fitting for the believer to honor and to respect matrimony, to bear the same view of God, who considers the family as the strongest and the most important unit known on earth. Because of the hardness of their hearts, Moses allowed his people to divorce, in order to keep any of them from committing murder to get rid of his spouse, or to justify the commitment of adultery, that makes him fall under the wrath of God, or subjects himself and his partner (if married) to being stoned to death. In the New Testament, as man became more mature, divorce is no more allowed, except for reason of adultery (Matthew 19:8, 9).

However the Law set certain limits for divorce, among which is the following statute:

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found (something objectionable) about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; When she has departed from his house and goes and becomes another man's wife; If the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife; Then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance" (Deut. 24:1-4)

The reasons behind this statute are:

(1) Man should not haste to seek divorce for any reason. The statute states that it is not enough for him just to utter the word 'divorce,' but he is committed to put it in writing, to have two witnesses to sign the certificate of divorce; then to put it in his wife's hand. He should carefully reconsider himself before hasting to proceed on this decision. Besides, he should realize that, after divorcing her, if someone else marries her, he will not be allowed to take her back, if her latter husband divorces her, or even if he happens to die.

The following is a sample of the divorce certificate that a Jewish husband should write for his divorced wife[1]:

[On the date: day…. Month… year…; I…. son of….; from... region; with my own free will, and under no pressure, I forsake you, and send you away, you… daughter of… from…. region; who has been my wife. Now I forsake you and send you away from me, to become free, and to have full authority over your own life. You can marry anyone you wish to marry; No one may reject you because of my name, from now and forever. This, from me, is a certificate of divorce; to set you free, and to send you away; according to the Law of Moses and of the State of Israel.]

(2) This is to proclaim the right of the divorced wife to remarry. As her first husband is to be counted as dead, she cannot be connected to him after being married to another man; because, in that case, she would be as though connecting to a dead corpse, which is counted as an abomination.

(3) Some believe that this statute was meant to confront certain practices that were followed by some Egyptians, who used to swap wives among themselves; two men divorce their wives, each to marry the other's wife for some time; then divorce her to return to his first wife. By such behavior, marriage and divorce is a way to satisfy that horrible uncleanness. Because the statute forbids marrying the ex-wife after being married to another; a man would realize that a woman is not a toy in his hand, whom he can send away, and get her back at his pleasure. He would realize that a woman has her own human status, and her own personality, which he should honor and respect.

(4) **St. John Chrysostom** says that, although the statute allowed the man who detests his wife, to divorce her, to send her away, and to marry another one; yet he is committed to give her a certificate of divorce; and not allowed to have her back, even if her second husband dies or divorces her. The reason behind allowing man to divorce his wife, is for fear that he would kill the woman he detests; according to the attitude that prevailed among the Jews of those days; who used to kill the prophets and shed the blood like water (Psalm 79:3). To divorce the detested wife was less evil than to kill her. As to not allowing to have her back; that was to let the husband, before divorcing his wife and sending her away, reconsider his decision once and many times, because he would never have her back[2].

(5) Jewish scholars differed in their interpretation of the expression "***because he has found something objectionable about her***" (1). According to the school of Hillel, man had the right to divorce his wife for any reason he finds objectionable in his sight[3]. In the days of the Lord Christ, the Pharisees came to ask Him, saying, "*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?*" (Matthew 19:3). On the contrary, according to the school of Shammai, man had no right to divorce his wife, except for some important reason, like committing adultery for example[4]. That

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[1] *Biblioth. Rab of Bartolocei, vol 4, p. 4450 (Adam Clarke Commentary).*
[2] *Cf. In Matt. hom. 17.*
[3] *Mishna: Gittin, 9:10.*
[4] *Lightfoot, Hor. Heb. Et Talm, on Matt. 5:31, opptom 2:290 (Pulpit Commentary, Deut., p. 381).*

interpretation was questionable, because the sin of adultery was punished by stoning to death, and not by divorce!

2. THE FAMILY AND DRAFT IN THE ARMY

In several ways, God demonstrates His hate for divorce; wishing that it would never happen among His people. At the same time, caring for the peace of the family and for its happiness; God relieved the newly married husband from being drafted in the army, because He considered the family as the foundation of the whole society; and that a joyful family emits the spirit of joy all around it.

"When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business, he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken" (Deut. 24:5)

The reasons behind this statute are:

(1) As we saw before, It is advisable to send away those whose hearts and minds are preoccupied with things that can make them fearful and cowards during the battle.

(2) To keep the soundness and unity of the family, as man, during the first year of his marriage, often faces problems, because the new couple have not yet recognized the nature and concepts of each other as they should. When the husband goes to war for an extended time, that may result in the coolness of their mutual love; or one, or both of them may find it a chance not to resume their marriage life.

(3) It is presumed that it is fitting for the people of God to be pure and to have no premarital sexual relationships. Once they get married, they acquire new experiences, which are very difficult to disregard. If the husband were suddenly taken to war, he would find it difficult to live without carnal relationships, and would fall in love with any woman he encounters during war, especially if his army takes some women captives. The wife, likewise, who is left behind, may find it difficult to keep pure during this critical stage.

(4) The goal of relieving the newly married man from going to war, is not to protect him against death; but to let him do his best to give happiness to his new partner.

(5) As God considers the first year of marriage as an extension of the wedding celebration that would always be remembered. He is keen that the husband and wife would have happiness and joy that would always support them all their life long. Watering it with joy and pleasure would certainly bring pleasure to God Himself.

(6) Yet, this celebration that extends for one whole year, has its limitations. It is not supposed to create a spirit of slothfulness and non-commitment; but it is a chance to establish a holy home where the Lord works, and the newly married couple practice their role in seriousness. The spirit of joy should be accompanied with prudence and the happiness should go hand in hand with work and commitment to responsibility.

(7) As it is fitting for the believer to work on account of the congregation, and even to give his life for its sake, it is likewise fitting for the State to care for every one of its members; to care for the newly married wife, for her happiness and for the soundness of her life.

3.THE FAMILY AND THE PAWN

The necessities of life should not be taken in pledge (be pawned), in order to protect the life of our brethren against destruction.

"No one should take the lower or the upper millstone in pledge, for he takes one's living in pledge" (Deut. 24:6)

God created man in paradise to work and keep its earth (Genesis 2:15). So whoever deprives man of work, is depriving him of his human life, given to him by God; and " *If anyone will not work; neither shall he eat"* (2Thessalonians 3:10). That is why, it is fitting for the lender not to take away from his debtor the tools of his work; but, on the contrary, he should encourage him to work, not only to be able to pay back his debt, but to eat and even to give the needy. The apostle Paul advises us concerning thieves: *"Let him who stole, steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need"* (Ephesians 4:28).

Pawning the millstone, or its upper part, to which a wooden handle is attached to rotate, and without which the lower part becomes useless; has been something common because of need. The millstone here is a small tool used by one person, mostly the housewife, to grind a quantity of grain just enough to make bread for her family for one day. That is why pawning the millstone would deprive the family of the necessary daily bread; namely, would deprive it of the right to live.

He probably also means a millstone used by a person to grind grain for others as a way to earn his living. In that case, pawning it would deprive him of the possibility to work; just as pawning the sow of a carpenter, the oxen of a farmer; or the book of a scholar. The lender should never destroy the possibility of the debtor to live and to pay back his debt, but should rather support him and help him.

In all times and in all nations, wealth is a power that could be either to build or to destroy. The rich man who cares for his poor brother, should use his possibilities for the good, whereas he, whose wealth transforms him to tyranny and misuse of authority, would be destroying himself and devouring his poor brethren.

4. THE FAMILY AND SLAVERY

According to the Law, whoever steals something deserves to be punished; yet not by the death penalty. But, according to the Law of 'Hamorabi,' whoever steals (kidnap) someone else or a child, and sells him as a slave, would be condemned to death.

"If a man is found kidnapping any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and mistreats him or sells him; then that kidnapper shall die; and you shall put away the evil person from among you" (Deut. 24:7)

Depriving man of his human freedom, is like killing him, and should bring on him the death penalty.

5. THE FAMILY AND DISSENSION

The Law cares for the settlement of the family, and for everyone of its member to enjoy peace of mind and freedom. It also cares for the spirit of obedience without dissension. That is why, when referring to the statute of the leper, he reminds us of the episode of Miriam, the sister of Aaron, when she spoke against her brother Moses (Numbers 12:14).

"Take heed in an outbreak of leprosy, that you diligently observe and do all that the priests, the Levites, shall teach you; just as I command them, so you shall be careful to do.

Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam on the way when you came out of Egypt" (Deut. 24:8, 9)

Here, he mentioned the issue of the outbreak of leprosy. According to the Law, the priest is committed to enter into the house and inspect it, lest the disease would spread to the rest of the family; or lest the whole family would perish (Leviticus 14:33-53).

When the priest enters into the house, his action is not considered as an act against the privacy of its owners; as, being a representative of God, he bears the spirit of fatherhood and love, and he does not enter it in order to judge or defame the family, but to keep everything in the house holy, and to protect its occupants from harm.

6. THE FAMILY AND LOANS

Once again he speaks about pledging or pawning. In verse 6 he warns against taking in pledge the tools necessary for earning the daily bread or daily living, as for example the millstone. Here he warns the lender against going into the house of the debtor to get his pledge, lest he would hurt the feelings of its owner; he should stand outside, and wait for his pledge. And if the debtor is so poor that he has nothing but one single garment, he should return it to him by sunset, lest he would catch cold when he sleeps.

"When you lend your brother anything, you shall not go into the house to get his pledge. You shall stand outside, and the man to whom you lend shall bring the pledge out to you. And if the man is poor, you shall not keep his pledge overnight. You shall in any case return his pledge to him again when the sun goes down, that he may sleep in his own garment and bless you; and it shall be righteousness to you before the Lord your God" (Deut. 24:10-13)

Man's home is his fortress, even for the poor; If the lender enter into it to claim his pledge, that would cause the poor; especially in the region of the Middle East, to feel that he has lost his security; and his personal dignity.

By such a statute, God provides the rich lender himself with a valuable lesson, not only to care to observe the dignity of his needy brother, but also as far as his look at his own family is concerned. Some rich people care for money and disregard the unity, peace, and happiness of their own family. If the rich man were committed to observe the dignity of the family of his poor brother, he would be more committed to care for the holiness and unity of his own family.

The divine Law teaches us to observe the privacy of the poor; and never to force ourselves on his house, whatever the reasons may be.

In the region of the Middle East, a poor laborer may go without his outer garment during his day work, especially in farming and hard handiwork like carpentering and construction etc. But he cannot sleep without it, even in summer, when it gets cold by night in desert regions.

Rebuking Israel for its wickedness, God says: "*They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge"*(Amos 2:8).

7. THE HIRED LABORER AND HIS WAGES

Besides caring for his own family, man should also care for those of the hired laborers working for him. He should, not only treat them justly and generously, but should also care for their feelings, and not wait for them to ask for their wages at the day's end, but also hasten to pay them.

"You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether one of your brethren or one of the aliens who is in your land within your gates. Each day you shall give him his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he is poor and has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the Lord, and it be sin to you" (Deut. 24:14-15)

Man should not oppress his hired laborers by giving them work beyond their capabilities, or by addressing them improperly; As according to the apostle, "*Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth"*

(James 5:4). It is such a great sin for man to disregard the right of his brother or his feelings, because in case he cries out in bitterness, the Lord Himself will listen to him.

The Law does not discern between an Israelite and an alien laborer; a believer should never oppress anyone, especially the poor and the needy, regardless of his race or his religion. Mercy and love are attributes of the true believer.

8. THE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

It was the custom of pagan nations to apply the penalty of crimes upon the whole family of the one responsible[1]. Indeed the Lord has threatened to visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Him (Exodus 20:5). But that was to warn them against the bitter fruits of sin, and its effects upon the children and grandchildren. Man sometimes does not care for the punishment that would come upon him, as much as he cares if it would come upon his children and grandchildren.

Lest the judges would probably misuse this divine warning, and assume that it is in their authority to punish someone for a crime committed by another member of his family; the statute here confirms that everyone shall bear his own responsibility.

"The fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall the children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deut. 24:16)

King Amaziah the son of Joash, applied this principle when "*He executed his servants who had murdered his father the king. But the children of the murderers he did not execute according to what is written in the book of the Law of Moses, in which the Lord commanded"* (2 Kings 14:5, 6).

The prophet Hezekiah spoke in some detail of the personal responsibility in chapter 18 of his book.

9. THE FAMILY AND THE PLEDGING

For the third time he speaking here about being careful when pledging (pawning):

"You shall not pervert justice due the stranger or the fatherless, nor take a widow's garment as a pledge. But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this thing" (Deut. 24:17, 18)

It is fitting for the judges not to pervert justice, but to be a support for the strangers and the orphans in the truth; to defend them where they have no one to support them in their weakness. God reminds them that they were once slaves in Egypt; and having experienced humiliation, they should take the side of those in humiliation; and not to be like those who, once they occupy the position of authority; instead of supporting the weak, they become more severe and cruel on them.

10. CARING FOR THE NEEDY WHEN REAPING THE HARVEST

The statutes here came to care for the feelings of everyone; and the Law came to invoke, in every way and at every situation, the spirit of love and compassion toward humanity; particularly the needy and strangers. The believer wherever he may be, and in every situation, is committed to remember the poor and to support the needy, without hurting their feelings. The Law here, came to add to what is mentioned in the book of Leviticus 19:9; 23:22.; where the Lord commanded those who reap the

[1] *Wsther 9:13,14; Herod. 3:118,119p Ammian: Marcell 23:6; Curtius 6:11.20 etc. Pulpit: Deut., p. 382.*

harvest of their land and their vineyards, saying: "*You shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleaning of your harvest"* And, "*You shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard"* You shall leave them for the poor and the stranger.

"And when you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. … You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do these things" (Deut. 24:19-22)

So, in all the statutes that came in this chapter, we notice that God cares to invoke the spirit of love and compassion, together with that of justice, righteousness, and good will, among mankind; especially within the same family; to become, as though a holy leaven that will raise the whole dough; with special care for the poor, the needy, and the strangers. That is the golden thread that binds all the commandments together; not just in the book of Deuteronomy, but in the Holy Bible as a whole.

Through this Law, man learns how, not to be preoccupied with the one who will reap the reward. But to let the divine care lead his life and gifts; even in the things that seem to be of little importance, like forgetting to reap a sheaf in the field, or some few olives on a tree.

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 24)
GRANT ME A HOLY FAMILY

❖ Your compassionate fatherhood always embraces me.
You grant me heaven as my mother,
And the angels as my beloved brothers.
What an amazing heavenly family!
You made out of the family here an icon of the heavenly family,
Into which the forces of darkness cannot infiltrate.

❖ In the old days You allowed man, because of the hardness of his heart, to divorce his wife.
But You remained a Stronghold for the family.
And an Advocate for the divorced wife.
Man, in his foolishness, wishes to have his wife like a toy in his hands. Whereas, You, the Creator, honors every man and woman.
Grant me a holy family, united in You.
Into which the forces of darkness cannot infiltrate.
Every bride dreams of the first month of her marriage.

❖ Whereas You made out of the first year of marriage, a perpetual wedding celebration.
You intend for us to have an incessant family joy,
Yet, not the joy of slothfulness;
But the joy of preparation for work, and the commitment of responsibility.
You relieve the newly married of military service.
Let me experience the spiritual matrimonial union, to have my soul unite with You.
And to become a soldier serving for the truth.

❖ There are many who wish to enslave their brethren.
To buy and sell them for the sake of temporal profit.
Yet You became, a slave for the sake of the slaves.
You delivered Yourself to the traitor as a purchased slave.
By this, You granted the slaves eternal liberty.
You alone are the Liberator of souls.
Make me taste the sweetness of family life!
Make me yearn for everyone to experience what I do.
Let me never rob from any family, someone to sell for evil;
To become in the sight of God like the murderer of a soul.

❖ Grant me to have in my heart a place for every family.
If it borrows, let me not take in pledge, anything of the necessities of its life.
Let me not hurt its feelings.

❖ You are the Father of the fatherless, and the Judge of the widows.
You are the Stronghold of those pained and afflicted.
You are the Supporter of the poor hired laborers.
You are the Compassionate for the penniless borrowers.
You are preoccupied with every poor and needy.
Grant me Your love; to bear the spirit of Your compassion.
Grant me Your mind; to make me live for others.
Grant me Your righteousness, not to oppress anyone.

You are the whole love;
You are the righteousness itself.
Let me acquire You, the Source of every goodness!

CHAPTER 25

MISCELLANEOUS LAWS

As an extension of the previous chapter, God proclaims his care for the afflicted categories of people, even if they are under punishment. He sets a limitation for the punishment of beating or scourging; He cares for the ox, not to be muzzled while treading the grain; for the widow, to get descendants for her husband who died childless, that his name might not be blotted out of Israel. Beside a group of several other statutes for the sake of referring a holy congregation to the Lord.

1. Forty lashes	**1–3.**
2. Do not muzzle a treading ox	**4.**
3. Setting descendants for the deceased	**5–10.**
4. The shameless woman	**11–12.**
5. Cheating weights and measures	**13–16.**
6. Destruction of Amalek	**17–19.**

1. FORTY BLOWS (LASHES)

Although the Law is very harsh with the guilty, going as far as stoning to death; yet it does not consider the punishment as a goal in itself; and does not embrace the spirit of revenge; but looks at the criminal as a brother who deserves to be treated with compassion, yet, without any partiality on the expense of the salvation of his soul and that of his brethren. The Law dealt with the Jewish people like little children who sometimes need to be disciplined, lest their collective or personal mission might be destroyed.

"If there is a dispute between men, and they come to court, that the judges may judge them, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked, Then it shall be, if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, that the judge cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence, according to his guilt, with a certain number of blows (lashes). Forty lashes he may give him and no more, lest he should exceed this and beat him with many lashes above these, and your brother be humiliated in your sight" (Deut. 25:1 –3)

The blows used to be by a rod (2 Samuel 7:14; Proverbs 10:13), which is still practiced in some cities in the Near East, where a person is caused to lie down on the ground and is beaten on his feet with a rod. He could be beaten by thorns and briers (Judges 8:16, 17); by stripes or by scourges with solid knots (1 Kings 12:11, 14).

In these verses, the following principles are presented:

(1) The accused should be confronted by those who accuse him, in the presence of judges, who will investigate and find out the truth. Everything should be done in public, lest justice would be compromised.

(2) The innocent should be acquitted.

(3) "*He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord*" (Proverb 17:15). According to the apostle Paul, "*He is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil"* (Romans 13:4); and according to the apostle Peter, "*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good"* (1 Peter 2:14).

(4) The verdict should be according to the seriousness of the guilt of the accused. If he does not deserve to be executed or stoned, he would be mostly beaten a

number of blows (lashes) according to his guilt. No one is to be exempted from punishment because of his rank, social status or wealth.

(5) Punishment should be done in a solemn religious atmosphere. The number of blows should not exceed 40; and the Jews used to prefer it to be forty minus one (2 Corinthians 11:24), for fear that through some error, it may exceed forty. In most cases, the whip used to carry three branches; and the condemned receives 13 lashes (13×3=39). Putting limitation to the number of lashes confirms that no one should be treated like a slave or an animal, lest he would be humiliated, or assumes to be despised by everyone, and with no hope of being corrected. Thus God cares for the psyche of everyone; discerns between the sin and the sinner; and seeks to crush the sin, yet to save the sinner and to correct his path.

During the procedure of scourging, the chief judge used to read with a loud voice, (Deuteronomy 28:58, 59; 29:9) ; and end with (Psalm 78:38) ; to confirm that the goal of the punishment is not revenge, but the benefit of the guilty and the edification of others. Trapp says that the Turks, after cruelly scourging, the guilty are committed to go back to his judge to kiss his hand and to thank him; and to the officer who executed the verdict to pay him some money for his labor[1].

(6) The verdict should be executed in the presence of the judge, who issued it, to make sure that his verdict is honestly executed, to realize justice.

(7) Saying: "***that your brother is not humiliated in your sight***" (3), reveals God's care for man's dignity, not only in the sight of his brother, but also in the sight of heaven. The trial that occurs on earth, and through human judges, has to be an echo to a heavenly work, aiming to separate the evil and not the evildoer, to take away the sin and not the sinner; and to destroy corruption, yet to glorify the repentant on a heavenly eternal level.

2. DO NOT MUZZLE A TREADING OX

An ox should have the chance to feed while working. The apostle Paul believes that the text here refers to the minister of the altar who should eat from the altar. The needs of those who preach the gospel should be provided, to let them minister without worrying about material things. The apostle says: *"Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown spiritual things for you; is it a great thing if we reap your material things? If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel Of Christ. Do not you know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:9-14).*

3. SETTING DESCENDANTS FOR THE DECEASED

"If brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family; her husband's brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.

And it shall be that the firstborn son whom she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name will not be blotted out of Israel. (Deut. 25:5-6)

[1] *Pulpit Comm., Deuteronomy, p. 394.*

What is the goal of this statute?

(1) Because man used to consider his seed as an extension of his life; the brother or a kinsman, is committed to marry the widow, to set a descendant of the deceased, so that his name would not be blotted out of the world. This is an ancient statute, even before the Mosaic Law, as it came in the book of (Genesis 38:8).The widow is not allowed to marry any man other than the brother or the kinsman, unless he refuses to marry her.

(2) The most important possession of man in the Old Testament, was his portion in the Promised Land that was given as a free gift from God to the people as a whole, and was distributed by lot among them by Joshua the son of Nun. Every tribe of Israel was keen on its portion of land, the way the church is keen on her enjoyment of the new land, the exalted Jerusalem.

As the childless widow could not be able to work the land, to sell its products, or to care for the sheep etc.; marriage to her was a necessity. And because her marriage to someone of another family can mean that he and his descendants may inherit a land that is not his right to inherit, this statute was set, to keep the land, not only within the same tribe, but the same family, or even to be delivered to the firstborn son who bears the name of his deceased father.

(3) This statute constitutes dignity for the widow, and a provision of family love for her, having no more husband or children to care for her.

The Sadducees wrongly assumed this statute to be a proof that there is no resurrection from the dead; as, in resurrection, whose wife will she be? (Matthew 22:24)

Some interpret the word 'son' as 'child;' as it came in the Septuagint version and in the 'Vulgate[1].' If the deceased had a daughter, he would have descendants through her (Numbers 27:4).

Now, How would be the situation if the brother or the kinsman refuses to marry the widow to set descendants for the deceased?

"But if the man does not want to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate of the elders and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to raise up a name to his brother in Israel; he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother.' Then the elders of this city shall call him and speak to him; and if he stands firm and say, 'I do not want to take her,' then his brother's wife shall come to him in the presence of the elders, removes his sandal from his foot, spit in his face, and answer and say, 'so shall it be done to the man who will not build up his brother's house.' And his name shall be called in Israel, 'the house of him who had his sandals removed'" (Deut. 25:7-10)

(1) There is no Law that commits him to do that against his free will. If he does not love her, he has the right to reject her; the relationship of marriage has to be built upon love and understanding.

(2) Concerning the kinsman who refuses to marry the widow of his brother (or of his deceased relative), the widow will remove his sandal and spit in his face in the presence of the elders of his city, and his house will be called 'the house of him who had his sandals removed.' This rite reveals how much the Law was keen on rising up the name of the deceased… because it was the hope of every believer that the Messiah would come from his seed.

It was believed that the refusal is a rebuff of the widow herself, of the deceased, of his family, of the tribe, and of the congregation as a whole, and even a

[1] *LXXl Hiseohus: Antiq. 4:8,23, Matt. 25; Maimon: In Jibbum 2:6-9.*

disregard of God's plan, that every tribe (and even every family) should keep its portion in the Promised Land,

Some Jews interpret that the spitting was not in the husband's face, but on the ground[1], a custom still followed in certain regions of the Middle East, like in Upper Egypt, when someone intends to insult another.

In the episode of 'Ruth,' when the kinsman refused to marry her, Boez, the next in line, took up the responsibility to raise a name for her deceased husband; and hence became worthy of the Lord Christ to come from his seed (Ruth 4).

Removing and taking the sandals of the kinsman by the widow, was a symbolic act of his unworthiness to tread with his sandals on the land of the deceased, and that the widow is free to marry anyone she wishes; as is clear in the words of the Psalmist: "*Over Edom I will cast My shoe"* (Psalm 60:8; 108:9)*;* namely, I will tread on his land, and possess it.

Moses was commanded to remove his sandals before the burnt bush; and likewise, in the New Testament, the priest remove his shoes before entering the altar, as a proclamation that he is not the Groom, the owner of the holy place, but the servant of the bride. The only Groom is the Lord Christ, the Savior of the world.

St. Ambrose says that, according to the Law, Boez, who loved Ruth, could not take her as his wife, before she removes his sandals, as he was not her husband yet. The same way, Moses, who is not the Groom, had to remove his sandals on the holy place (Exodus 3:5); so had Joshua the son of Nun (Joshua 5:16). Our Lord Christ, the true Groom, does not have to remove His sandals, whose strap, St. John the Baptist found himself not worthy to loose (John 1:27)[2].

Walking barefoot referred to extreme poverty; and as the captives of war were committed to do. In the prophet Isaiah it came, "*The Lord spoke by Isaiah the son of Amez, saying, 'Go, and remove the sackcloth from your body, and take your sandals off your feet.' And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. Then the Lord said, 'Just as My servant Isaiah walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and a wonder against Egypt and Ethiopia, so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as prisoners and the Ethiopians as captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt"* (Isaiah 20:2-4).

And when David fled from the face of his son Absalom, "*he went up by the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up; and he has his head covered and went barefoot"* (1 Samuel 15:30).

4. THE SHAMELESS WOMAN

A woman has the right to defend her husband in the time of need; yet, she should do that with the spirit of decency. If she puts out her hand and seizes the genitals of the one who attacks her husband, her hand should be cut off; as that would reveal that she is completely shameless, and has lost her dignity and self-respect; lest others would follow her example, and her behavior would become an offense to girls and women

"If two men fight together, and the wife of one draws near to rescue her husband from the hand of the one attacking him, and puts out her hand and seizes him by the genitals, then you shall cut off her hand, your eye shall not pity her" (Deut. 25:11, 12)

The Lord Christ in His talk about the offense, was probably referring to this statute; when He said: "*If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from*

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[1] *Talmud, Jebam, 106, Maimon, In Jibbum 4:6-8.*
[2] *St. Ambrose: The Christian Faith, Book 3, 10 (71).*

you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell" (Matthew 5:29, 30). Namely, that it is fitting for the believer to be always cautious against any offense and to crucify all his carnal lusts, whatever the cost may be.

5. CHEATING IN WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

As it is not fitting to cheat in weights and measures, it is likewise not fitting to be partial, and to take the side of the rich at the expense of the poor.

"You shall not have in your bag different weights, a heavy and a light. You shall not have in your house different measures, a large and a small. You shall have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure, that your days may be lengthened in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. For all who do such things, and all who behave un-righteously, are an abomination to the Lord your God" (Deut. 25:13-16).

God has created man to deal with his brethren with the spirit of justice. Trade and dealings are opportunities, should not to be used by man to acquire things unjustly; but to practice the righteousness of Christ, and to experience faithfulness; in order to hear the Lord's words: "*Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things"* (Matthew 25:21). Slothfulness is an abomination in the sight of God, the Holy and Faithful. The principles of justice should prevail over all trade dealings (See Luke 6:38).

(1) It is not only an abomination for man to cheat in weights and measures; but to have them at home, even if he does not intend to use them. He says, "*You should not have,"* and not "*You should not use."* Man should not have at home or where he works, anything that could draw him to sin.

(2) Every oppression we may do, is a practice of cheating in weights or measures; a kind of abuse of things; according to what came in the book of Amos: "*Hear this, you who swallow up the needy, and make the poor of the land fail… making the ephah small and the shekel large, falsifying the balances by deceit; that (you) may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals – even sell the bad wheat"* (Amos 8:4-6).

(3) The word 'weights' in Hebrew came as '*Eben*' or '*Waa' aaben*;' meaning 'stone;' stones were used as weights. Two sets of stones were sometimes put in the trader's bag: one heavy and the other light; to use the former when purchasing, and the later when selling (See Exodus 16:16; Leviticus19:23).

(4) Cheating is a crime directed, not only against the party we are dealing with, but against the society as a whole. Every man who earns his profit through cheating and deceit, not feeling the real value of what he has, would scatter it unwisely. And on another aspect, he, against whom cheating occurs, whatever harm comes to him, is as though it comes to the whole society. Moreover, cheating will remove from man, and from those around him, the blessing of the Lord.

It is fitting for every man, to behold in his shop, office, or factory, the throne of God proclaimed; and the Lord Christ present; and to behave as is fitting for a place where the Lord Himself dwells. The success of work is not in the size of the profit, as it is in the living testimony to the work of God, who grants His blessing and success to the faithful in their behavior.

(5) Faithfulness in weights and measures, revealing a heart that loves justice, would make the believer enjoy the blessing of the Lord; and his days would be

lengthened on earth; whereas cheating, oppression, and partiality, would make him fall under curse; as God hates all kinds of deceit. The wise Solomon says: *"A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight"* (Proverb 11:1); and "*Diverse weights and diverse measures, they are both alike an abomination to the Lord"* (Proverb 20; 10).

The use of true weights and measures refers to a spirit of inner discernment; as man should not use for himself a balance different from the one he uses for others. And as **Abbot Theonas** says in the *Conferences* of **St. John Cassian**:

[Having in our conscience a just judge who cannot be bribed; even if everyone errs, our inner purity would never be deceived. We should embrace in our diligently alert heart, a perpetual tranquility; so as to keep our discerning ability from getting lost; and to keep ourselves from being preoccupied with some kind of extreme fast; or with extreme slothfulness; by which we weigh our talents by an unsound balance. We should place the purity of our souls on one pan of the balance, and our physical strength on the other; and weigh them with a good conscience; lest we unjustly get partial toward one side at the expense of another; namely toward an unfitting firmness or extreme slothfulness…

It is not without reason that the Lord rebukes those who deceive themselves with unsound measures; saying: *"Those of low estate are but a breath; those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up"* (Psalm 62:9). And that is why the apostle advises us to have good control on our rein of discernment; and not to go to extremes in either ways (See Romans 12:3). The Grantor of the Law commands the same thing, saying: "*You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume"* (Leviticus 19:35).

It is therefore fitting for us not to have in our hearts, or in the stores of our conscience, oppressive or double balances; namely, we should not burden those to whom we preach the word of God, by extremely firm statutes, more than we can personally bear; while giving ourselves more freedom… because if we use for ourselves and our brethren different balances; we will be rebuked by the Lord, according to the words of the wise Solomon: "*Diverse weights and diverse measures, they are both alike, an abomination to the Lord"* (Proverbs 20:10)[1].]

It is not fitting for us to have two kinds of balances; namely, one kind for the priests and the other for the congregation; as we are all members in the one body of Christ; submitting to one Lord; and enjoying one life in Jesus Christ. If the priest errs, whatever his rank is, his priesthood will not spare him of falling under chastisement, which would actually be double, because of his greater knowledge,

❖ There is indeed, no privilege for the priests over the congregation[2].

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

6. THE DESTRUCTION OF AMALEK

"Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt; how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God.

Therefore it shall be, when the Lord your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget" (Deut. 25:17-19)

Speaking of not cheating in the weights and measures; he gives Amalek as an

[1] *Cassian: Conferences 21:22.*
[2] *In Defense of His Flight to Pontus.*

example.

The first battle for the people of God was at Rephidim against Amalek (Exodus 17). Some scholars believe that, while Pharaoh represents the devil who, for a long time, enslaved mankind; and whom they have got rid of in the water of Baptism; Amalek represents the carnal lust; namely, the works of the ancient man, that fights against the believer; but which he overcomes by the cross, until he has the ultimate conquest. The Lord says: *"The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation"* (Exodus 17:16). Our war against the works of the ancient man, will remain, as long as we are in flesh in this world; as, according to the apostle, *"the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish"* (Galatians 5:17)

Having caused great evil to the people of God to destroy their faith, they should blot out their remembrance, lest their corruption and iniquities would infiltrate in the people and cause them to perish. Destroying Amalek refers to blotting out every trace of the fierce and oppressive sin on the way of our salvation.

Although we should always be merciful and compassionate, yet this should be with the spirit of prudence and discernment. We should not be slothful with sin; and should not open a door before offence, for us or for others. If it is possible, let us be peaceful toward everyone, and pray for everyone; yet, if friendship leads us to wickedness, we have to be firm, with the spirit of prudence and love.

Some believe that, because Amalek's transgression was not addressed against a certain person, but against the Church, as the congregation of the Lord; God Himself stood to protect her; and as it is said: *"Every tool against you will not succeed."*

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 25)

GRANT ME THE SPIRIT OF COMPASSIONATE JUSTICE

❖ Your Law is very firm, just, and particular.
You seek the punishment of transgressors, not to torture but to chasten them.
You care for the transgressor, that even while chastening him, he may repent.
And in case he loses his temporal life, You seek his eternity.

❖ Caring even for the ox; not to be muzzled while treading out the grain;
To let it feed, as long as he works.
As it is for my sake that the ox is working;
How can I deprive it of feeding on the grain it is treading out?
Grant me to work on account of Your kingdom.
Let me search for every lost sheep.
To let You rejoice over him.
And be fulfilled with the salvation of my brethren
As for me, You will never let me go hungry!
And will never muzzle my mouth to feed on the carnal bread.
Nor my heart to feed on the food of angels.

❖ You gave us the statute of raising descendants for the deceased.
As everyone was hoping that the Messiah would eventually come from his own seed.
You did not wish a widow to grieve because she is childless.

❖ You gave the woman the right to defend her husband;
Yet with the spirit of decency and self-respect.

❖ Your Law commits us to be honest concerning measures and weights.
And not to have in our bag different weights, heavy and light.
To carry Your impartial example.

CHAPTER 26

THE FIRSTFRUITS AND RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT

For the sake of the holiness of the people, God commanded the destruction of Amalek, who persists on opposing holiness, on invoking the spirit of corruption, and on spreading abominations. But the negative side is not enough; the people are committed, in the Promised Land, to do the positive work; namely, offering the firstfruits in a magnificent religious rite. The firstfruits constitute an offering of thanksgiving to God, the Grantor of the holy land; and the Giver of the good gifts; beside confirming the perpetual bond between the believer and his God, and renewing the covenant with Him on the land of sojourning.

THANKSGIVING IN THE HOLY BIBLE AND THANKSGIVING DAY IN THE WEST

The rite of thanksgiving in the Old Testament bears three important factors; namely, praise, giving, and renewal of the covenant with God, and confirmation of obedience to Him. In the New Testament, on the other hand, the day of 'Thanksgiving,' the day of Sunday, when the church offers the unique, un-repeated sacrifice of Christ, to God the Father; offers Him the firstborn Son. That is her offering that is connected with praise, giving, and the renewal of the covenant with God on an exalted level. Unfortunately, the '***Day of Thanksgiving***' in North America, became a day of eating, and sometimes of drinking, singing, and corruption. There are many who disregard praise and enjoyment of the covenant with God.

This chapter invites us to re-evaluate the concepts of thanksgiving and of giving the firstfruits to God, to please Him; not according to human concept. It is to be noticed how that amazing rite confirms the importance of praise and thanksgiving on all levels:

- **The personal level**: Every member of the congregation approaches the house of God on a personal relationship with God, to thank Him for the good gifts he enjoys.
- **The family level**: What is offered is in the name of the whole family.
- **The church level**: The believer praises God who has worked in the church since the time of the early Church Fathers, and is still working, and will work along the generations, for the edification of His church.
- **The national level**: The believer thanks God for His dealings with Israel as a special nation.

1. Offering of the firstfruits	**1–11.**
2. Offering of the tithes	**12–15.**
3. Remembering the covenant	**16–19.**

1. OFFERING THE FIRSTFRUITS

"And it shall be when you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it, that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground which you shall bring from your land that the Lord your God is giving you, and put it in a basket and go to the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide" (Deut. 26:1-2)

The believer was requested to bring on a basket with the firstfruits of the produce of the land every year; beside a sheaf of the firstfruit of the harvest for the whole land, offered on the day after the Passover (Leviticus 23:10). Every man will bring on a tribute of a freewill offering, a basket of firstfruits on the feast of the

Pentecost (of the Weeks) at the end of the harvest; hence called "the feast of ingathering" (Exodus 34:22); according to his own ability (Deut. 16:10).

When man finds out that the fruits have matured, he will bring their firstfruits to the Lord; put them in the basket containing wheat, barley, grapes, pomegranates, olives, and dates; places plant leaves in between one item and the other; then goes to offer the basket.

Offering the firstfruits is an offering of thanksgiving to the Lord, who granted them the Promised Land, after the bitterness of bondage in Egypt. It is a symbol of the Lord Christ, our Firstfruit, by whom we enjoyed the eternal life, and became counted as a possession of God.

In this offering it is noticed:

a. By this offering, the believer confesses that all what he has is a gift from God; and that he is offering what God granted him.

b. Denying himself, man offers the firstfruits of the ripe fruits to God; giving Him the priority over himself; namely, putting God first in everything. It is so fitting for us to offer the firstfruits of our life, time, work, and our talents to God, presenting the best of what we have on His account.

c. Offering the firstfruits of the best produce, is a proclamation that the people who are dedicated to God from among the peoples of the world, should be as such; not as described by the prophet Micah: *"Woe is me! For I am like those who gather summer fruits, Like those who glean vintage grapes; There is no cluster to eat of the first ripe fruit which my soul desires. The faithful man has perished from the earth, And there is no one upright among men"* (Micah 7:1, 2).

d. Bringing the basket containing the firstfruits of the produce, the believer proclaims that the land that God promised to his fathers, which he received, is still in his possession. As a time came when the people lost their land, and were led captives to Assyria (Israel), then to Babylon (Judah).

e. Together with the material giving, there is an offering of thanksgiving, by which the believer confesses that the dealings of God with his fathers along all the generations are dealings with him personally; saying:

"And you shall go to the one who is priest in those days, and say to him, 'I declare today to the Lord your God, that I have come to the country which the Lord swore to our fathers to give us"

"Then the priest shall take the basket out of your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God. And you shall answer and say before the Lord your God: 'My father was a Syrian, about to perish, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. But the Egyptians mistreated us, afflicted us, and laid hard bondage on us. Then we cried out to the Lord God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression.

So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Deut. 26:3-9)

So every believer will offer a praise of thanksgiving to God for His gifts to him personally, and to the whole people along the generations. In this praise, the believer confesses the following:

1. All the generations will consider that all the blessings that have been realized with them, were a divine promise to Abraham, who was not an Israeli, but

was a wandering Aramaean (Syrian), with no place to settle down. On the feast of thanksgiving, they are committed to approach with the spirit of humility; with the realization that, as their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was not Israelites, it is fitting for them to have their hearts open toward the other nations. Abraham, the Patriarch, dwelt in the region of Mesopotamia.

2. Being proud as children of Abraham, they admit that they were few in number (5); and what they reached of great population is a divine gift.

3. His people were born poor, sojourners and oppressed in Egypt; and although they became rich and mighty, there is no point in pride, nor in disregarding the grace of God on them. No offering would be received, unless it is accompanied with praise, full of the spirit of humility and thanksgiving to God. Therefore, through this annual offering with its spiritual rites, the memories of God's dealings with them, and His gifts and blessings to them, remain the subject of their continuous meditations.

Every year, celebrating the feast of the firstfruits, or of thanksgiving, the believer praises God for the following blessings:

- Although he had his origin of Aramaic (Syrian) fathers, who were not yet the chosen people of God; yet they were very beloved by Him, have got the divine promises, and have entered into a covenant with God; or have renewed the covenant with Him.
- His fathers were sojourners in Egypt, where they fell under bitter bondage. And now he gained freedom.
- When they came to Egypt, they were few, but now they became very populous.
- He has got a portion of the Promised Land, which is still giving him continuous free goods.
- He is now enjoying the divine presence; standing before the Lord to offer love and a gift of what is given to him by God; and to renew the covenant with Him.

e. A confirmation that what the believer offers is of what God granted him: "***And now behold, I have brought the firstfruit of the land which You, O Lord, have given me.' Then you shall set it before the Lord your God, and worship before the Lord your God***" (Deut. 26:10)

It is fitting for the believer to translate the praise of thanksgiving to action or giving; the way Jacob did: "*Of all that you give me, I will surely give one-tenth to you"* (Genesis 28:22). This is what the wise Solomon expresses on the day of dedication of the house of the Lord; and what is always confirmed by the men of God (1 Chronicles 29:14).

f. This offering is accompanied by the feelings of joy that prevail on the whole house: "***So you shall rejoice in every good thing which the Lord your God has given to you and your house, you and the Levite and the stranger who is among you***" (Deut. 26:11). God wishes that His people rejoice, and eat their bread with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God (Acts 2:46, 47).

g. If joy is a personal divine gift enjoyed by the believer through the blessings of God and His worship; the believer cannot practice this joy except through the congregation; rejoicing together with the ministers of the word and the strangers (11).

2. OFFERING OF TITHES

In our commentary on(Deuteronomy 14:28-29) , we have dealt with the offering of tithes on the third year. Some assume that the third and the sixth years of the Sabbatical year are the two years of tithes dedicated to the poor, beside the tithes offered to the temple.

In the statute of tithes, the following points are noticed:

1. Care for the needy and the ministers of the Lord. *"**When you have finished laying aside all the tithes of your increase in the third year, which is the year of tithing, and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your gates and be filled**"* (Deut. 26:12).

After offering his tithes to the house of the Lord for two years, the believer, on the third year, does it at his own home. The third year symbolizes the resurrection together with Christ on the third day; through which we gained the spaciousness of heart toward everyone, especially the ministers of the house of the Lord, the strangers, and the needy.

While the firstfruits and the tithes are offered in the house of the Lord before His altar; the tithes are likewise offered to the needy believers. While the firstfruits refer to the heavenly Lord Christ, who carries us to His heavens, the tithes refer to making us holy in Him, to turn our land or our life holy in Him. On one side, God confirms His presence in the midst of His people through His house dedicated to Him. And on the other side, He proclaims His presence in the midst of their homes – the holy family churches.

By love we bring our gifts to the house of the Lord, to proclaim our longing to set forth to heaven. And we offer our gifts in our house, to behold the Lord coming to us through His ministers (the Levites), the poor, and the needy.

2. The gift of tithes is accompanied by a true longing for obedience by the divine commandment. *"**Then you shall say before the Lord your God: 'I have removed the holy tithes from my house, and also have given them to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within their gates and be filled; I have not transgressed Your commandments, nor have I forgotten them**"* (Deut. 26:13)

Saying, "***before the Lord your God***," does not necessarily mean that it should be only in the temple. For the believer feels the divine presence everywhere he may be. Isaac once said to his son Esau: "*that I may bless you before the Lord before I die*" (Genesis 27:7).

As the divine commandment requires offering the tithes, that are holy to the Lord, I should give all what He commanded me to offer. By practicing this commandment, I proclaim obedience to all the commandments. That is why the material offering – especially the tithes in the Old Testament – if it does not go hand in hand with the offering of free will, the longing for obedience, and the remembrance of the covenant, it would not be acceptable by God.

3. The spirit of joy together with holiness should accompany this offering, together with all the attached rites. That is why, allowing the one who offers the tithes of the two years to eat parts of his sacrifices; he is committed to eat them, not with the spirit of greed or lust, but with that of heavenly joy, together with holiness.

"I have not eaten any of it when in mourning, nor I have removed any of it for any unclean use, nor given any of it for the dead. I have obeyed the voice of the Lord my God, and have done according to all that You have commanded me" (Deut. 26:14)

He probably means: I have not offered any of it to an idol; namely, I have not mixed between the sacrifices to God and those to the idols. Or I have not borne a fellowship between the worship of God and that of idolatry. It is claimed that some people used to shed the blood of sacrifices before the idols; then offer their meal in the name of the living God.

The believer testifies that he has never eaten any of his produce when in mourning (26:14); namely, he never used them as an offering to the idols; according

to what came in the Book of (Hosea 9:4) : *"It shall be like bread of mourners to them; all who eat it shall be defiled;"* and *"Do not eat man's bread of sorrow"* (Ezekiel 24:17); an offering connected to the god of fertility, who died, was buried, and risen, and mourned by idolaters. He confirms the same meaning by saying: *"**nor given any of it for the dead**"* (14); namely, he did not use it in the rite concerning the god of fertility of the Canaanites. When he says: *"**nor given any of it for the dead**,"* he means that he did not offer his sacrifices and gifts to honor dead idols, nor for the sake of deceased friends or relatives.

Some Jews believe that this confession (13-14), used to be said by the believer in a low voice; being a personal confession, whereas the confession concerning God's works, used to be said in a loud voice.

4. The believer ends his confession by praying to the Lord of heaven to bless His people:

"Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel, and the land which You have given us, just as You swore to our fathers, 'a land flowing with milk and honey'" (Deut. 26:15)

As though the gifts, praises, thanksgivings, prayers, and supplications, given by the believer, are given in the name of the whole congregation.

5. The believer connects between his faithful life and his prayers. As God does not listen to the prayers of the wicked who persist on their evil, nor to the cries of the heretics. The righteous Job wonders: *"Will God hear his cry when trouble comes upon him?"* (Job 27:9). The Psalmist says: *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear"* (Psalm 66:18). Whoever listens to the voice of sin, God will never listen to his prayer, and will never receive his offerings and his sacrifices: *"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight"* (Proverb 15:8). *"The Lord is far from the wicked, but hears the prayers of the righteous"* (Proverb 15:29); and, *"Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, will also cry himself and not be heard"* (Proverb 21:13); meaning that man's prayer will certainly be received if he approaches God with repentance and walking in the righteousness of Christ, together with the spaciousness of his heart toward his brethren.

Offering his longing for enjoying the blessings of God, the believer feels more hungry and thirsty for the divine blessings; and will not stop seeking them with the spirit of love and not with that of selfishness. He will seek, not just for himself alone, but also for the whole congregation; saying, *"**Bless Your people**."* The thirst of the believer for the divine blessings is counted as an integral part of his thanksgiving sacrifice to God.

3. REMEMBERING THE COVENANT

"This day the Lord your God command you to observe these statutes and judgments; therefore you shall be careful to observe them with all your heart and with all your soul.

Today you have proclaimed the Lord to be your God, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His Commandments, and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice.

Also today the Lord has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He has promised you, that you should keep all His commandments.; and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the Lord your God, just as He has spoken" (Deut. 26:16-19)

Some see in these verses a '**golden chain**,' starting with God and ending with God. It includes the following stages:

- God presents His commandments.
- As the people respond to these commandments with all their hearts and souls, God proclaims them to be His people, and to be their God.
- Becoming their God, they have to keep His commandments more and more, to become His own holy people.
- Becoming set high above all nations, they will praise Him, his holy name and his exalted splendor.
- That will hold them faster as a people of God, and more reference to the Lord as their own God.

Thus, the people enter into an incessant series of glorious goods through their union with the Lord their God.

The prophet Moses always concentrates on two points: the first, is that the people should be preoccupied with the commandments of the Lord, and should keep them in their inner depths. And the second, is to remember and to hold fast to the promise or the covenant of God with His own people. The Law came to confirm the following points:

- The union with God: *"I will be their God, and they shall be My people"* (Jeremiah 31:33).
- The holy life in the Holy God: ***"that you may be a holy people to the Lord your God"*** (19).
- God's care for the honor of His people as a whole among the nations He has made, and the honor of every believer; to make out of them what is like a heavenly angel who carries a heavenly citizenship, saying: *"Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honored, and I have loved you…"* (Isaiah 43:4).

What the prophet Moses present are not his own commandments, but ***"the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments"*** of the Lord God (16); that will never grow old, but are God's commandments given *"today"* (16).

As to **the fruits of keeping the commandments** with all the heart, the soul, and faithfulness, and of holding fast to the divine covenant; these are:

1. That they will become His own people (18).

2. That God ***"will set them high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that they may be a holy people to the Lord their God, just as He has spoken"*** (19). As it is said: *"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people"* (Proverb 14:34). He exalts them in such a way, to give them the ability to partake of the praise of the heavenly hosts; and to grant them exaltation in name, by binding them to His great name; that heaven and earth would stand in awe because of the honor that became theirs in the Lord; and exaltation in splendor, by reflecting the splendor of His glory on them. And finally, He makes them holy, as He is Holy.

At the end, we can say that this chapter is a praise of thanksgiving expressed in several ways:

- Praise through the church liturgies (the collective prayers according to certain system).
- Praise of God through practicing the spirit of joy, and invoking this spirit in the life of others.
- Praise through the spirit of giving; translating thanksgiving into action.
- Praise through the good free will through observing the divine commandment and

renewing the covenant with God.

- Praise through the perpetual thirst for God Himself, who incessantly blesses His people.

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 26)

RECEIVE ME AS YOUR FIRSTBORN

❖ You long to see me a firstborn, O You the unique Firstborn.
You wish for me to be like a ripe fruit offered to You before Your divine throne.
You find Your pleasure in me; O You, the Source of pleasure of all creation.
You are in no need for my worship, my talents, or me.
But You desire my heart, O You, amazing in Your love.

❖ Receive the basket of my firstfruits, in which I have gathered of the firstfruits of Your gifts to me.
In it, I offer my exalted thanksgiving, O You, who created me out of nothing.
I thank You, because You have liberated me, not from the bondage of Pharaoh, but from that of Satan.
You made me cross over the Red Sea,
Having brought me in the water of Baptism, granting me the conquest.
You have granted me Your Holy Spirit, as the Leader of my life.
You have borne me to the New Canaan.
Your land that flows with milk and honey.
I offer you my perpetual joy in You, O the Rejoice of my heart.

❖ From the basket of the firstfruits, allow me to offer the tithes.
I am greatly ashamed to offer You of what You have given me.
Stretch Your rich hand to receive from my weakness, what are Yours.
I will not approach Your temple with an empty hand,
As You have filled it with goods.
I will offer you in Your house, like in heaven.
I will open the gates of my house, by giving to your ministers,
To the strangers, to the orphan, and to the widow.
To let them eat together with me of what You have given me.
I behold You coming in them to bless my heart, my house, and my storehouses.

❖ Let me bring of Your blessings for me to Your house.
Come to my house to receive few of Your gifts to me.
I will enter into Your house, and You will enter into mine.
To find comfort in Your heart, and You to find comfort in mine.

THE SECOND SERMON
SUB-DIVISION (3)

THE RITE CONCERNING THE BLESSINGS AND THE CURSES (CHAPTERS 27 to 28)

Moses committed his people, as they were about to enter into the Promised Land, to do the following:

a. To inscribe the divine commandments on large stones on Mount Ebal (Shechem), for all to see. These stones refer to the Lord Christ, the divine Word, who came down to us.

b. To build an altar to the Lord their God that refers to the Lord Christ, the Cornerstone, who offered Himself a sacrifice to God the Father in our name; the Source of our fulfillment and our joy; saying: "*You shall eat there, and rejoice before the Lord your God"* (Deut. 27:7). Through the Lord Christ we can enter the heavenly Promised Land; He is the Word and the Victim.

c. Six tribes shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people; and six tribes shall stand on Mount Ebal to curse them (Deut. 27:12, 13).

CHAPTER 27
OBSERVING THE COMMANDMENT TOGETHER WITH OFFERING THE SACRIFICE

A PREPARATION FOR THE CROSSING OVER

In preparation of the people with all their leaderships for the crossing over to the Promised Land, God concentrated several times on observing the commandment, as a sign of faithfulness in receiving the divine covenant; and on the sacrifice, as a sign of the need for the blood for atonement of the sin.

Speaking of the commandment and its connection to worship, he confirms "*today,"* although reminding them of the past events, and lifting up their sight with the spirit of hope toward the future. Thus, in our faith, we look both to the past and the future, as though they are the present. The past, does not only bear past memories, but bears for us an experience we should live in our present day. And the future for us, is not just theoretical thoughts, but we are enjoying the pledge of the future; especially, the eternity, in our present day. So, the believer lives in a past, a present, and a future, living and active in him.

The proclamation of the blessings and the curses of the covenant was connected to setting an altar of stone, on which were offered burnt offerings for the renewal of the covenant (1-8). One half of the people stood on Mount Ebal, and the other half on Mount Gerizim, to confirm the blessings and the curses of the covenant. Whoever disobeys or break the covenant would submit to the curse (9-14). He gave a list of the curses, which would befall those who break the covenant with God (15-26).

1. Writing the Law on stones whitewashed with lime 1–4.
2. Building an altar of whole stones 5–10.
3. Two groups: One to utter the blessings, and another to utter the curses 11–13.
4. The curses uttered on Mount Ebal 14–26.

1. WRITING THE LAW ON STONES WHITEWASHED WITH LIME

"Then Moses, with the elders of Israel, commanded the people, saying, 'Keep all the commandments which I command you today. And it shall be, on the day when you cross over the Jordan to the land which the Lord your God is giving you, that you shall set up for yourselves large stones, and whitewash them with lime. You shall write on them all the words of this Law, when you have crossed over, that you may enter the land which the Lord your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord God of your fathers has promised you. Therefore it shall be, when you have crossed over the Jordan, that on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones which I command you today, and you shall whitewash them with lime" (Deut. 27:1-4)

Here, Moses did not proclaim the commandments alone, but proclaimed them together with the elders of Israel, so that the people would not assume that, it was just Moses, the old man who was approaching his last days, who cared for those commandments. As a successful leader, he let others partake of his ministry; and did not refer everything to himself alone. For the same reason, the apostle Paul often included in his epistles, the names of those ministering with him, like Silvanus, Timothy, Barnabas, Mark, and Silas etc.

He commanded them to inscribe the Law on large whitewashed stones on the

day they cross over the Jordan, as they could not enjoy the Promised Land and the divine promises, unless they keep the divine commandment.

Writing or inscribing on stones, stone or metal pillars, has been the way to declare the statutes and laws. Lysias quoted a law from a pillar at Areopagus in Athens[1]. At Eleusis, pillars with inscription of laws were excavated[2]. Plato spoke of pillars set in public places on which traffic laws were inscribed[3]. And Polybius used the word 'pillar' to mean a law or a condition of alliance[4].

The number of stones in that episode was not indicated; but they had to be numerous to accommodate all the words of the law. Whitewashing them with lime was to make them smooth, and for the writing to be very plain.

Some scholars believe that the words of the Law were first written on the stones, and then were covered to protect them, the way followed by the ancient Egyptians in writing on the walls of their temples. But it is more logic to assume that the stones were first covered with a layer of lime, on which the words were then written, as it would be easier to write on lime than directly on the stone. Thomson states that he saw stones covered with lime, with writings that go back to about 2000 years[5].

Writing the Law on large whitewashed stones, and in plain inscription, was to remove any excuse by man. God did not let man depend on the natural law, and when He provided him with the Law, He did not confine it to the safes of the priests and teachers, but proclaimed it publicly to anyone who seeks the truth; and to become at the same time, a testimony against any rebel to the divine commandment.

What does he mean by saying *"**the words of this Law"**?* Some believe them to mean the curses, which were uttered on Mount Ebal, mentioned in this chapter. Whereas others believe that they mean all the statutes and the judgments mentioned in chapters 12 to 26 of this book. A third group believes that they are the Ten Commandments that the prophet Moses received from God on Mount Sinai. Some scholars believe that the number of the commandments presented by Moses and inscribed on the stones were 613[6].

The valley at the foot of Mounts Ebal and Gerizim constituted a magnificent natural stage that was proper for that episode, as Mount Ebal was easy to see from the location where Moses gave his speech.

2. BUILDING AN ALTAR WITH WHOLE STONES

Beside the large stones on which the commandments were written, an altar was built to the Lord, of whole stones on which no iron tool was used (Exodus 20:22); on that altar, burnt peace offerings and sacrifices were offered.

"There you shall build an altar to the Lord your God, an altar of stones; you shall not use any iron tool on them. You shall build with whole stones the altar of the Lord your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to the Lord your God. You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there and rejoice before the Lord your God. And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this Law" (Deut. 27:5-8).

The altar is to be built with whole stones on which no iron tool is used. The stone here refers to the Lord Christ, on whom the prophet Daniel prophesied; *"a stone cut without hands… that became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth"*

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[1] *Eratos th, 31:12.*
[2] *Polluk 10:97.*
[3] *De Legg. 11., p. 916E.*
[4] *Hist. 24:4,12, 26:1,4.*
[5] *Thomson: Land and the Book, ii, p. 204.*
[6] *Pulpit Commentary, Deuteronomy, p. 419.*

(Daniel 2:34-35); the stone that was rejected by the builders, because it "*had no form or comeliness,"* as described by (Isaiah 53) . Yet it was accepted by God, and became the Cornerstone.

No iron tool should be used on the stones of the altar; namely, not to be touched by human hand. Our salvation is not to be realized by human hand, but through true divine work; namely, that of the cross.

Introducing an eulogy for his father, the elder St. Gregory, in the year 374 AD, **St. Gregory of Nazianzus** spoke about the role of his mother St. Nuna, who drew him to the exalted life of faith, that made out of him a successful Bishop. He says that It is a great thing, not to use an iron tool on the stones of the altar (5); as everything dedicated to God has to be natural, with nothing artificial. So it is certainly counted a great thing how she honored the temple by her silence. How she never gave her back to the honored table, nor made controversy along the divine path. How she did not partake of any unclean or unholy table. How she could not bear to pass by, or even to look at a corrupt house. How she did not allow her ears that used to receive the divine things, or her tongue, that used to utter the divine words, to become unclean by Greek stories or stage songs[1].

- On the altar, burnt offerings to the Lord are offered; where the Lord Christ offers Himself a perfect burnt offering of love before God the Father, on behalf of mankind.
- On it peace offerings are offered (7); as by the crucified Christ, the reconciliation is realized between God the Father and mankind; and in Him, the believer gains his inner peace.
- There, the believer eats (7); as the sacrifices were connected to food; as a sign of fellowship.
- The believer rejoices before the Lord his God (7); enjoys the shadow of heaven, bears its icon; and proclaims his joy for the divine covenant, and the joy of his soul for being attached to it. We are invited to a joyful banquet; God Himself rejoicing and finding pleasure in the obedience of His children, their love, and their heartily worship, invites them to rejoice together with Him, and to share with Him His pleasure in them.
- "***And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this Law****"* (8). Offering the sacrifice or practicing the worship, being connected to keeping the divine commandment, he repeated the commandment pertaining to writing the words of this Law on the stones in the same chapter; confirming that the writing should be "***very plainly****"* (in the Septuagint version); as the goal of writing them is to proclaim them to the whole congregation, in an easy way to read; according to the command of the Lord to the prophet Habakkuk "*Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it"* (Habakkuk 2:2).
- The word of God should be well inscribed, plainly written, for all – priests and congregation – to be able to read and understand; and no voice should be louder than that of the divine word. As our Bible is the backbone of our faith, of the church tradition and life, any law that does not bear the spirit of Holy Bible, would be vain. Our Bible is the divine Book that leads our life, and bears us to the bosom of God Himself.

Writing the word on stones in a clear way, and publicly displaying it, reveal the responsibility of the church to present the word as it is to the whole congregation, for all to enjoy.

[1] *On the Death of His Father, 10.*

The altar and the stones with the inscribed words of the Law are to be set on Mount Ebal, in order that those who fall under the curse of disobedience would find a chance to return to God through the holy sacrifice; and the connection to the divine word.

The stones were set on Mount Ebal, where the curses were uttered, for everyone to realize that the Law was helpless, neither to remove the curse, nor to grant life. It just provides knowledge about sin, and reveals man's need for someone to justify him (Romans 3:19-20; 7:9-14). The suitable place for the Law is the Mount of the curses and not of the blessings.

By the same way, the altar was set on the Mount of curses, for the believers to realize their need for the unique sacrifice, capable of lifting the curses up from them – the sacrifice of Christ. The Law requested the animal sacrifices from them; but as these sacrifices were only a shadow and a symbol, they are unable to sanctify the conscience, to purify the depths, and to grant righteousness.

"Then Moses and the priests, the Levites, spoke to all Israel, saying, 'Take heed and listen, O Israel: This day you have become the people of the Lord your God. Therefore you shall obey the voice of the Lord your God, and observe His commandments and His statutes which I command you today" (Deut. 27:9, 10)

By saying, *"**Take heed and listen**,"* he proclaims the people's need, as well as every believer's, to silence and alertness, as the voice of the world around and in us, often overpasses the divine voice. Every now and then, we are in need of an interval of tranquility, in which the ears of the inner man get inclined to the voice of the Lord, to listen to Him with all respect.

"***You have become the people of the Lord your God***": The people of the Lord, because of His choice and call, are always His possession. Yet, they will indeed become as such, when they accept His word and observe His Law (John 1:12). God always reminds us of the call to which we are called, to become the people of God, so that, as He is holy, so we become holy in Him.

It is a call to get attached to Him, and be referred to Him; to become His people; namely, to enjoy having the royal and heavenly features; Then, all the storehouses of heaven, its blessings and its possibilities, will be within our hands.

3- TWO GROUPS: ONE TO UTTER THE BLESSINGS, AND ANOTHER TO UTTER THE CURSES:

"And Moses commanded the people on the same day, saying, 'These shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people, when you have crossed over the Jordan: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin; and these shall stand on Mount Ebal to curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. And the Levites shall speak with a loud voice, and say to all the men of Israel…" (Deut. 27:11-14)

Mount Ebal is on the west bank of the River Jordan, very close to Shechem, where the Sanctuary of the Lord has been for some time (Joshua 24:1).

The tribes chosen to say the blessing, were the sons of Leah and Rachel; whereas those chosen to proclaim the curse on Mount Ebal, were the tribes of Gad, Asher, sons of Zilpah, the maidservant of Leah; Dan, and Naphtali, sons of Belhah, the maidservant of Rachel; and Zebulun and Reuben, sons of Leah. The Levites (namely the priests and not the whole tribe of Levi), most probably stood in a region intermediate between the two Mounts (Joshua 8:33); to repeat with a loud voice the blessings and curses, for all to hear.

Here, he mentioned only the curses, whereas some Jews believe that he uttered

the curse, then the corresponding blessing[1].

Some find it difficult for the voice of each group to be heard by the whole people, when they proclaim the blessings and the curses. But by contemporary experiment, it was proved that the voice is easily and clearly heard; especially that it was uttered by a large group of people, and not by one single individual.

4- THE CURSES UTTERED ON MOUNT EBAL:

As the time was near for the people to cross over the Jordan, they had to get to know an important fact; that the land they were going to possess and inherit was the Lord's. God is its owner; and that the price was obedience. By such obedience, they were not only to abide on the land of the Lord, but they would also have a portion in the new land; namely, in the high Jerusalem.

The curses for disobeying, or for breaking one of the Ten Commandments; and the blessings for obeying the commandment; were like a key for the people to enjoy the land; and to be filled with hope in heaven itself.

The curses came, starting by the sins directed against God Himself, like idolatry (15); then against the parents (16); against social justice (17); then against the handicapped and the needy (18-19). Namely, it started by God, then the parents, the society as a whole, and lastly the needy. That was followed by the curses against purity and chastity (20-23); then that against murder (24-25); and lastly he gave a general commandment concerning the observance of commandments.

It is noticed that the book introduced the words of the curses in detail, and not the words of the blessings; And that the words of the curses were read first, then followed by those of the blessings; every item by itself; the curse then the blessing, in order to confirm that no one will escape from the curse, except him who resorts to the Savior; according to the words: "*If You, Lord, will mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?"* (Psalm 130:3). *"For as many as are the works of the Law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the Law, to do them'"* (Galatians 3:10); "*They have all gone out of the way; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one"* (Romans 3:12).

Proclaiming the curses first, then the blessings, confirms the need for humanity to be threatened first by punishment, and once they become mature, they would appreciate the sweetness of blessings. Thus, and as we previously saw, curse is but a natural fruit of man's separation from God, the source of blessings. Blessings are the entrance into blessed life, and the enjoyment of fellowship with God. While sin bears its chastisement in itself, as it separates man from the source of his life; obedience, on the other hand, bears its blessings; as it brings us to God, the Source of life, and the fulfillment.

"Cursed is the one who makes any carved or molded image, an abomination to the Lord; the work of the hand of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret.' And all the people shall answer and say, 'Amen.'

'Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

'Cursed is the one who moves his neighbor's landmark.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

'Cursed is the one who makes the blind to wander off the road.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

'Cursed is the one who perverts the justice due the stranger, the fatherless,

[1] *Talmud Bab. Sotah, c.7; Targum Hierosp in lot; Surenhus, mishna, 3:262.*

and widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

'Cursed is the one who lies with his father's wife, because he has uncovered his father's bed.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

'Cursed is the one who lies with any kind of animal.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

'Cursed is the one who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

'Cursed is the one who lies with his mother-in-law.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

'Cursed is the one who attacks his neighbor secretly.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

'Cursed is the one who takes a bribe to slay an innocent person.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

'Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen'" (Deut. 27:15-26)

The number of curses is twelve, the same number of the tribes. In them, it is noticed:

a. The word "***all***" is repeated, for man to realize that no one is above the commandment: the priest or the laic; the rich or the poor; the man or the woman; all the members of the congregation, both leaders and subjects, are committed to observe the commandment.

b. At the end of every item, all shall say, '***Amen***;' a sign that all are committed to observe and to respond to the commandment. It also bears the following meanings:

1. A confirmation of the knowledge by every member of the congregation, that the fruit of sin is the curse.

2. Man through breaking any of the commandments of the Law; and not through breaking all the commandments together; or through breaking certain commandments acquires this fruit, but as the apostle James says, "*For whoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' Now, if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law"* (James 2:10, 11).

3. It bears the feeling of guilt by everyone. No one should justify himself.

4. It is a confession by everyone that the Law is good, and the fault is his alone.

5. The religious man needs to say the word '***Amen***' more than anyone else; as because he sometimes may become clothed with the garment of hypocrisy, he is committed to be frank with himself; and to proclaim to himself that falling into disobedience would put him under the curses.

❖ I may say that the whole people were submitted to this curse; as there is no one who has observed the Law all the time. But Christ added to these curses another one, saying, "*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'* (Galatians 3:13), by which the curse fell on everyone who is hanged on a tree; and who disobeyed the Law. And as it was necessary for Him who intends to liberate from the curse, to become, He free of it, Christ took upon Himself the other curse, to set us free of the first one.

It is like when an innocent man consented to receive the verdict of death in place of another, to spare him of the punishment. Christ took upon Himself, not the curse of disobedience, but the other curse, to take away the original curse from others. He, *"who committed no sin; nor was guile found in His mouth"* (1 Peter 2:22), by His death, He saved the mortals from death; and by bearing the curse, He saved them from

it[1].

St. John Chrysostom

"***Secretly***"(24); As all the mentioned sins could be secretly committed; the warning was directed to the conscience of the individual; and God calls the whole congregation to publicly condemn those sins.

"***All the words of this Law***" (26): The people connected to the covenant through entering into a curse (and an oath); a way well known in the East (Acts 23:12); was followed by Nehemiah (10:29); mentioned by Paul (Galatians 3:10); And Christ put the curse upon Himself Galatians 3:13) to set His people free from it.

c. With every proclamation of a curse, the people said '***Amen***.' But as the One capable of bearing the curse on our behalf, has come; We can say together with the apostle Paul: "*Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'"* (Galatians 3:13).

d. Together with every cry-out '***Amen***,' every true believer feels the inability of the Law, not only to offer blessing, but even to offer life. As everyone has fallen under death; the believer anticipates the coming of the Savior Messiah, who alone can bear the curse on our behalf; and grant us His blessed life "*We were kept under guard by the Law, kept for the faith who would afterward be revealed; the Law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith"* (Galatians 3:23, 24).

[1] *Commentary on Galatians 3:13.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 27)

SET OF MY HEART TWO TABLETS OF THE LAW AND MAKE IT AN ALTAR FOR YOURSELF

❖ My heart is in Your hands;
By Your fiery Spirit, inscribe on it Your commandment.
Set of it two tablets of the Law;
To bear the work of Your divine finger.

❖ Whoever takes Your commandment away from me, is taking away my heart.
And is depriving me of my life.
Your commandment will stay inside me until I cross over the new land.
It is my treasure and my heavenly deposit.

❖ Make out of my heart a holy altar for You.
On which burnt offerings of love are offered; as my whole being burns by my love for You.
On which I offer a sacrifice of peace;
As You are the Source of my reconciliation with Your holy Father.
You are the Grantor of true peace.
Set in my heart a banquet of love, offered on Your altar.
Where You enter to dine with me, and me with You.
Turn my heart into a banquet of joy; to bring back to me the joy of Your salvation.

❖ My ear rejoices by Your commandment; and is fulfilled by Your altar.
It contemplates on Your blessings that You incessantly proclaim
The curses will have no place in it.
Stand in my heart; and stretch Your hand with blessing.
You are the true Source of blessing.

CHAPTER 28
THE BLESSINGS AND THE CURSES

Having come close to the end of his farewell speech to his people, who were about to enter into the Promised Land, he provided them with the right to choose between obedience and disobedience. He revealed the blessings of obedience to the divine commandment; namely loyalty to the divine covenant; as well as the curses for the disobedience of the commandment; namely breaking of the covenant. This chapter confirms man's freedom to choose either of two ways; it is within his hands. God's grace is always ready to work in the life of those wishing for it.

In this talk about the blessings and curses, it is noticed:

1. While God presents His blessings to His people and children as a free gift or grace; yet, with His love for man, He requests from him to refrain from living with the spirit of slothfulness and confusion; but to walk as is fitting of a people referred to God; or as a son attached to the spirit of his father. He requests from them to be spiritually mature.

2. It was not possible for the people, at the start of their spiritual path, to present to them the rewards and punishments on an eternal level; but on the level of their temporal life; that, when the Word of God comes; and the believer gets mature, his insight would be greater, and his mind more mature, to seek the heavenliness and to fear the eternal punishment.

3. Those blessings and curses have their special concept for the Christian believer in the light of the biblical thought, and the encounter with the Lord Christ, who lifts him up, not to seek temporal blessings, nor to fear earthly strokes; but to seek for himself the Grantor of the blessings; and to fear the deprivation of the fellowship with Him in the heavenly glories.

A. BLESSINGS OF OBEDIENCE: 1–14

1. The blessings go after and attach themselves to the obedient 1–6.
2. Victory over enemies 7.
3. Enjoyment of riches 8.
4. Enjoyment of holiness 9.
5. Enjoyment of dignity 10.
6. Enjoyment of fruition 11.
7. Nature at the service of the obedient 12.
8. Enjoyment of the spirit of leadership 13–14.

B. CURSES OF DISOBEDIENCE 15–68

1. Curses go after and attach themselves to the disobedient 15–19.
2. Suffering from disturbance 20.
3. Suffering from plagues 21–22.
4. Nature opposes the disobedient 23–24.
5. Defeat before the enemies 25–26.
6. Deprivation from every gift 27–35.
7. Loss of dignity 36–37.
8. Deprivation from the fruition of the labor of hand 38–42.
9. Falling down and collapse 43–46.
10. Falling under servitude 47–57.
11. Falling under the plagues of Egypt 58–60.
12. Dwelling of destruction 61– 67.
13. An apostasy to Egypt 68.

A. BLESSINGS OF OBEDIENCE

By presenting blessings before curses, God proclaims that He is slow to anger, and fast to reveal love and mercy. He finds pleasure in blessing; reveals His longing that no one would fall under curse; and His desire for the success and holiness of His people (1-14). His promise came for a flood of blessings, physical and material, for those who are faithful to the covenant by observing the commandment. It is fitting for us in dealing with God, to be filled with the hope of the children for their Father's love, rather than with the terror of slaves from their master.

He presents to us the conditions for gaining the blessings; which are:

- Diligently obeying the voice of God (1-2), in order to bear inside us His holy will (13).
- Keeping the commandment of the Lord, and walking in His ways (9); not once, nor many times, but to keep it all the time, and to walk in His way up to its end, and not to its middle.
- Not to divert from the way to the right or to the left, and that would be neither by exaggeration, nor by slothfulness.

Here, he distinguishes between two kinds of blessings, integrated together; namely, the blessings that concern the people as a whole, and those that befall the individual and his family; although this could not be separated from that. As to the collective blessings, he says:

"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments, which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth" (Deut. 28:1)

He starts the blessings by the work of God with the congregation, setting it high above all nations of the earth. Dwelling in the highest, God will set out of His Church a heavenly congregation, which His Holy Spirit would bear, as though up to the throne; to become high above all nations of the earth.

This is the work of obedience. While bowing by our free will before God, He would lift up our mind, will, and all our depths, to bear heavenly features, not to be counted among the earthly creatures, but to enjoy fellowship with the heavenly ones. Speaking about the divine blessing, God is referred to His people; and the expression "the Lord your God' is repeated.

1. THE BLESSINGS GO AFTER AND ATTACH THEMSELVES TO THE OBEDIENT:

Whereas every man desiring to enjoy the blessing, wonders how to achieve it, the prophet here reveals the exalted love of God, who, wishing to lift us up to experience His blessed life, let the blessings go after man, who often assumes that he is unworthy of them; that, in the great day of the Lord, the believers say: *"Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You?"* (Matthew 25:37). We are in need, not to go after the blessing, but rather to open the gates of our hearts to it. The prophet sees the blessing as though a being or a person who goes after the believer, to reach him, attach to him, and to unite with him; saying:

"And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God" (Deut. 28:2)

He is addressing the people as a whole as though one person; The secret of the blessing is the unity of the people together, for all to enjoy what is for their edification, if they obey the voice of the Lord their God.

The blessing comes to the believer, reaches him, and presents itself to him

with all its exalted riches and divine possibilities; comes to bless all the aspects of his inner and outer life, and all his relationships, to grant him peace in his heart, and with others.

After revealing the divine blessings, working in us and dwelling within us; being a shadow of the Lord Christ who came to us; he clarified the following aspects of these blessings:

- **Their kinds**: earthly, mental, and spiritual blessings.
- **Their extension**: They work in the city as well as in the country (3). They will dwell everywhere; namely, we shall enjoy heavenly blessings pertaining the high city of Jerusalem; and temporal blessings pertaining to the field of ministry in this world.
- **Their work**: Blessings that touch all the aspects of our life: "***Blessed shall be the fruit of your body***" (sanctifying the Spirit); "***the produce of your ground"* (sanctifying the body); and *"the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle, and the offspring of your flocks***" (sanctifying the human energies); namely both the inner and the outer life (4).
- **Their range of care**: They care even for the daily needs of man: "***Blessed shall be your basket***" (luxuries like the fruits in those days); "***your kneading bowl***" (necessities like the daily bread) (5).
- **Their center**: They accompany man and attach to him wherever he is, when he comes in, and when he goes out (6).
- **Their capacity**: They keep him against his enemies, and grant him the spirit of conquest (7)
- **Their possibilities**: Blessings in their storehouses; and even to become a holy people; namely, a "***blessing to others***" (8).
- **Their goal**: Set us holy for the Holy One (9).
- **Their reward**: They will grant the believer dignity and awe (10).
- **Their results**: a perpetual fruition (11).
- **Their role**: The gates of heaven will open to flood the believer with blessings with no limits "***The Lord will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season*** (namely, sends His Holy Spirit to us***); and to bless all the work of your hand****" (12)*
- **Their mission**: Will set the believer as a leader and head (13).

a. "***Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country***" (Deut. 28:3). The blessing will reach the believer whatever his circumstances are; whether he is trading in the city; or working in the field in the country. He will enjoy the blessed divine life; whatever is his work, his position, or his role in the society. It was said: 'God created the country, and man made the cities.' And here, God confirms His care for this and that. He blesses the city with His divine righteousness, purifies its polluted atmosphere; leaves no place in them for evil; but fills them with the sweet fragrance of Christ.

b. "***Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground, and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle, and the offspring of your flocks***" (Deut. 28:4). God created the earth and everything on and in it for the sake of man. If man is blessed, blessed will be the earth serving him with all its possibilities and herds. Whereas if he is cursed; God will say to him: "*Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life ; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field*" (Genesis 3:17, 18). The blessing will be in the inner depths "***the fruit of your body***;" and in the outer life

"***the produce of your ground***;" as well as in the body with all its instincts "the increase of your herds."

c. "***Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl***" (Deut. 28:5). Some believe that the basket represents the place where man stores the fruits and agricultural produce; whereas the (small) kneading bowl is the vessel in which man kneads bread for the family just enough for one day. Thus God will bless the daily needs of man, and will let him in need of nothing.

d. "***Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you get out***" (Deut. 28:6). As the Psalmist says: "*The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in*" (Psalm 121:8). The blessing of the Lord, is not only in the inner and outer life of man, to bless his whole being, works, and possessions; but **will walk along with him and will accompany him** wherever he goes, in his coming in and in his going out.

2. VICTORY OVER ENEMIES

"The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee from you seven ways" (Deut. 28:7)

God does not promise the obedient believer that no enemy will attack him; but on the contrary He confirms to him that he will have many enemies; yet the opposition will lead him to conquest and victory, and he will enjoy glories and crowns, as enemies are only one step to glory. Our life will be a perpetual battle, in which the devil will attack the believer with all his hosts and evil works, together with his long experience, and deceit; concentrating on them as though in one way; but he will, by the grace of God, the Grantor of conquest, be scattered before the believer in several ways.

3. ENJOYMENT OF RICHES

"The Lord will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you" (Deut. 28:8)

Accompanying the believer and dwelling in him, the blessing of the Lord, will not only lift him up to heaven to set him above all nations of the earth, but will bless even his temporal possibilities "***his storehouses***," and will turn his hand into a blessing; "***in all to which you set your hand;***" even the ground will be blessed because of him. With the blessing of the Lord, the believer will praise, saying: "*A little that a religious man has, is better than the riches of many wicked*" (Psalm 37:16).

God will open up the gates of heaven before the faithful to get his fulfillment; and, with no limit. He will grant him from His treasure everything new. And at the same time, He will bless the land on which he walks, and all to which he sets his hand, to fill up his storehouses with riches. Whereas the rich man who lacks the blessing of the Lord, will never get fulfilled; and as the wise Solomon says: "*He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them; So what profit have the owners, except to see them with their eyes…There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt, but those riches perish through misfortune; When he begets a son, there is nothing in his hand. As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return. To go as he came; and he shall take nothing from his labor which he may carry away in his hand*" (Ecclesiastes 5:10-15).

The apostle James says: "*Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten"* (James 5:1, 2). On the contrary, in case there is the blessing of the Lord, even if the storehouses of man are not full, he would be counted as rich. The Psalmist says: *"A little that a righteous man has, is better than the riches of many wicked"* (Psalm 37:16).

4. ENJOYMENT OF HOLINESS

"The Lord will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways" (Deut. 28:9)

"***Establish***" *or "raise up"* is the same word used by the Lord Christ when He restored to life the daughter of Jairus, and came in (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18) ; proclaiming setting a new thing. Setting of men a holy people, is one of the most valuable of divine gifts, that makes out of man a being referred to God, who bears His divine righteousness and holiness.

The concept of holiness is dedicating man with his whole being to the Holy God. If God is preoccupied with the salvation and glorification of man, the believer, in response to God's love should dedicate all his energies, by the Holy Spirit of God, on account of His kingdom.

This blessing also bears the concept of settling down and solid establishing; The church of God, every home, and even every heart, need the exalted hand of God to establish His kingdom in them; according to the evangelist St. Luke: "*The churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily"* (Acts 16:5). The apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans wrote: "*For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established"* (Romans 1:11); and to the Colossians: *"As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, routed and built up in him and established in the faith"* (Colossians 2:6, 7); and to the Hebrews: "*Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace"* (Hebrews 13:9). The apostle Peter says: "*Therefore I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know them, and are established in the present truth"* (2 Peter 1:12).

That is how God establish His people in the holiness that is His, to become His icon that no power can remove or smudge. It is of the work of the Holy Spirit in our depths.

5. ENJOYMENT OF DIGNITY

"Then all peoples of earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and shall be afraid of you" (Deut. 28:10)

"***The name of the Lord***" is the Lord, as He proclaims Himself. When we are called by His name, acquire Him, and bear His fear and dignity in us, all peoples of the earth will be afraid of us. Of the spiritual Israelites, it is said: *"to whom pertain the adoption and the glory"* (Romans 9; 4). Israel has got the shadow; whereas we have got the grace and the truth; as according to the apostle: "*For the Law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things"* (Hebrews 10:1).

Through obedience, the fear of God working in us is proclaimed; and through fear, lest we may hurt the feelings of His love, He pays us back this fear, by the others fearing us. God will honor whoever honors Him; and whoever fears Him, will be granted dignity and fear. It was said about the church: "*Fear came upon every soul"* (Acts 2:43).

The world fears the prayers of the righteous; although they bear no hate toward them. They feel fear and apprehension before God who is pleased with them and dwells in them.

Being called by the name of God, it is fitting for us to bear Him, not just by outer appearance, but through holding fast in Him; as according to the apostle Paul, "*For they are not all Israel who are of Israel"* (Romans 9:6). In the great day of the Lord, those who bear His name superficially, will be separated from those who spiritually bear His power; as "*Not every one who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness'"* (Matthew 7:21-23).

6. ENJOYMENT OF FRUITION

"And the Lord will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground in the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers to give you" (Deut. 28:11)

Together with the dignity that the believer will enjoy as a divine gift, God will grant him plenty of goods that will never decrease; goods in his children, the fruit of his body; goods in his possessions as the livestock; and goods in the land in which he dwells.

7. NATURE AT THE SERVICE OF THE OBEDIENT

"The Lord will open to you His good treasure the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow" (Deut. 28:12)

When the believer by obedience, opens his heart to God, heaven will open up its gates, to rain, not its treasures, but the Grantor of all treasures, the rain of the Holy Spirit, who works in the believer's life, granting him the blessing and the conquest, together with eternity.

❖ Even heaven will be also called new, when it is no more bronze; but gives rain; and the earth, likewise, becomes new, when it is no more barren[1].

St. John Chrysostom

Man, who is faithful in his relationship with God, will behold the gates of heaven open before him, to draw from their storehouses, not the water of rain, but the nature of love. He will long to lend and to give, rather than to take; to have his heart become spacious with compassion, that floods all around him abundantly.

8. ENJOYMENT OF THE SPIRIT OF LEADERSHIP

"And the Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them. So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them" (Deut. 28:13-14)

When obedience is connected with humility, God will grant His children, not the spirit of humiliation, but that of living and true leadership. The believer would be a head and not a tail. The wise Solomon says of the acquirement of the divine wisdom: *"Exalt her, and she will promote you; she will bring you honor, when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace"* (Proverb 4:8, 9).

[1] *In Hebr. hom. 14:6.*

God grants His children the spirit of perpetual growth, to be promoted all the time, and never fall; it may be a slow growth, yet an un-defeatable, perpetual and steadfast one.

Connecting to His Savior, the Only-Begotten Firstborn Son, the believer himself, also becomes a firstborn. And in his obedience to the King of kings, he becomes a king. He continues to be in a perpetual growth, longing to reach the perfect measure of the stature of Christ.

❖ The Law requires of the believer who observes it, to keep walking in the way, described by the Lord as "*narrow and difficult*" (Matthew 7:14); and not to turn aside from it, to the right hand or to the left.

This teaching is based on the fact that virtue is distinguished by moderation. Any evil is naturally done through either the lack or the exaggeration of virtue. Cowardice is a lack of virtue, whereas extravagance is an exaggeration of practicing it.

In all other things, in which you strive to reach what is better, you have to take the middle way in between the close evils.

The wisdom is to take the middle way between and simplicity; the wisdom of serpents, or the innocence of doves (Matthew 10:16) is not always commended, if one of them is chosen alone. Virtue is rather a strong combination of both along the way.

The person who lacks moderation is loose; and he, who goes beyond moderation,(2timothy 4: 2) will have, according to the apostle, a troubled conscience. One would surrender himself to pleasures with no limit; while the other would wrongly think of marriage, as though it is adultery. Moderation is walking along the middle way between the two[1].

St. Gregory of Nyssa

[1] *Life of Moses 287-290.*

B. CURSES OF DISOBEDIENCE

Having revealed the joyful aspect of obedience, here he reveals the dark aspect of disobedience. If we do not observe the commandments, we shall, not only be deprived of the promised blessings, which provide us with every kind of happiness, but we shall cast ourselves under the curse, which provides us with every misery.

God proclaimed the power of His blessings and their activity in the life of the believer; but at the same time, He revealed the seriousness of disobedience, in order that the believer would not assume that the spiritual life is love with no control or law. Here, He presents a horrible portrait of what would befall the people because of their diversion from God, the Source of their life, their growth, fulfillment, joy, holiness, and inner freedom. Many scholars believe that this part of the chapter represents the most horrible part in the Holy Bible. Matthew Henry states that a man could not bear to read the curses that came in it; he tore out this chapter altogether from the Holy Bible. He did not realize that love has to be clothed with firmness; and that God's exalted love, could not be enjoyed without the divine fear.

In every nation, there are people who could be described as children spiritually, who need some kind of fear to lift them up to maturity, until they practice obedience through love. What are here called curses, are expressing the divine anger against sin or evil. God's anger is holy, and could not be separated from His love. He gets angry because of sin, longing to liberate the sinner from it. The curses are but natural fruition of man's separation from the Source of every blessing. When we talk about what God allows of curses; their source is not God the whole love and the Giver of goods; but they are the fruit of our evil will, separated from the Source of blessing.

The true love goes hand in hand with faithfulness and seriousness in work, and not slothfulness and un-faithfulness.

The curse in the Holy Bible

Blessings and curses represent an essential factor in spiritual life and in biblical thought. But there is a great difference between the concept of the curse in the Holy Bible, and that of the pagan world. The pagans believe the curse to be a divine anger, or a work of magic, which would not be removed through repentance and spiritual behavior; but through the use of magic words and works. The Holy Bible, on the other hand, sees the following in the curse:

A curse is a natural fruit of sin: When the sinner tastes its pledge in the present world, he would probably re-evaluate his position, and repent his sin. Otherwise, he would taste the fullness of bitterness in the coming world. If the blessing is the gift of God the Righteous One, the curse, on the other hand, is the fruit of evil done by the wicked and the sinner (Proverb 11:31). Sin will bring confusion, chaos, and corruption to the soul, to turn everything in and out of man corrupt (see Galatians 6:8; Romans 6:21).

The work of curse is corruption: It corrupts the mind, the heart, the will, and the whole inner being of man. It is a blessing of the Lord that we are not aware of the extent of what the curse would do in us; especially in the world to come, lest we fall into despair. What this chapter reveals of the work of curse in the life of man is but a shadow of what to happen in the depths of the soul, and to be revealed in the great day of the Lord.

A curse deprives nature of the natural fruition: God has set for nature laws, by which it consummates its work, and brings on the increasing fruits for the happiness of man, which it cannot do without divine help. The curse, being a separation of man from God the Almighty, leads to an utter confusion of the laws of

nature.

A curse is a deprivation from life: Wherever it dwells, it separates man from God, the Source of life; and death would come to him wherever he is. We do not fall under a curse for no reason, nor for one of no significance, as God does not search for a chance to come against us, nor intends to enter with us into a conflict. The following categories fall under curse:

a. Those who despise God, and refuse to listen to His voice (15), considering His voice not worthy of listening to.

b. Those that disobey Him.[20] God would never cast us away, unless we cast Him away of our life.

Possibility of the curse

God does not wish man to have curse and not blessing. He has created him to enjoy the fellowship of life with Him. But sin turns light into darkness, the sweetness of life into bitterness, and the food into poison.

- Curse turns **man's exalted mind**, with all its capabilities and possibilities, into a center of confusion. It acts like a virus to a computer that corrupts its memory, and confuses all its data.
- Curse turns **the beautiful nature** that is created to serve man, into a tool for his sufferings and troubles.
- Curse turns **the body** which is supposed to share with the soul its rejoice of God, the Creator of all, into a center of lusts that destroy both the soul and the body.
- Curse turns **the children**, from being the source of joy, into that of anxiety.
- Curse turns **possessions**, from being the source of man's fulfillment, into the cause of disturbance.
- Curse corrupts **the exalted system of nature** with all its precise laws, into a state of chaos.
- Finally, as the curse dwells in man, it turns him into someone **in a kind of unconsciousness**; to see the son as a furnace of fire; nature as an agent of limitless curses; and the future as darkness destructive to the soul.

Escaping from the curse:

All curses generally come upon us, and overtake us, even if we try to escape from them or to overcome them (15). God's anger will follow the sinner, even if he tries desperately to flee from its power (Job 27:22). Nobody can flee from God, but everybody can flee to Him. Nobody can flee from His justice, but everybody can flee to His mercy (Psalm 21:7-8).

Wherever the sinner will go, curse will follow him; and wherever he may be, it will come upon and settle in him. He would not find protection within the walls of the city; and the pure air of the field will not protect him from the corrupt smoke. *"The curse of the Lord is on the house of the wicked"* (Proverb 3:33). And when he comes out of the house, he cannot leave it back there and flee from it; as it gets into his heart, and infiltrates into his bones.

Curse for him is like the ground on which he stands, as it happened with Cain (Genesis 4:11). The curse will dwell in the basket and the storehouse; namely, in his mind and conscience (Timothy 1:15). He will never find comfort, but will lose the peace of his heart and mind.

Because the curse will come upon all to which he sets his hand,[20] he will be in great despair.

God threatens to bring on very severe judgments; as it came in (Ezekiel

14:21). If man does not repent, he will face double as much.

Curse and prophecy

Some believe that the curses, which came here, are all prophecies that were realized along the eras:

* The Assyrian and the Chaldean attacks, mentioned in (15), and in Jeremiah 4:13.
* The Babylonian captivity for the duration of 70 years.
* The Roman occupation as foreign enemies (49, 50).
* The siege of Jerusalem by Titus, as it came in Josephus the Historian[1].
* The hundreds and even thousands of Jews who were sold as slaves along the generations.

❖ Those wicked people tend to kill themselves by every kind of lusts… Yes, Even when they live, they do in disgrace; considering their bellies as their gods; and will get tortured when they die[2].

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

1. CURSES GO AFTER AND ATTACH THEMSELVES TO THE DISOBEDIENT

Seeing the blessings like someone going after the believer, intending to catch up with him, to enter into his depths. The curses are seen doing the same. There is a struggle between God and the devil. As God intends to acquire man as His own child, to grant him eternal glories, the devil intends to do likewise; doing his best to acquire him as his son to partake of his perdition.

"But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all his commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you" (Deut. 28:15)

Curses try to chase man wherever he goes, to offer him everything contrary to blessings. Curses intend to work in man, whether he is in the city or in the country, to touch both his inner and outer life, to corrupt even his daily work, and to accompany him in his coming in and in his going out.

"Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country. Cursed shall be your basket, and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out" (Deut. 28:16-19).

The curse here is the deprivation of the city and the country of every touch of life; for death to come everywhere.

2. SUFFERING FROM DISTURBANCE

"The Lord will send on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do, until you are destroyed, and until you perish quickly, because of the wickedness of your doings in which you have forsaken Me" (Deut. 28:20)

If the fruit of the Spirit is love mixed with joy (Galatians 5:22), where the Spirit carries the soul as though to heaven to taste the eternal joy, while still in the midst of confusion, worries, and temptations of this world, the work of sin, especially disobedience, is to deprive man of this heavenly atmosphere; as with disobedience, man gives his back to God, the source of the true inner joy, casting himself into the hell of anxiety and disturbance, in all that he sets his hand to do, and bringing himself

[1] *Josephus: Wars of the Jews, Book 5:10:3; 6:3:3,4; 6:6:2.*
[2] *Paschal Letters 7.*

to inner destruction.

3. SUFFERING FROM PLAGUES

"The Lord will make the plague cling to you until he has consumed from the land which you are going to possess. The Lord will strike you with consumption, with fever, with inflammation, with severe burning fever, with the sword, with scorching, and with mildew, they shall pursue you until you perish" (Deut. 28:21, 22)

In the Septuagint version, the word 'plague' came as 'death;' as when man, by his disobedience, refuses to attach himself to God, the Source of life, he brings death upon himself. All kinds of maladies will come upon him, until his body and soul both wither. Thus he loses his vitality, and becomes like a dead corpse.

Together with every kind of maladies to man's body, his crops will be infected by pests like blight: *"I blasted you with blight and mildew, When your gardens increased, Your vineyards, Your gif trees, And your olive trees, the locusts devoured them; Yet you have not returned to Me, says the Lord"* (Amos 4:9). And also the withering, caused by the east winds, as it came in Pharaoh's dream: "…*and seven ears, withered thin, and blighted by the east wind"* (Genesis 41:23); when the hot wind strikes the ears of grain before it bears the fruit, causing them to dry up.

4. NATURE OPPOSES THE DISOBEDIENT

"And your heavens which are over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you shall be iron. The Lord will change the rain of your land to powder and dust; from the heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed" (Deut. 28:23, 24)

Nature created by God for the happiness and fulfillment of man, will stand against him; the heaven shall turn into bronze that bring no rain; and the earth shall turn into iron in which no seeds can grow. Famine will come over earth, man will suffer a decrease of produce; according to the warning of God: "*I will break the pride of your power; I will make your heaven like iron and your earth like bronze. And your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce; nor shall the trees of your land yield their fruit"* (Leviticus 26:19, 20).

Instead of rain falling from heaven on earth, heavy sand and dust will fall that blind the eyes. Man will lose his comfort, and his sound sight to things.

So, by giving his back to God, man loses the gift of His Holy Spirit, his soul (the heaven) will turn into bronze that bears no fruit of the Spirit; and his body will bear the spirit of rebellion and opposition, to become like iron.

5. DEFEAT BEFORE THE 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; and you shall become troublesome to all the nations of the earth. Your carcasses shall be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and no one shall frighten them away" (Deut. 28:25-26)

Before their entrance into the Promised Land, and their enjoyment of conquest over the nations dwelling in Canaan, God confirmed to them, that if they disobeyed His commandment, they would lose their conquest and their honor; and their carcasses would become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth; both on the level of the people as a whole, and that of every individual. As the prophet Elijah said to the wife of Jeroboam: "*The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Jeroboam and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field, for the*

Lord has spoken" (1 Kings 14:11). And as it came in the psalms: *"O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; Your holy temple they have defiled. They have laid Jerusalem in heaps. The dead bodies of your servants, they have given as food for the birds of the heavens, the flesh of Your saints to the beasts of the earth"* (Psalm 79:1, 2). And according to the words of the Lord on the tongue of the prophet Jeremiah: *"Therefore behold, the days are coming, says the Lord… the corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the heaven and for the beasts of the earth; and no one will frighten them away"* (Jeremiah 7:32, 33).

The literal translation of the phrase "***troublesome to all the nations of the earth**,"* is that it will be moved by the nations of the earth here and there, up and down; namely, it will be like a ball for their feet; as it was said: "*I will hand them over to trouble to all kingdoms of the earth"* (Jeremiah 15:4); and "*I will deliver them to trouble into all the kingdoms of the earth, for their harm, to be a reproach and a byword, a taunt and a curse, in all places where I shall drive them"* (Jeremiah 24:9; 29: 18) .

6. DEPRIVATION FROM EVERY GIFT

If God struck the Egyptians who enslaved His people, when Pharaoh refused to allow them to go to sacrifice to the Lord in the wilderness; this people, if they disobeyed the Lord and refused to submit to Him in obedience and faithfulness to His covenant, they would fall under similar strikes with no partiality of nations over another. Every nation will enjoy the blessings of the Lord or fall under His strikes, according to its position as far as the commandment is concerned. That is why He says: "***The Lord will strike you with the boils of Egypt**"* (27); namely, with various strikes; physical, mental, psychological, social, familial, economic, military etc.

a. **Physical strikes**: "***The Lord will strike you with the boils of Egypt, with tumors, with the scab, and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed**"* (27).

b. **Mental strikes**: When man is stricken with some kind of madness, to become unable to take the wise decision in running his life; with some kind of mind blindness, to lose his way as though groping in darkness at noonday; like what happened with the leaders of the Jews who became blind to recognize the Lord Christ 'the Sun of righteousness;" loved the darkness and rejected the Light of the world. Man would fall into confusion of the heart, to become unable to know the difference between the truth and the vanity; and become hesitant in his decisions.

"The Lord will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart; and you shall grope at noonday, as a blind man gropes in darkness" (Deut. 28:28-29).

The Jewish people have been stricken with spiritual blindness. Although He called them "My servant and My messenger;" and it was fitting for them to preach the Messiah the Savior of the world; yet their eyes were blinded to see Him, and their minds to understand the prophecies about Him; hence He rebukes them, saying: "*Hear, you deaf; and look, you blind, that you may see. Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as he who is perfect, and a blind as the Lord's servant?"* (Isaiah 42:18-19) As it came in Zephaniah: "*They shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord"* (Zephaniah 1:17). And as according to our teacher the apostle Paul concerning those who rejected the word of the gospel: "*Whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them"* (2 Corinthians 4:4).

c. **Social strikes**: He would fall under social oppression; would cry out all the

days of his life, with no one to respond to him or to give him justice; and would moan of oppression, and accuse all who are round him; not realizing that his disobedience to God, and his rejection of His love, would deprive him even of the enjoyment of his social rights.

"You shall not prosper in your ways; you shall be only oppressed and plundered continuously, and no one shall save you" (Deut. 28:29).

d. **Familial strikes**: Strokes within his family; He would fall into captivity, and his children would be delivered as slaves to another nation.

"You shall betroth a wife, but another man shall lie with her; you shall build a house, but you shall not dwell in it; you shall plant a vineyard, but shall not gather its grapes. Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you shall not eat of it; your donkey shall be violently taken away from before you, and shall not be restored to you; your sheep shall be given to your enemies, and you shall have no one to rescue them" (Deut. 28:30, 31)

e. **Military strikes**: His country shall be delivered to the enemies because of his sins; his children shall become slaves to strangers; he will see them humiliated before his eyes, unable to help them. The enemy will enjoy all the fruits of his land, while he and his countrymen live in hunger and disgrace.

"Your sons and your daughter shall be given to another people, and your eyes shall look and fail with longing for them all day long, and there shall be no strength in your hand" (Deut. 28:32)

f. **Economic and material strikes**: He would be stricken in his possessions; building a house, to be taken away from him, and stay homeless; planting a vine to be denied the enjoyment of eating its grapes and drinking its wine; to see his ox slaughtered before his eyes, and not eating from it; his donkey violently taken away and not restored to him; and his sheep given to his enemies, and no one to save him of all this oppression.

"A nation whom you have not known shall eat the fruit of your land and the produce of your labor, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually. So you shall be driven mad because of the sight, which your eyes see.

The Lord will strike you in the knees and on the legs with severe boils which cannot be healed, and from the sole of your foot to the top of your head" (Deut. 28:33-35)

And as it came in the prophet Zephaniah: "*Their goods shall become booty, and their houses a desolation; they shall build houses, but not inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards, but not drink their wine"* (Zephaniah 1:13). And in the prophet Micah: *"You shall sow but not reap; you shall tread the olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil; and make wine, but not drink wine"* (Micah 6:15).

7. LOSS OF DIGNITY

"The Lord will bring you and the king whom you set over you to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods – wood and stone. And you shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations where the Lord will lead you" (Deut. 28:36-37).

He spoke about the military strike, which is the collapse of the nation because of sin, for the people to fall into captivity. Now he tells us about a strike of losing honor. God has created man to live as a master on earth, and not to be enslaved by anyone. The earth and everything above and below it were created to serve man. Man was not created to be a slave under his brother. Yet, if he delivers himself to the servitude of sin, instead of the freedom given to him by God, God will sometimes

allow for him to be deprived of honor and freedom, to give him the chance to stand before his depths to search them, to get back freedom and liberation from the servitude of the devil, by returning to God.

It is amazing to notice the following here:

1. What happens to us of bitterness, like captivity with all its servitude, humiliation and ridicule, are allowed by God; as it is said: "***The Lord will bring you … where the Lord will lead you***".

2. Although it so seems that God is harsh in delivering His own people to a foreign nation to chastise them; yet whoever becomes harsh on soul, does not care for its salvation or freedom, and does not care for falling in servitude, would be worthy of a temporary servitude.

3. When the people disobey God and reject His commandments, He lets them be captivated by a pagan nation; fall into idolatry, and be humiliated until they return to God; not just to worship Him, but to respond to His commandments. This was literally realized, when Israel and Judah were captivated by Assyria and Babylon; became in the humiliation of captivity, until God allowed for their return to Jerusalem.

8. DEPRIVATION FROM THE FRUITION OF THE LABOR OF HAND

"You shall carry much seed out to the field but gather but little in; for the locust shall consume it. You shall plant vineyards and tend them, but you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat them. You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil; for your olives shall drop off. You shall beget sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours; for they shall go into captivity. Locusts shall consume all your trees and the produce of your land" (Deut. 28: 38- 42)

Moreover all these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you, until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes, which He commanded you. And they shall be upon you for a sign and a wonder, and on your descendants forever" (Deut. 28:45-46)

By saying "***forever,***" God proclaims His ultimate rejection of Israel, as long as it refused faith in the true Messiah. As a people, they are no longer the one chosen by God, having opposed the Savior of the world. But whoever returns to faith, and accepts Him, in whom the prophecies that are within their hands were realized, will find the arms of God outstretched to him with love and acceptance. He will be waiting for the faithful few remnants (Isaiah 10:22; 6:13; Romans 9:27; 11:5).

❖ The (Word of God) is food, ornament and security for the soul; there would be, in not listening to it, famine and deprivation[1].

St. John Chrysostom

9. FALLING DOWN AND COLLAPSE

"The alien who is among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come down lower and lower. He shall lend to you, but you shall not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you shall be the tail" (Deut. 43-45).

10. FALLING UNDER SERVITUDE

Whoever refuses to serve God would be committed to serve others by force; and whoever does not worship God, would be a slave to many. That is why **St.**

[1] *In Matt. hom. 2:10.*

Arsanius often said: [It is better for you to be a slave to one master, than to be a slave to many.]

"Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things, therefore you shall serve enemies, whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of all things; and he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you. The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand, a nation of fierce countenance, which does not respect the elderly nor show favor to the young. And they shall eat the increase of your livestock and the produce of your land, until you are destroyed; they shall not leave you grain or new wine or oil, or the increase of your cattle or the offspring of your flock, until they have destroyed you" (Deut. 28:47-51)

Because of disobedience, Assyria invaded Israel and captivated it (Isaiah 5:26; 38:11; 23:19); and Babylon invaded Judah and captivated it. Here, he speaks more about the Roman Empire. He describes the nation that was going to chastise the people as being like an eagle; which was a prophecy of the invasion by the Roman Empire (following those by Assyria, Babylon, Made, Persia, and Greece). The eagle was the distinguishing sign of the Roman army. The word 'eagle' in Latin is '*aquila*,' was used by some scholars to mean a military regiment.

That nation, they did not understand its language, as they spoke in Latin; a nation of fierce countenance, which did not respect the elderly nor showed favor to the young; the slogan of the Romans was: 'Violence is life[1].'

"They shall besiege you at all your gates until your high and fortified walls in which you trust, come down throughout all your land, and they shall besiege you at all your gates throughout all your land which the Lord your God has given you.

You shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom the lord your God has given you, in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you. The man among you who is sensitive and very refined will be hostile toward his brother, toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the rest of his children whom he leaves behind, so that he will not give any of them the flesh of his children whom he will eat, because he has nothing left in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you at all your gates" (Deut. 28:52-55)

When man assumes that he can protect himself behind the strong high walls, the curse would draw him out of where he assumes to be the source of his security, to find himself helpless. No fortified strongholds can protect him (Deuteronomy 9:1), nor chariots and horses (Psalm 20:7), nor great number and wealth (Proverb 10:15), nor political experience and alliances with foreign powers (Isaiah 30), can protect him, because God's mighty hand forsakes him.

I wish we do not hide behind self-righteousness; as "*every mouth may be stopped before the Lord"* (Romans 3:19); or put our trust in vain things (Matthew 3:9; 7:22); or justify ourselves by excuses (Matthew 25:26; Luke 14:18).

He presents a very bitter portrait for the tender and delicate queen, of authority, who used to be always carried on shoulders, but now humiliated in captivity; saying:

"The tender and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground because of her delicateness and sensitivity, will

[1] *Caes. Hisp. 30; cf Matt. 24:28.*

refuse to the husband of her bosom, to her son and her daughter, her placenta which comes out from her feet, and her children whom she bears; for she will eat them secretly for lack of all things in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you at all your gates" (Deut. 28:56-57)

The queens were used to go to extremes in adornments and pretence of tenderness, in order to get more respect and honor; whereas man's honor, whether a man or a woman, a king or a slave, is not in his or her outer adornments, or in what he or she pretends to be, but in what his or her depths bear of good personality, wisdom, and inner bond to the heavenly One.

11. FALLING UNDER THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT

"If you do not carefully observe all the words of this Law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, the Lord your God, then the Lord will bring upon you and your descendants extraordinary plagues – great and prolonged plagues – and serious and prolonged sicknesses. Moreover He will bring back on you all the diseases of Egypt of which you were afraid, and they shall cling to you" (Deut. 28:58-60)

It is obvious that he does not mean here the book of Deuteronomy, but what the prophet Moses has presented of the commandments and statutes that God delivered to him.

*"**The glorious and awesome name**"* (58): God's names in the book of Deuteronomy warrant a study. He is *"the living God"* (5:26); *"God of our fathers"* (6:3); *"God of gods, and Lord of lords"* (10:17; Revelation 19:16); *"The Rock… A God of truth"* (32:4); *"The Most High"*(32:8; *"The eternal God"* (33:27). But the most frequently used is *"The Lord your God."*

What does he mean by saying, "***Written in this book***"? At that time, the book of Deuteronomy was not yet written. Some scholars believe that to mean the Book of Law that the prophet Moses received from God.

He connects between keeping the commandment or acting according to it and the enjoyment of the fear of the Lord our God. As through the fear of God we keep the commandment, and through keeping the commandment we taste the sweetness of the fear of God; practically experience it and grow in it.

God brought upon the Egyptians the ten plagues mentioned in the book of Exodus (7-11); to let His people enjoy the exodus, receive the divine commandment, and realize the covenant with God. Now, as the people refuse to respond to the divine commandment, and do not keep it, they are worthy of falling under the same plagues under which the Egyptians fell.

12. DWELLING OF DESTRUCTION

"Also every sickness and every plague, which is not written in the book of this Law, will the Lord bring upon you until you are destroyed. You shall be left few in number, whereas you were as the stars of heaven in multitude, because you would not obey the voice of the Lord your God.

And it shall be, that just as the Lord your God rejoiced over you to do you good and multiply you, so the Lord will rejoice over you and bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land, which you are going to possess. Then the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known – wood and stone.

And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place, but there the Lord will give you a trembling heart, failing

eyes, and anguish of soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life.

In the morning you shall say, Oh, that it were evening!' And in the evening you shall say, 'Oh, that it were morning!' because of the fear which terrifies your heart, and because of the sight which your eyes see" (Deut. 28:61-67)

Now, as His people refused to attach to Him, He chastises them even to destruction, with the hope that the few remnants of them will return to Him. He rejoices over them to chastise them, to scatter them among the peoples from one end of the earth to the other end.

"'For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies' says the Lord; Therefore turn and live'" (Ezekiel 18:32); and the Lord Christ Himself wept over the falling Jerusalem (Luke 19:41).

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic believes that the words of the prophet Moses: "***Your life shall hang in doubt before you****,"* constitute a prophecy about the death of the Lord Christ, who was hanged on the cross by the unbelieving Jews[1].

❖ If they cared for the prophecy of Moses, they would not have hanged Him, who was their life[2].

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic

By saying, "***Your life shall hang in doubt before you****"* he means that it will be like something hanged by a thread before someone, who expects it to fall any moment.

13. AN APOSTASY TO EGYPT

"And the Lord will take you back to Egypt in ships, by the way of which I said to you, 'You will never see it again.' And there you shall be offered for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you" Deut. 28:68)

The worst curse was probably being taken back to Egypt to be sold there as slaves to their enemies; and in disgust, no one will buy them.

Some believe that *Egypt* here, is a symbol of what befell the Jews, when they fell in captivity to several nations; whereas others believe that that has literally been realized after Titus took over Jerusalem, and carried a great number of Jews to Egypt where they lived a bitter life of servitude, up till the days of Hadrian[3].

Some say that the worst enemy of mankind on earth is man himself; as when he oppresses his fellow man, he becomes fiercer than wild beasts. That is why he saved the threat of captivity and servitude to the end, being the worst of curses.

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[1] *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei, 35:2.*
[2] *Paschal Letters, 10:5.*
[3] *Josephus. De Bell, Jud. 6:9:2; Philo: Flace and Leg. Ad Laium.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY (Chapter 28)

LET YOUR BLESSING ATTACH TO ME

❖ Foolishly, I was searching for Your blessing;
Thinking that they are very far from me to acquire.
Then I found it knocking on the gate of my heart;
Seeking my friendship, love, and submission.
Let Your blessing enter into my depths and attach to me; I am sick of love.

❖ Let Your blessing work in my life;
In my work, my home, and my church;
To occupy all my being;
My soul, body, mind, and all my energies.
To reign inside me, and to lead all my being;
To work in my eating, drinking, sleeping, and waking up.

❖ Yes, let Your blessing become the leader!
To move all my being in the battle of the Spirit.
By it, I will conquer every enemy and every corruption,
By it, I will enjoy thrones of eternal glory.

❖ Let Your blessing set guards on the storehouses of my heart,
To turn it into a sanctuary for You.
To enjoy following Your example, O the all holy One!
To become a living icon of You, O the only holy One!

❖ Let Your blessing carry me up to Your heaven;
Let it reveal for me Your divine mysteries;
And grant me a place in Your exalted secret place;
To encounter You, and unite with You, O the divine Groom of my soul.

❖ Your blessing turns my life into an incessant heavenly joy.
It makes me a head and not a tail;
It opens for me the treasures of heaven;
And blesses the goods of the earth;
And everything to which I set my hand;
Your blessing will lift me up to You, to stay with You forever.

THE THIRD DIVISION

THE THIRD SERMON
(Deut. 29 to 30)
THE COMMANDMENTS AND
THE CONSTITUTION OF LAWS

- **Reminding them of the Covenant** **29.**
- **The possibility of realization of the Covenant** **30.**

Now, as the prophet Moses presents his final farewell sermon (Deuteronomy 27-30), he speaks about the future in the Promised Land. In it we find what is called '**The Palestinian Covenant**,' which God made with Israel.

God entered with mankind into covenants that began since the days of the early man and ended by the exalted covenant made by the Lord Christ in His body on the cross.

- **The Adamic covenant**: Adam has got a divine promise to open the gate for the hope of salvation by crushing the head of the serpent that was realized by the cross.
- **The Noahic covenant**:. Noah has got a divine covenant after the renewal of the earth by the water; the Holy Spirit of God through the sacrifice of the Lord Christ realized that.
- **The Abrahamic covenant**: Abraham has got a divine promise, that by his seed all the nations would be blessed; that was realized as the Lord Christ opened the gates of His Church to the whole world.
- **The Mosaic covenant**: The prophet Moses has got a divine promise when he received the Law and the divine commandments; and as the Lord Christ came, the divine Word Himself came to dwell among us.
- **The Palestinian covenant**: The promises given in Canaan are all symbols of entering into the higher Canaan, the open heaven, through the King of glory; which all were realized by the covenant we got in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- **The Messianic covenant or the New covenant**.

In order that the people would keep the covenant made by God with them in the land of Moab and in Horeb (29:1), Moses called them and gave them this sermon as a renewal of the covenant. After speaking about the blessings of keeping the commandments, and the curses of disobedience; and the tribes publicly partaking of their proclamation before the whole congregation; Moses uttered his third and final sermon. Certain scholars, however, considered that the third sermon begins by chapter 27. This sermon includes:

1. **Reminding them of the blessings of the Lord to them** (29:1-17); having set them free of the servitude of Pharaoh, cared for them in the wilderness, granted them conquest over kings, and granted them the Promised Land and the nations to serve them. The goal of all that was to let them enter into a covenant with God, being His own holy people; they are His, and He is theirs (29:13); a covenant made with all: with the leaders as well as with the people, with the children, as well as with women (29:10).

2**. A warning against turning away from God**, the Grantor of life, to go and serve foreign gods; on both the level of the individual, and that of the congregation (29:18); the same as the warning by the apostle Paul, saying: "*Looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled"* (Hebrew 12:15); "*that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood"* (29:18).

3. **The fruit of disobedience**; the curses mentioned in the previous sermon (28), to become an example to the generations (28:22-29).

4. **In order to encourage them to enjoy the obedience of the commandments**, he clarified that:

1. **The door of repentance is open**: We should not fall into despair as long as we are still in this world; as God anticipates our repentance to bring us back to Him (30:1-19); He is capable of making us holy by circumcising our hearts (30:6), to make them flare toward Him. God will rejoice over us for good, and will be pleased for

us (30:9); if we faithfully turn to Him with all our hearts and with all our souls (30:10).

2. **The commandment is not difficult**: nor it is outside us (a symbol of the Lord Christ dwelling in us). *"The word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it"* (30:14; and Romans 10:6-8).
3. **Our free will**: *"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil"* (30:15). We are without excuse, as long as God sanctifies our free will to choose our way with no commitment or compulsion.

CHAPTER 29
REMINDING THEM OF THE COVENANT

In the whole book of Deuteronomy, and even in the whole Bible, there is nothing that preoccupies the minds of the men of God, like the enjoyment of the covenant that God made with Abraham and his descendants after him; that preoccupied the minds of the prophet Moses and the prophets along the generations, until the Lord Christ came and sealed it by His precious blood.

Moses again reminds them of the dealings of God with them in their exodus and in the wilderness (2-9); inciting them to be faithful to the divine covenant; as a new generation chosen by God to be representatives of God Himself on earth (10-21). It is a collective covenant, in which he proclaims that God confirms the reference of the people to Him among the nations (22-29).

He did not mention the rite of the renewal of the covenant, as practiced by the new generation.

1. Reminding them of the covenant	**1-9.**
2. The two parties of the covenant	**10-15.**
3. Idolatry constitutes a breaking of the covenant	**16-28.**
4. The secret things belong to the Lord	**29.**

1. REMINDING THEM OF THE COVENANT

As the nature of man's memory tends to forget; especially in things concerning his relationship with God; God incites us to renew the covenant with Him, reminding us of His dealings with us in the past. Now, before the departure of the prophet Moses from this world, he reminded the people once and again of what God has done with them and with their fathers, from the time they were suffering from servitude in the land of Egypt, until they came to the Mount of Moab. God has previously made a covenant with their father Abraham. Now he does not present a new covenant different from the one set in Sinai, but he intends to confirm and renew that same covenant.

God is faithful in His eternal covenant that would never change. But, because man, with his corrupt heart forgets, or pretends to forget it for the sake of lust, pride, or material profit; he is in need for someone to remind him all the time of renewing the covenant with the Lord his Savior.

Moses clarified that the conditions of the covenant are not his own; but his role is to break the seals and to reveal what was set by the Lord Himself.

"These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb" (Deut. 29:1)

Although the covenant that He now sets in Moab, bears the same spirit as that previously set in Horeb; yet God presents it to every generation according to their situations, as though He is renewing it. God intends to confirm to every generation that the covenant is their own, and not that of the previous generations. It is a covenant convenient to the present generation.

(1) The covenant always starts with a reference to the great events that took place; that reveals the deals of God with His people.

"Now Moses called all Israel and said to them, 'You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land – the great trials which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great wonders" (Deut 29:2, 3)

The exodus from Egypt, the liberation from the servitude of Pharaoh; and all the signs and wonders that reveal God's plan toward His people, and His goal from the covenant He set with them.

Although he is speaking to a new generation born in the wilderness, yet he speaks about the exodus from Egypt, saying, *"You have seen… before your eyes, which your eyes have seen."* What their fathers have seen and talked to their children about is counted as something that the next generations have themselves seen and experienced.

(2) Although the past events testify to the dealings of God, and reveal His covenant; yet the problem is in man, who does not seek understanding and wisdom; something that brings grief to the heart of Moses.

"Yet the Lord has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day" (Deut. 29:4)

God wishes to give the believer a heart to perceive; according to the words of the wise Solomon: *"The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord has made both of them"* (Proverb 20:12); Yet He does not give it to him who opposes.

There are many who have eyes, yet they cannot see, because they do not seek the truth, but what is for their lusts. The Lord Christ came to His own, who, although they saw Him, yet without the eyes of faith. That is why they did not accept Him. And as the apostle Paul says: *"If they knew the Lord of glory, they would not have crucified Him."*

God granted man a heart that bears an inner insight and spiritual ears, by which he can see and hear. But, if he refuses to obey God, he would become as though he was not granted a heart to perceive, eyes to see, or ears to hear. With every practice of obedience with the spirit of love, the soul would ascend, as though one step of the ladder of heaven, led by the light of the Holy Spirit, who purifies its depths to become capable of seeing and of hearing the divine voice. By this, the renewal of the covenant with God, would become, not just presenting promises to God to respond to His love, but by the practical response to the Spirit of God, and the acceptance of the divine grace in the practical life; by which the soul ascends day after day, as though to heaven itself.

(3) God's dealing with them is perpetual and continuous. It did not stop at their exodus from the land of Egypt, or at the perdition of Pharaoh and his army; but He sustained the people for forty years in the wilderness, and let them need nothing. Referring to God's dealings, full of compassion toward His people, it is not the prophet Moses who speaks, but he lets God Himself do the talking:

"And I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet. You have not eaten bread, nor have you drunk wine or similar drink; that you may know that I am the Lord your God" (Deut. 29:5, 6)

God took on Himself the role of their leader; He also cared for their clothes, footwear, food, and drinks; He not only gave them what is necessary, but He even gave them wine that symbolizes joy.

(4) He granted them the conquest over their enemies:

"And when you came to this place, Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan came out against us to battle and we conquered them. We took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, to the Gadites, and to half the tribe of Manasseh" (Deut. 29:7, 8)

Together with the conquest He also granted them a flood of riches. He gave them the land of the enemies to inherit. Now, the prophet Moses calls them to keep

the covenant, and to practically realize it, in order to prosper in everything they do.

"Therefore keep the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in what you do" (Deut. 29:9)

The prophet Moses did not refer, as far as the renewal of the covenant is concerned, to the animal sacrifices, nor to the rites of purification; as he knew that the people would never forget these things. But he concentrated on '**obedience;**' namely, on the faithfulness of heart in encountering God on the level of love. That is the main issue of the renewal of the covenant: the heart dedicated to God by love and obedience! The holy eye to see, and the holy ear to hear the voice of God!

2. THE TWO PARTIES OF THE COVENANT

The two parties of the covenant are: God, who intends to establish them as a people for Himself, and that He may be God to them (12), to have complete knowledge of His people, and to have absolute authority over them. The other party is the whole people; the heads of the tribes, the elders, men, women, children, beside the strangers who joined them in faith.

"All of you stand today before the Lord your God: your leaders and your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones, and your wives – also the stranger who is in your camp, from the one who cuts your wood, to the one who draws your water" (Deut. 29:10, 11)

God sets His covenant with the congregation with all its categories; Hebrews and strangers; the present and the future generations. He starts with the heads of the tribes, for whom it is fitting to bow their heads under the divine yoke, in which they would find an exalted love, abundant mercies, and prosper in everything. Women and children should also be included, as all are invited to enjoy this covenant. The Lord Christ says: "*Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 19:14).

The invitation includes the strangers who denied idolatry and entered into the faith of God. When the Lord Christ entered the house of Zacchaeus the chief tax collector, He said: "*he also is the son of Abraham"* (Luke 19:9). And even the slaves are not denied the enjoyment of the covenant, those who cut the wood or draw the water.

In other words, there is no one too great to enter a covenant with God, or to be bound to Him; nor there is anyone not invited to enjoy the blessings of the covenant. "*In Christ Jesus, there is no slave nor free"* (Colossians 3:11); and, "*Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it"* (1 Corinthians 7:21).

"That you may enter into a covenant with the Lord your God, and into His oath, which the Lord your God makes with you today, that He may establish you today as a people for Himself, and that He may be God to you, as He has spoken to you, and just as He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Deut. 29:12-13)

The invitation is given to those who attended a holy spiritual meeting, together with those who were absent.

"I make this covenant and this oath, not with you alone, but also with him who stands here with us today before the Lord our God, as well as with him who is not here with us today" (Deut. 29:14, 15)

The word "***enter***" (12) in Hebrew came to bear a meaning that is difficult to translate. It does not mean signing a contract just for formality, but to enter into its depths. It is as though that contract is an encounter of God with the holy congregation; in an amazing union; a sort of 'matrimony.'

God intends to make His covenant with all His people; those who were present before Him, or those who could not attend the meeting because of any reason like being sick. These should not be denied taking part in the covenant; because, though they could not come to the house of the Lord, yet they were there in Spirit, if not in body.

He probably meant by those who did not attend, the future generations, as the covenant extends till the end of time.

As a summary of the covenant, it is: "*That He may establish you today as a people for Himself, and that He may be God to you"* (13), referring to the life of the early fathers as a living example of entering into a covenant with God: "*As He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob"* (13).

3. IDOLATRY CONSTITUTES A BREAKING OF THE COVENANT

On a positive aspect, God intends to establish them as a people for Himself; and on a negative aspect, He wishes that they would give their back to idolatry, the source of every sin at that time.

Some may probably wonder, why speaking about negative aspects? The actual atmosphere, in which the Jews lived in Egypt, makes it necessary to speak about these negative aspects, as:

(1) They might have carried in their hearts much of the Egyptian idolatry; and then, they were about to enter into Canaan, to inherit locations of idolatry, to have some pagans living among them, and pagan nations all around them.

"(For you know that we dwelt in the land of Egypt, and that we came through the nations which you passed by, and you saw their abominations and their idols which were among them -- wood and stone and silver and gold); so that there may not be among you man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood" (Deut. 29:16-18)

The word "***idols***" in Hebrew came to mean huge shapeless lumps, incapable of movement, difficult to carry, so they were rolled on the ground. Their gods were worthy to be rolled into or out of their temples; and even worthy to be rolled out of the heart, to make it fit for the dwelling of the living God alone.

He warns them that in case that abomination infiltrates into one individual, man or woman, it would defile the whole family, then the whole tribe; the way the bad leaven corrupts the whole dough. A single individual might become a root bearing bitterness and wormwood to corrupt the whole congregation; "*looking diligently… lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled"* (Hebrew 12:15).

That is how one individual may start doubting faith, to become like a sort of undesired weed that infiltrates into a field of wheat to deny them of their due of nourishment. That is why the apostle Paul warns us against those who deny faith, saying: "***looking diligently…***" In every era, there are some appearing within the congregation, or around it, who may try to kill the living faith, to destroy the new life, for the perdition of souls. The Lord Christ Himself warned us against them, and the apostasy that would happen at the end of days, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. The corrupt teachings become the root of bitterness that corrupts the hearts of believers, to deprive them of the fruits of the Spirit.

❖ In case such root of bitterness is found, do not leave it to grow; cut it, to deny it

carrying its own fruit; and corrupting and defiling the good ones around it.

For a good reason, he called sin bitterness; as there is nothing more bitterly than sin[1].

St. John Chrysostom

In the old days, the people were in danger of being diverted to idolatry, and to denying faith in the living God. But now, as the divine salvation is consummated, the devil has turned his war into trying to draw the believers toward denying the salvation work, denying the deity of the Lord Christ, and devaluation of His redeeming work on the cross. Hence, in every era the devil finds ways to destroy faith.

(2) The sinner – especially the idolater – assuming that he is safe and secure, may try to draw others with him. Instead of trying to get rid of that deadly root, full of poison and bitterness, he congratulates himself, as though he has acquired peace, through the imagination of his cruel heart, persistent on evil.

"And so it may not happen, when he hears the words of this curse, that he blesses himself in his heart, saying, ' I shall have peace, even though I walk in the imagination of my heart – as though the drunkard could be included with the sober" (Deut. 29:19)

In the Old Testament, the devil used to do his best to make man deceive himself; that, in worshipping the idols, he enjoys his life, rejoices, and does not deprive himself of the lusts of his body. This war, of self-deceit, is still going on; when man seeks a kind of faith that is connected to the wide road, in order to realize all the lusts of his body with a comfortable conscience, instead of the narrow road. That is why we find the world characterized by a kind of lukewarm faith; we find many who, although they claim that they do not deny the existence of God, yet they deny Him by choosing the wide and easy road. They deceive themselves by the false hope under the pretence of faith; when they are actually diverted from the truth, claiming that they are full of peace. It does not stop at a few people falling into idolatry, but by drawing others to evil, they may cause the whole nation to go to perdition.

"The Lord will not spare him; for then the anger of the Lord and His jealousy would burn against that man, and every curse that is written in this book would settle on him, and the Lord would blot out his name from under heaven. And the Lord would separate him from all the tribes of Israel for adversity, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this book of the law" (Deut. 29:20-21)

Destroying himself through connecting to idolatry, and destroying others around him through persisting on it, the Lord would not spare him, but allows for his chastisement, by causing him to burn as though in the furnace of the divine anger, blotting out his name from under heaven, and separating him from the holy congregation; as he is not worthy to enjoy the divine covenant together with them, but deserves to fall under the curses.

"So that the coming generation of your children who rise up after you, and the foreigner who comes from a far land, would say, when they see the plagues of that land and the sickness which the Lord has laid on it:' The whole land is brimstone, salt, and burning; it is not sown, nor does it bear, nor does any grass grow there, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Amah, and Zeboim, which the Lord overthrew in His anger and His wrath'" (Deut. 29:22-23)

When the coming generations and the foreign nations hear about what dwelt

[1] *In Hebr. hom. 31:1.*

upon the people who possessed and inherited the land, then fell under all those curses; they would stand astonished, wandering what it is all about?

"All the nations would say, 'Why has the Lord done so to this land? What does the heat of this great anger mean?

Then men would say: 'Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. For they went and served other gods and worshipped them, gods that they did not know and He had not given to them. Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against this land, to bring on it every curse that is written in this book. And the Lord uprooted them from their land in anger, in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day'" (Deut. 29:24-28)

The Lord starts His chastisements by plagues and sicknesses, with the hope that they would repent and return to Him (22). Then in case they did not, He would overthrow the whole nation, like what He did to Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the Lord overthrew in His anger and His wrath (23); the perdition of which has become a famous example of God's indignation. The prophet Hosea, in his prophecy, referred to this verse, which proves that he was aware of the book of Deuteronomy.

By that, they would come to be a lesson for the future generations, and to the foreigners, to realize what the wicked would do to themselves. And as the apostle Peter says: "*For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what would be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God"* (1 Peter 4:17).

The land that flows with milk and honey would come to be an example before the whole world, by its destruction because of sin. God has no partiality. He judges His own, the same way He does the others. A harsher and far bitter judgment would be on those who know more; according to the words of the Lord: "*You only, have I known of all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities"* (Amos 3:2). And as it came in Daniel: "*All Israel has transgressed Your Law, and has departed so as not to obey Your voice; therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him. And He has confirmed His words which He spoke against us and against our judges who judged us, by bringing upon us a great disaster; for under the whole heaven such never has been done as what has been done to Jerusalem"* (Daniel 9:11-12).

"***Gods that they did not know***" (26): As pagans used to believe that every people have a god, whose worship they inherit as their own legacy; the nations would wonder how the Jews have forsaken their God to worship another that they did not know!

4. THE SECRET THINGS BELONG TO THE LORD

The prophet Moses ends his talk about the rejection of Israel, by confirming that God, who alone knows the secret things, has an exalted plan that is difficult for man to realize.

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

This phrase has a special significance in revealing the goal of visions and divine proclamations. God does not give them to satisfy our curiosity, nor to fulfill us mentally; but for the sake of our edification and our practical growth. The

proclamations and signs are not a parade of God's mysteries and powers; but they are rather a call for us to enjoy them in our practical life

As an example, when the Holy Bible proclaimed to us the story of creation, it did that in a simple way for the sake of our edification; and not in a scientific nor a philosophical way. God's word is not a book of science or philosophy, but it is a divine word that brings man into the bosom of God. It proclaims the fatherhood of God and His longing to enter with us into a covenant and a work of salvation, that we may respond to Him with a living practical faith and perfect obedience.

The divine proclamations are not mental debates; but are divine work through love, so that man would get to know his beloved, would yearn to set forth to Him, and would enjoy dwelling with Him, now and on an eternal level. That is why they are given to every man according to his capacity, and to what is for his edification. The limitless mysteries of God, then stay as an inexhaustible pledge for us to enjoy in eternity; that we realize with new continuous depths, with great longing and growing desire, even in eternity.

The prophet Moses says: *"**The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us**"* (29); as though what are proclaimed are just what concern us; and not in order to realize the absolute God as He is! **St. John Chrysostom** has a voluminous essay on 'The incomprehensive nature of God,' in which he speaks about God's proclamations of His nature, revealed to the heavenly and earthly creations, as much as they could enjoy!

"***Those things which are revealed to us**;"* having become *"Stewards of the mysteries of God"* (1 Corinthians 4; 1); God's proclamations came to be for us a commitment and a responsibility to testify them before others. Visions and proclamations are not a subject of boasting, but rather a call to work and preaching. That is why, as the apostle Paul speaks about the revelation of the divine secret, he connects it to ministry, saying: *"The ministry which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus"* (Colossians 1:26-28).

Whoever enjoys the secret, would long to share the same experience with every one. He would not stop praying and working for realizing this. And as the apostle Paul says: *"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened…"* (Ephesians 1:17, 18)

Yet, whatever proclamations we get; we know the divine secret *"in part"* (1 Corinthians 13:9), as long as we are still in body in this world.

It is as though the prophet Moses confirms our submission to the exalted wisdom of God, which reveals to us as much as we could possibly bear, and what is for our benefit, so that God's plan would stay exalted as far as the human mind is concerned. The Lord Christ says to His disciples: *"It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority"* (Acts 1:7). He said as well to His disciple Peter concerning John the beloved: *"If I will that he remains till I come, what is that to you?"* (John 21:22) And the apostle Paul says: *"Let no one defraud you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshy mind"* (Colossians 2:18).

The Lord calls us to seek the knowledge, and to strive in it, as He longs for us

to bear a true knowledge from Him; yet, concerning what is for our edification, and according to our forbearance; and not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Romans 12:3). Thus every knowledge and every vision should not be without a goal, but for our benefit and edification.

This phrase has a special significance for the Jews, assuming that it presents topics of utmost importance concerning them.

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 29)

RENEW YOUR COVENANT WITH ME

❖ These are not the screams of my heart to You;
To renew the covenant with me;
These are the screams of Your fiery Spirit, longing for me.
You wish to renew Your covenant with Your people in every generation.
You long for every believer to respond to the covenant.

❖ You have performed signs and wonders with my fathers.
And You are today still the same; as yesterday, and forever.
Performing for me and offering me more than what I ask for;
You are an amazing Leader;
Who cares for my salvation and conquest;
And cares even for my clothes, food, and drink;
You wish to fill my life with real joy.

❖ You are the Grantor of conquest
You destroy before me the forces of darkness with all its energies.
And bring me to the new land to possess it.
Beside the conquest, You grant me immense riches;
And prosperity in every task I stretch my hand to do.

❖ Let me stand before You in Your presence;
Not to judge me, but to sign the covenant of love between us.
Your knowledge of me is perfect;
You know my falls, my corruption, and my weaknesses.
And yet, You still intend to establish a covenant with me.

❖ You set Your covenant with both the great and the slaves;
With men, women, and children.
With Hebrews and foreigners, even captives among them.
Here I approach; lift me up out of the trash;
And bring me, according to Your true promise, among the highest nobility of Your people.
I will give my back to the devil with all his deceits.
I will not allow any wrong thought to infiltrate into my depts,
Lest it would become the root of bitterness in my whole being.

❖ Is there anything sweeter than Your love?
Is there anything more bitter than sin?
You are the sweetness of my love, which takes away from me the bitterness of sin.

❖ Let me set a covenant with You; O the heavenly wisdom;
To reveal for me Your mysteries.
And to proclaim in my depths Your truth and plan!
You are the very wisdom, and the Revealer of all mysteries.

CHAPTER 30
THE POSSIBILITY OF REALIZATION OF THE COVENANT

After reminding them of the divine covenant, and speaking of the danger of disregarding or breaking it, even if by a single individual, lest his listener would fall into despair, he started to speak about the possibility of the realization of the covenant, and of keeping the commandment. Before man, there are two roads: life or death; obedience or disobedience!

1. God anticipates your return 1–10.
2. The commandment is near you 11–14.
3. The decision is within your hands 15–20.

1. GOD ANTICIPATES YOUR RETURN

Here, God presents His divine promise to those who chose to return. Some scholars see in this promise, a prophecy about the return of Israel and their receiving faith at the end of ages. He presents a promise on condition; that is the return to God, a promise presented to every sinner or disobedient.

"Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations which the Lord your God drives you, and you return to the Lord your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today,, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you.

If any of you are driven out to the farthest part under heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land, which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers" (Deut. 30:1-5)

Here, it is to be noticed:

(1) There is no way to be saved from the curses and to enjoy the blessings, except **by returning to God**. *"Remember this, and show yourselves men; recall to mind, O you transgressors"* (Isaiah 46:8). He calls on the mind to go back to remembering God; something that would grant them spiritual manhood; namely, maturity and strength. And it is not a matter of the mind alone, but the heart, likewise, has to be occupied by the Lord, to repeat His name with love all the time. If remembering the dealings of God in the past, would bring man over to repentance. It is fitting to translate repentance into love.

Repentance is the way to forsake eating with pigs, to enter into the house of the father, where the repentant will see his father running toward him, to embrace him, to celebrate his return by a banquet, and even to defend him before his brothers (see Luke 15).

(2) **Listening to the voice of the Lord**, keeping His commandments, and submitting to His will (2).

Repentance should be translated into practical obedience. This voice is directed both to man and his household, especially his children (2); to receive the commandment with all the heart and all the soul; namely, with the whole strength, with great joy, and with a complete and a true desire.

By saying: *"**with all your heart and with all your soul**"* (2), he proclaims that God will never accept less than the whole love and the whole strength. He seeks the heart and the soul completely, without which He would reject any worship, ministry, or gift.

(3) **Obedience to all commandments**, saying: *"**do all His commandments which I command you today**"* (8). And as the apostle James says: *"Whoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all"* (James 2:10). One, who is holy to the Lord, will care for all His commandments; according to the words of the Psalmist: *"I would not be ashamed, when I look into all Your commandments"* (Psalm 119:6).

(4) When we return to the Lord, listen to Him, and keep all His commandments, God will also **gather us again from all the nations**, and bring us back from the farthest parts under heaven (3, 4). What does he mean by "***the farthest parts under heaven***," but that His ears listen to the screams of the heart of the repentant, to perform miracles with him. God, proclaiming His compassion toward those who return to Him, says: "'*My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him,' says the Lord"* (Jeremiah 31:20).

(5) We often look at God's dealings with our fathers as amazing, unique, and unrepeatable. But here, he confirms that God is ready to perform with the same power, with all the generations; saying: *"**He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers**"* (5).

(6) Our returning to God will bring Him pleasure: *"For the Lord will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers"* (9).

(7) By returning to God, all the curses that befell us will come over our enemies; namely, on the devils that provoked us to disobedience: *"**The Lord your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you**"* (7).

(8) Some may wonder, saying, 'what can we do, if we are unable to keep the commandments? How could we love the Lord with all the hearts? That is actually the work of the Lord in us if we deliver our life to Him. *"**The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live**"* (6). Man can circumcise his own flesh or that of others. But who can circumcise his heart and that of his descendants except God Himself, who searches the hearts, uproots evil from them, and renews them? And as the apostle Paul says: *"In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead"*(Colossians 2:11, 12). *"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh' but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God"* (Romans 2:28, 29).

As long as the circumcision is the seal of the covenant, it is fitting for this seal to touch, not only the flesh but also the heart, to be drawn completely to the love of God, and to be committed to the conditions of the covenant. Let us then return to Him, to work with His Holy Spirit in us, He, who alone, can circumcise the heart. *"Turn at My reproof. Surely I will pour out My Spirit on you; I will make My words known to you"* (proverb 1:23).

(9) Speaking of the return to God, He repeats in these ten verses the expression "***The Lord your God***" 12 times, to confirm the special relationship between man and

God, being His God who yearns to him as His child. And as it is said in Jeremiah: "*Return, you backsliding children; and I will heal your backsliding. Indeed we do come to You, for You are the Lord our God"* (Jeremiah 3:22).

When he threatened by curses, he referred to God, the powerful God, the Judge of all. But as he calls them to repentance, he confirms their return to the divine bosom, as the Lord their God is the God of the covenant and the grace.

Finally, we notice in his talk here about repentance and the return to God, that he confirms God's exalted gift; namely, the free will. It is man's right to choose between the way of blessings and that of curses (1). And as man yearns to the Lord his God, he would find the divine possibilities within his hands.

"And you will again obey the voice of the Lord and do all His commandments which I command you today. The Lord your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good. For the Lord will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers, if you obey the voice of the Lord, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the Law, and if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul" (Deut. 30:8-10)

2. THE COMMANDMENT IS NEAR YOU

Before the exalted blessings promised by God to those who return to Him by repentance, it is important to confirm that returning to Him is not a difficult matter.

The commandment in its essence is entering through the narrow gate and the difficult way to encounter God who loves man, and present to him every heavenly possibility. Because there are many who count the commandment as something that do not fit their nature; but is fitting for those with heavenly nature; the prophet Moses, the receiver of the Law confirms here that the commandment is easy; within our hands, and its place is in our heart, filling it with sweetness and love.

"For this commandment which I command you today, it is not mysterious to you, nor it is far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?.' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it" (Deut. 30:11-14)

What does he mean by the commandment that is not mysterious or far off, but the Word of God who incarnated and dwelt among us; was born in Bethlehem, Judea, who came to give salvation to the whole world? He is not separated from us in heaven; that we have to ascend to acquire Him; Nor He is in the depths of the sea, that we have to go down to enjoy Him; but He came to be very near to us, to dwell in our depths. And as the apostle John says: "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us"* (John 1:14). His gospel became uttered by our mouths, and engraved in our hearts.

This is what the apostle Paul realized, saying, "*Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'(That is to bring Christ down from above) or 'Who will descend into the abyss' (that is to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart' (that is the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved"*(Romans 10:6 10). St. Paul believes that the prophet Moses, in his sermon, about the commandment, which is at our hands and in our heart, means the Word of God, who, by His incarnation came among us and dwelt in our depths, coming to be

within our hands.

Philosophers at that time used to experiment with thoughts and ideas, to gain philosophy. But our Christ came to us to present Himself 'the true Philosophy,' being the 'Wisdom of God.'

The word of preaching the gospel came to be in the mouth of the church; as it is said: *"For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge; and people should seek the Law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts"* (Malachi 2:7). It is in the mouth; as God speaks with every man in the language he understands. And it is in the heart, where the word is found, not clothed with vague expressions; but directly comes in touch with man's feelings, emotions, and all his depths.

God, with his love for man, would not present to him a commandment above his abilities, nor beyond his reach; but an easy one, at his hands, and brings it into his heart; to be able to comprehend its true concept, and to realize its possibilities.

In the *Conferences* of **St. John Cassian**, he dealt with the apparent controversy between the call of the Lord Christ to us to enter through the narrow gate; and His saying: *"For My yoke is easy, and my burden is light"* (Matthew 11:30).

St. Athanasius the Apostolic speaks about the possibility of the human soul to recognize God, using this phrase, saying:

- An accurate knowledge and understanding, needs nothing beyond your souls. Although God is above all, yet knowledge is in us and within our souls. As an example, the prophet Moses teaches us, saying, *"The word of faith is in your heart." The Lord Savior proclaimed and confirmed the same thing, in saying, "The kingdom of God is within you"* (Luke 17:21). As we have the faith inside us, and the kingdom of God within us, we can easily and quickly realize the word of God the Savior[1].

Pope St. Athanasius the Apostolic

- The apostle Paul says: *"The word is near you"* (Romans 10:8). Grace starts at home, the factory of all virtues[2].

St. Gregory of Nyssa

- If *"the kingdom of God,"* according to words of our Lord and Savior, *"does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'see here! Or see there! For indeed the kingdom of God is within you"* (Luke 17:20, 21). As *"The word is near (us), even in (our) mouth and in (our) heart"* (Romans 10:8), it is clear therefore, that whoever prays for the coming of the kingdom of God, is actually and truly praying for the kingdom of God to come within him, to get consummated and to produce fruits. Every saint, who takes God as his possession, and keeps His spiritual statutes, has God dwelling in him as a very disciplined city[3].

Origen

3. THE DECISION IS WITHIN YOUR HANDS

Once again, and more clearly, he confirms that the commandment, which became very near, anticipates man's decision, with no pressure or commitment.

"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil" (Deut. 30:15)

"***Life and good***" are now before the believer. If he receives them, he will enjoy them to cross over to the future blessings. They are set before him, to let him realize their secret, so as not to have an excuse later on; to feel their importance; and finally in order to take his ultimate decision.

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[1] *Contra Gentes, 30:1-2.*
[2] *St. Gregory of Nyssa: On Virginity, ch, 23.*
[3] *Origen: On Prayer 25:1.*

God has used every way to incite the free man to receive life and to enjoy the eternal happiness; as man is moved by either one or both things: fear and hope.

Concerning fear:

"In that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and the Lord your God may bless you in the land which you go to possess.

But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess.

I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you" (Deut. 30:16-19)

And concerning hope:

"That I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;

That you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them" (Deut. 30:19-20)

- Now, being put as though between water and fire; between the highest of goods and the lowest of evils (Sirach 15:17-18); between the destruction of the low hell and the high paradise. Let us hear the amazing good Lord, crying out to us in the Holy Bible, saying: "***I have set before you life and death… therefore choose life that you… may live***" *(19).*

Concerning these two ways, the Lord advices us in the Holy gospel, saying: "*Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it"* (Matthew 7:13, 14).

The return to paradise is realized by going along the narrow and difficult way. Whereas descending to low hell is realized by going along the other way. Therefore, as long as we still, and through divine help, can choose; let us ascend to the joy of paradise, through the narrow and difficult way, instead of getting under the chastisements of hell by going through the broad way[1].

- See O man; You have before you "*water and fire; life and death; goodness and evil*" (Sirach 15:17-18); heaven and hell; the legitimate king and the cruel tyrant; the vain sweetness of the world and the blessing of the truth for paradise. The Lord Christ, by His grace, has given you the strength: "*has stretched His hand to point to you the right way to choose*" (Sirach 15:17) [2].

Fr. Caesarius of Arles

God has already demonstrated His yearning for man to lead a blessed life: "***that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God may bless you in the land which you go to possess****"* (16).

He proclaimed how the situation came to be very serious; by calling heaven and earth as witnesses against man, that he has presented to him every possibility of blessing from His side; and it remains for man to choose that on his side: "***I call***

[1] *Sermon 150:2.*
[2] *Sermon 151:5.*

heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live*"* (19). And finally, He confirms the two commandments: "love of God" and "obeying Him": "***That you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them****"* (20).

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 30)

MY SON: I AM STILL WAITING FOR YOU

❖ I have often broken your covenant;
Yet, Your sweet voice rings in my ears:
"I am still waiting for you, O My child"
You anticipate my return to You;
You yearn for my return to Your bosom.

❖ Let me remember Your dealings with me;
Let me open my heart with love, for You; and translate my repentance into action.
Let me translate my mental return into practical obedience;
By listening to the voice of Your life-giving commandment.
Granting me Yourself to acquire;
You will accept nothing less than my whole mind, my whole heart, and my whole life.
To possess and to acquire me; You are offering me Yourself in me to acquire.

❖ I wish to return to You.
Gather me again from the nations.
Bring me back from the captivity, deadly to my soul.
You are the God of the impossible!

❖ Let me return to You, to pour Your blessing on me;
To take away from me all the curses of my disobedience.
To put all the curses which befall me on the heads of my enemies.
I will rejoice when You rejoice over me, and bring me into your bosom;
When You support me with Your Spirit, and circumcise my heart;
To make me work diligently to keep Your commandment.
Who can approach my heart to circumcise it but You?
Who can bury it but You, O the Risen One from the dead?

❖ I will return, to find out that You are my Lord.
You refer Yourself to me; and refer me to You.
I am Your own child; And You are my own Lord.

❖ Let me return to You; as You are within me, waiting for me.
I am in no need to ascend into the clouds to encounter You;
Nor to descend down to the depth of the sea;
But, I need only to enter into the depths of my soul to encounter you.

❖ You taught me how to take the ultimate decision.
Before me, I have You, the Life; and also the death, my enemy.
So let me choose You, O the whole goodness!

THE FOURTH DIVISION

FINAL WORKS AND COMMANDMENTS

(Chapters 31 to 34)

- **A final advice with a warning (chapter 31).**
- **The final song of the prophet Moses (chapter 32).**
- **Blessing the people (chapter 33).**
- **Moses on mount Nebo (chapter 34).**

A FINAL ADVICE WITH A WARNING

This section presents to us the following works and final commandments of very great importance:

(1) **Joshua as the successor of Moses** (Deut. 31). The successful leadership of the prophet Moses is demonstrated by producing such a good disciple – Joshua. The successful leader cares for the second raw of leadership, in order that his work would go on and does not stop. With humility Moses proclaims: *"**I am 120 years today. I can no longer go out or come in**"* (31:2). And expresses his joy that his disciple is going to realize what he could not: *"**Also the Lord has said to me, 'You shall not cross over the Jordan… Joshua himself crosses over before you, just as the Lord has said**"* (31:2, 3).

He supported Joshua, proclaiming: *"**The Lord, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you. He will not leave you, nor forsake you; do not fear or be dismayed**"* (31:8).

(2) **Confirmation of the commitment of publicly reading the Law before the people**, including the children, on the feast of Tabernacles in the year of release (the seventh year).

(3) **The Lord appeared at the Tabernacle** in a pillar of cloud to bless the transfer of leadership to Joshua. He spoke frankly with His people confirming their entrance into the Promised Land; then their breaking His covenant later on. And He inaugurated Joshua the son of Nun, and said, *"**Be strong and of good courage… I will be with you**"* (31:23).

(4) **The commitment of the Levites to write down the Law** (the Torah), and to put it beside the Ark of the Covenant.

(5) **The final song** (Deut. 32); according to the Lord's command (31:19); uttered by Moses at the last moments of his life, a song that the greatest of authors and poets could never match!

(6) **Blessing the tribes song** (Deut. 33): It was not possible for Moses with his compassionate feeling of fatherhood, to depart from this world, without blessing of his people; like what Jacob did with his sons (Genesis 49).

(7) Moses went up to Mount Nebo where hedelivered his spirit according to the word of the Lord; And the Lord Himself buried him.

CHAPTER 31
A FINAL ADVICE WITH A WARNING

The prophet Moses confirmed that God is the true Leader of His people. As He led them in the days of Moses, He will lead them through Joshua. He also commanded the priests and all the elders of Israel to read the 'Torah' in the year of release, at the feast of the Tabernacles. He did not mention here, anything concerning the renewal of the covenant, except for writing the Law and reading it (9-13). The Lord appeared to Moses, and warned the people against diversion from faith after his departure.

1. Encouraging the people and Joshua 1–8.
2. Reading the 'Torah' in the year of release 9–13.
3. The appearance of the Lord in the tabernacle 14–23.
4. Delivering the book of the 'Torah' 24–30.

1. ENCOURAGING THE PEOPLE AND JOSHUA

The decisive moments came when the prophet Moses proclaimed that he has reached the age of one hundred and twenty years, and that he no longer can go out and come in. Delivering the leadership to Joshua; he encouraged him and the whole people.

"Then Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel. He said to them: 'I am one hundred and twenty years old today. I can no longer go out and come in. Also the Lord has said to me, 'You shall not cross over this Jordan. The Lord your God Himself crosses over before you. He will destroy these nations from before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua himself crosses over before you, just as the Lord has said" Deut. 31:1-3)

(1) Moses lived 120 years like Noah who preached righteousness in an evil world. He lived 40 years in the palace of Pharaoh learning the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts 7:20, 23); 40 years in the land of Midian preparing himself for ministry (Acts 7:29, 30); and 40 years as the leader of the people under God Himself.

The prophet Moses revealed to us his view of those years in his prayer that came in Psalm 90; in which he does not count his age in years, but according to the blessing of God, saying: "*For a thousand year in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night"* (Psalm 90:4). He looked back at his early eighty years of age, as bearing, together with physical strength, labor and sorrow; whereas his last forty years; together with physical frailty, it bore strength in the Spirit; God's gift to minister. He said, "*The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years; yet their boast is only labor and sorrow. For it is soon cut off, and we fly away"* (Psalm 90:10).

(2) Moses considers God's work with his successor Joshua as with him personally; Joshua's enjoyment is his enjoyment as well. Although admitting that he grew too old to go out and to come in, yet he says that God is crossing over before him. How? Because God is working in Joshua! That is the spirit of true leadership that bears no selfishness. He considers the success of the future leadership as his own success.

Moses did not ask for a single day to be added to his life, to consummate his work, and to bring the people into the Promised Land; but he sought that his successor would realize what he had began. So, we should not worry about the shortness of our days, but we should ask and do our best to prepare the future leaders to consummate

what we began, or what we have received from the previous generation.

(3) The prophet Moses often repeats the divine verdict: "***You shall not cross over this Jordan***" (2). He undoubtedly yearned to cross; yet he considered the crossing of the people as though he did it himself.

(4) You will never find a leader who encourages his soldiers so strongly before his departure from this world as Moses did; confirming to them that the conquests, which were realized in his days, will increase after his departure, because the conquest does not depend on him but on the divine presence.

"And the Lord will do to them as He did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites and their land, when He destroyed them. The Lord will give them over to you, that you may do to them according to every commandment, which I commanded you. Be strong and of good courage, do not fear or be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you" (Deut. 31:4-6)

God who dwells in the midst of His people, as He worked in the days of Moses, He will go on working among the generations; according to the words of the apostles: "*The Lord is my Helper; I will not fear what man can do to me*" (Hebrew 13:6).

(5) Moses called Joshua; set him as his successor, commanded him before all the people; and confirmed to them their continuous success.

"Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, 'Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. And the Lord, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you; He will not leave you nor forsake you; Do not fear nor be dismayed" (Deut. 31:7-8)

When the Lord is with them and goes before them, there is no reason for fear because of the possibilities of the enemy or their long experience.

Although Joshua has already proved his good leadership in several situations, yet, as he was getting into a new stage of his life, he was in need of reminding him continuously that God is on his side.

Moses demanded from him to be a living example of courage to his people. For if the leader gets dismayed all his people will follow him in his frustration. The most serious set backs for the leaders and the ministers of the word are losing their trust in God; the fear of the leader destroys the soul of his men and shakes their faith.

A leader of God's people should always believe that God goes before him, leads him along the royal way; accompanies and supports him; would never forsake him; nor allow him to collapse.

"***Do not fear nor be dismayed***" (8). As fear would naturally come to man, he is continuously in need of a word of encouragement. We find examples of this in the Holy Bible, from the Book of Genesis to the Book of Revelation (Genesis 15:1; Revelation 1:17).

2. THE TORAH TO BE READ IN THE YEAR OF RELEASE

"So Moses wrote this Law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel" (Deut. 31:9)

The Jewish *Mishna* states that the first five chapters of the book, together with other parts, were read on the days of the feasts.

The prophet Moses, in his last days, wrote down his sermons and the

commandments mentioned in the last chapters. He wrote down 13 copies of the five books; delivered one to every tribe, and put the thirteenth copy in the Ark of the Covenant. Others believe that he wrote down only two copies; delivered one of them to the priests and the Levites for public use; and the other copy he put in the Ark of the Covenant as a reference; especially in case the people break the Law, and divert to idolatry. This second copy was called 'The copy of the Lord.' Bishop Patrick believes that Moses wrote down the five books, or consummated them[1].

"And Moses commanded them, saying, 'At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the feast of the tabernacles, when all Israel come to appear before the lord your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this Law before all Israel in their hearing" (Deut 31:10, 11)

He fixed the year of release – the seventh year – as the time for a public reading of the Torah for the whole people; besides a daily reading by the families, of some excerpts of the Law; and Moses has been read in the synagogue every Sabbath (Acts 15). Yet, these private readings at homes or at weekly local meetings were not enough, the whole congregation were also committed to a public reading.

The year of the release was convenient for reading the whole Law; when slaves were set free; debtors were granted a release of their debts; pledged lands were given back; and everyone; the rich through generous giving, and the poor through being supported, would all feel that their souls are prepared for obedience of the divine commandment. If the commandment incites man to do good; doing good incites the soul to accept the commandment and to respond to it. On that day, the whole book of Deuteronomy was most probably read, together with excerpts of the other five books of Moses.

During the days of the tabernacles, the entire congregation rejoiced before the Lord their God (Leviticus 23:40). They used to dwell for a whole week in tents made of tree branches; in order to feel that they are but sojourners in this world; and when they hear the divine commandment, they say together with the Psalmist: "*I am a stranger in the earth. Do not hide Your commandments from me"* (Psalm 119:19). The Torah is read, as God's commandment is the true source of joy; and everyone would listen to it with joy and pleasure of the heart.

The Torah is read once every seven years; the Sabbath of the years, as our true comfort and Sabbath is in the commandment of the Lord. The seventh year refers to the evangelic work, in which we attain the freedom in Christ Jesus, and the forgiveness of sins; it is the year well accepted before the Lord (Luke 1:74-75).

Women and children, although not committed to join in the other feasts; in the feast of the tabernacles, they were committed to ascend together with the men, in order that all hear the reading of the Law.

"Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the Lord your God and carefully observe all words of this law" (Deut. 31:12)

When all the congregation are gathered together, men, women and children, beside the proselytes who newly joined faith, to hear the word of God, and to learn to fear the Lord, the leaven that raises the whole dough of the new generations is offered, and the children are raised in a Scripture atmosphere; to learn to be preoccupied only by the love of God, and the enjoyment of his true promises in awe and respect.

Unfortunately people did not obey this commandment and did not practice that

[1] *Matthew Henry Commentary.*

tradition, except on very limited number of occasions, between the days of Joshua and the coming of the Lord Christ; several centuries passed without practicing that awesome right. Joshua did read all the words of the Law before the people of Israel: the congregation, the elders, the officers, the judges, the priests, and the Levites, bearers of the ark of the covenant; and before the strangers who were living among them and newly entered into faith (Joshua 8:33-35).

When king Solomon built the temple, he gathered everyone and read the words of the law; that is why he called himself '*the preacher*' (Ecclesiastes 1:1, 2, 12; 7:27; 12:8; 10:9).

King Jehoshaphat sent the leaders of Judah throughout all the cities of Judah where they taught, and had the book of the Law of the Lord with them (2 Chronicles 17:9).

King Josiah went up to the house of the Lord with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; the priests and the Levites and all the people, great and small; and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant, which had been found in the house of the Lord. Then the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the Lord (2 Chronicles 34:30, 31).

When the people returned from captivity, all the people gathered together as one man in the open square, and Ezra the scribe read from the book of Law of Moses (Nehemiah 8:1-3).

"And that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the lord your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess" (Deut. 31:13)

3. THE LORD APPEARS TO MOSES IN THE TABERNACLE

"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, the days approach when you must die; Call Joshua and present yourselves in the tabernacle of meeting, that I may inaugurate him;' So Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves in the tabernacle of meeting" (Deut. 31:14)

When the time came for Moses to finalize his talks with his people, the Lord said to him, "***Behold, the days approach when you must die***." With the approach of the days when Moses was to die, the Lord appeared to him more and more, to realize that his departure was just a crossing over to the Lord, to see Him face to face. What a joyful gift from God! With the transfiguration of the Lord in the depths of the soul, man's heart becomes prepared to die with joy and the pleasure of heart.

Moses, together with Joshua were called to present themselves to the Lord; one to prepare for departure by delivering leadership into the hand of his disciple; and the other to prepare to receive the burden of leadership, and the spirit of true fatherhood from his mentor.

The glory of the Lord appeared to the prophet Moses. That was the only time in this book we read about the appearance of the Lord; whereas we read about it three times in the previous books. Some scholars believe that the appearance of the Lord here, just before the departure of the prophet Moses, was a reference of the appearance of the new Law; the New Covenant when the Old Covenant grew old.

"Now the Lord appeared at the tabernacle in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood above the door of the tabernacle" (Deut. 31:15)

Whenever we enjoy the evangelic life, and realize our crossing over to heaven, the Lord appears in our tent, as sojourners; and proclaims His glory in us.

What did the Lord say to Moses?

(1) His people will break the covenant with God; the covenant for the sake of which Moses strived for forty years to let the people enjoy divine love, and to have a portion in the Promised Land, the symbol of heaven. The reason why they were going to break the covenant would be their binding to idolatry, and forgetting God their Savior.

"And the Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, you will rest with your fathers, and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake me and break my covenant which I have made with them.

Then My anger will be aroused against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured. And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say on that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?'

And I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil they have done, in that they have turned to other gods" (Deut. 31:16-18)

God confirms that breaking the covenant was on man's side, saying: "***They will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them***." The blame falls upon man alone.

The people of God fell into the worship of the gods of the Canaanites, the previous owners of the land. He calls them 'foreigners,' whose land He delivered to His people. But His people rejected God, the Grantor of the land; and worshipped foreign gods who could not protect their subjects. The same way, having received from God every possibility, some of us fall into the worship of wealth, through greed and the worship of their bellies; or the worship of pleasures, through evil lusts.

(2) The Lord said to Moses, "***You will rest with your fathers***" (16), although Moses died on Mount Moab far from where his fathers were buried. This divine saying is not to be interpreted as concerning the mere body; but concerning the rest of his soul in hope together with the souls of his fathers before him.

According to the Targum Jonathan Ben Ozel said: [You will rest in dust with your fathers; your soul will rest in the treasure to come with your fathers[1].]

(3) God with His amazing wisdom gives every man according to his heart. As His people seek to forsake God (16), God gives them the wish of their heart by "***hiding His face from them***" (17). They gave God their backs and not their faces, and He deprived them of the shines of His love, and the enjoyment of the splendor of His glory. By saying, "***I will hide My face from them***," He means taking His grace and His protection away from them.

(4) In the introduction to the book of Proverbs, he spoke about the languages by which God speaks to man and teaches him, among which are songs and praises. Here, God Himself demands from Moses in the last moments of his life on the land of Moab, to teach his people by this kind of language.

"Now therefore, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel" (Deut. 31:19)

Through the proclamation of the Holy Spirit, Moses wrote down the song, by which he warns his people against breaking the covenant with God. This song did not keep the people from turning away from the worship of the living God; yet it opened a door for repentance and returning to God. If they forsake the Lord, and fall into the

[1] *Adam Clarke Commentary.*

bitterness, they would remember, through this song, they have learned by heart, that God has previously warned them, that He is not pleased by their fall, and that He is still waiting for their return. It is as though God has prepared for them the medicine beforehand, so that if they did fall, they would find within their hands a divine cure.

(5) Instead of offering a sacrifice of thanksgiving for granting them the possibilities of fulfillment and comfort, they fell into apostasy.

"When I have brought them to the land flowing with milk and honey, of which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and filled themselves and grown fat, then they will turn to other gods and serve them; and they will provoke Me and break My covenant.

Then it shall be, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song testifies against them as a witness; for it will not be forgotten in the mouths of their descendants; for I know the inclination of their behavior today, even before I have brought them to the land which I swore to give them.

Therefore Moses wrote this song the same day, and taught it to the children of Israel.

Then he inaugurated Joshua the son of Nun, and said, 'Be strong and of good courage, for you shall bring the children of Israel into the land of which I swore to them, and I will be with you (Deut. 31:20-23)

4. DELIVERING THE BOOK OF THE LAW

"So it was, when Moses had completed writing the words of this Law in a book, when they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying 'Take this book of the Law, and put it inside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there as a witness against you; for I know your rebellion and your stiff neck. If today, while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against the Lord, then how much more after my death?" (Deut. 31:24-27)

Moses delivered the words of the book of the Law to the Levites who bore the Ark of the Covenant, not in a formal rite, but with frankness, clarity, and warning. His long experience for forty years has taught him, that the people with their leaders have not opposed him personally several times, but they have opposed God Himself, despite God's exalted dealings with them through Moses' hands.

Proclaiming to them what will happen to them after his death, he said:

"Gather to me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing, and call heaven and earth to witness against them. For I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands" (Deut. 31:28-29)

When the Lord Christ came to the world and presented the free salvation, He also proclaimed before His death, that false christs and prophets will appear and lead the people astray (Matthew 24:25); The same thing was proclaimed by the apostle Paul, concerning the appearance of false teachers after his death.

"Then Moses spoke in the hearing of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song until they were ended" (Deut. 31:30)

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 31)

GRANT ME THE TRUE SPIRIT OF LEADERSHIP

❖ Grant me to follow the example of Moses, the first leader of his people.
To consider the success of the new leaderships, as a success for me.
Not to refer any success to myself.
But, as much success as God granted me, He would grant more to the future generations.
God is the One working along the generations.

❖ Teach me to bear the spirit of hope in the new generation;
To see You strongly working in them
Let me incite in them the spirit of courage, to work by You with the spirit of strength.

❖ Let us follow the example of Moses who received the Law.
Let us present to the future generations the Law of God, inscribed on our hearts, proclaimed in our life and behavior.
Let us keep the precious tradition, the practical and true evangelic life.

❖ The whole book of Law was publicly read in the year of release.
For everyone to hear, even the children, to learn the fear of God.
To hear it during the feast of the Tabernacles.
Let us read it perpetually to the new generations;
So that the word of God become planted in every heart.
To find in it their pleasure at the time of their sojourn.
Let us present it to them with the spirit of true joy.
To see in it the secret of our inner rejoice.

❖ During the last days of Moses, You often appeared to him.
His heart flared with yearning to set forth to You;
And he delivered the same Spirit to the new leader.

❖ Moses ended his life by singing a spiritual song.
Grant me to bear the spirit of praise,
To make the future generations receive the language of praise.

CHAPTER 32

THE SONG OF MOSES

Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit of God, the prophet Moses presents to us his final song. This song is called the key to every prophecy; as it speaks about the birth of the nation, its childhood, then its denial and apostasy, and finally its chastisement and return.

The prophet Moses presents to us a song that bears a living theological thought. As a prophet, he does not separate between music and theology. Music without theology turns into a kind of looseness and loss of time; and theology without music, makes man lose his delicacy and gentleness. If theology turns man into a living icon of God, that bears an image of joyful life; music is indispensable to theology, as it makes out of man a rejoicing and an incessantly thanksgiving being.

The true life of faith is a music piece that proclaims harmony in man's life, between his temporal behavior, and his taste for the deposit of eternity.

Although the life of the prophet Moses has been an incessant series of continuous strife, during which he suffered bitterness from the cruelty of his people's heart, yet his life was actually a rejoicing symphony of love; a series of praises and songs. As he set forth to the wilderness, after God granted him the conquest over Pharaoh, he, together with the people, sang a song, when they came to "*the well dug by the nation's nobles"* (Numbers 21:17). And now, he ends his life with a magnificent praise, as he, on the bank of the River Jordan, was called to depart from this world, and his soul rejoiced seeing the heavenly Canaan with the eyes of faith. He saw God, like a father who holds the hand of His child along the way, guiding him and fulfilling his spiritual and material needs; As his soul saw Him, like an eagle that hovers over its young ones; carrying them on its wings; protecting, caring for them and letting them in no need of any other; sustaining them in the wilderness; bringing for them honey from the rocks, and oil from the stones, i.e. He makes what is impossible for them[1].

The prophet Moses recorded in that song what his depths bore toward God his Savior; beside bitterness and moaning, caused by the apostasy of his people from the worship of God, and their binding to the abominations of idolatry; that brought them under the divine chastisement.

After a final provocation of his people to obey God, the Lord finally commanded him to ascend the Mount of Nebo, to behold from afar the land of Canaan, and then to die.

1. An introduction to the song 1–2.
2. God's greatness and righteousness 3–4.
3. The diversion of the people and their breaking of the covenant 5–6.
4. Reminding the people of the works of God 7–14.
5. A denying people 15–18.
6. Chastening the denying people 19–43.
7. A call to obedience 44–47.
8. A divine command to Moses to ascend the Mount of Nebo 48–52.

1. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG

The prophet Moses, realizing the approach of his final departure of this world,

[1] *Cf. the author: Song of Songs, Alexandria 1980, p. 10 (in Arabic).*

and delivering the leadership into the hands of his disciple Joshua, he offered to God a magnificent praise, in which he glorifies the great and mighty God (1-4), and parades His works, as the Creator, the Savior, and the advocate, who stays faithful to His covenant with His people, despite their wickedness. He begins his song, saying:

"Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.

Let my teaching drop as the rain, My speech distill as the dew.

As raindrops on the tender herb, and as showers on the grass" (Deut. 32:1, 2)

St. John Chrysostom[1] believes, that, as there is no man who hears and testifies to the divine things, heavens are called to testify.

The prophet Moses calls the angels, the heavenly hosts, as well as all the nations, to testify to what he utters concerning God's dealings with His people; and the reaction of treason and denial of the people.

St. Clement of Alexandria[2] believes that God calls the believers with heavenly knowledge (the heaven), as well as those whose hearts are preoccupied with the earthliness (the earth), to testify.

In Isaiah (1, 2), and in Micah (6, 2), we see a call to nature to testify in the trial of man, or in the controversy between God and His people.

Moses asks heaven and earth to listen to him. He calls on the soul and body to sing together a song to God for His love and care despite man's cruelty and rebellion. The words of God turns the wilderness into a paradise; and as dew, they give comfort and peace to the soul.

The prophet Moses used the praise to thank and glorify God (Exodus 15). Here he uses it to preach. With the same spirit, came several of the psalms of the prophet David, under the headline 'For teaching.' And the apostle Paul says: "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord"* (Colossians 3:16).

Moses' teaching is not his own, but is like the dew coming down from heaven by the Lord. And as it came in Isaiah: "*For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth. It shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it"* (Isaiah 55:10-11).

It does not depend on the wisdom of men, but "*shall be… like dew from the Lord, like showers on the grass, that tarry for no man, nor wait for the sons of men"* (Micah 5:7). Rain is the gift of God, "*For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God"* (Hebrew 6:7).

Like rain, he utters his teaching that starts as few successive drops, then soon turn into huge overwhelming quantities. What Moses proclaims, is the word of God, which is, either like soothing dew, or sweeping destructive rain or flood, like that in the days of Noah. Teaching can be effective and active, when it is gentle like inaudible dew or light rain that disturb no one; bringing the word into the heart; "*come down like rain upon the mown grass, like showers that water the earth"* (Psalm 72:6).

❖ Do you want to know how believers are called clouds in the Holy Bible? The

[1] *In Heb. Hom 23:8.*
[2] *Stromata 4:26.*

prophet Isaiah says: *"I will command the clouds, that they rain no rain on it"* (Isaiah 5:6). Moses was a cloud; that is why he says: "*Let my teaching drop as the rain"* (2). The epistles of the apostles for us are spiritual rain. That is what the apostle Paul says in his epistles to the Hebrews: "*For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it… receives blessing from God"* (Hebrew 6:7); and again he says: *"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase"* (1 Corinthians 3:6)[1].

St. Jerome

❖ If we as humans, are keen on watering our gardens, and sometimes exert effort to draw water from a well or a river; how much more should we care to provide with water the plants of our bodies, which are in the paradise of the Lord; namely in His Church; to draw water for the dry places, and the barren locations, from the rivers of the Holy Bible, the spiritual drains, or the wells of the early Fathers; then we have to uproot the harmful worthless herbs, and plant those of benefit instead.

As it came in the apostle Paul, whom we are his successors, though of much less capabilities: *"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase"* (1 Corinthians 3:6).

With the help of God, it is fitting for us to consummate our duties; Let us continue planting and watering; because if we do, God will give the increase[2].

Fr. Caesarius of Arles

2. GOD'S GREATNESS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

"For I proclaim the name of the Lord: Ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice. A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright He is" (Deut. 32:3-4)

What is the teaching given by Moses, which drops like rain, to turn the earth into a fruitful paradise?

(1) **The greatness of God**, apparent in His care for His creation. He is the "***Rock, perfect in His work***." The word "***Rock***" came six times in this chapter, as He is the Rock for all the creation He made in the six days. He is the un-shaking Rock, on which the Church is built; so that no harm can come on it.

(2) **God's work is perfect**; All His work is good; and accordingly, He is perfect and good in His care for His creation. Everything He allows, is for the good of His people. And as the wise Solomon says: *"I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it"* (Ecclesiastes 3:14). The work of man, however good he may be, is not perfect, whereas that of God is very perfect. That is why the Lord Jesus says: "*When you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'we are unprofitable servants"* (Luke 17:10).

(3) God is "**Just and Righteous**," without injustice; and according to the prophet, "*Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the Lord are right; The righteous walk in them, But transgressors stumble in them"* (Hosea 14:0). He is the Truth, without injustice, nor lies. He would never do wrong when He chastises, because He knows what is for the edification of man, and what is for the good of the congregation. He would never do injustice to anyone. And according to the Psalmist: Let them "*declare that the Lord is upright; He is my Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him"* (Psalm 92:15).

God is called "*Righteous,"* and so also man may be called. **Pope St. Athanasius** says that the word 'righteous' in the Holy Bible carries two meanings: the

[1] *On Ps. hom. 73.*
[2] *Sermon 1:6.*

first is having faith and confidence, which could apply to men; and the second meaning is being trustworthy, which applies to God. Abraham was righteous, because he had faith in the word of God; And God is Righteous, according to what David says in the psalm: "*The Lord is righteous in all His ways"* (Psalm 45:17 *LXX*). He would never lie[1].

3. DIVERSION OF THE PEOPLE AND THEIR BREAKING OF THE COVENANT

Despite God's righteousness, the people diverted and foolishly broke their covenant with God. The prophet here presents a comparison between God's attributes and those of His people. God is great in His love, justice, and wisdom. He is like a rock, unchangeable; on Him believers could comfortably lean; and in Him they could resort for protection against the stings of the creeping serpents. From a rock, we should also remember how God let water pour for the people in the wilderness. The people, on the other hand, corrupted themselves, and foolishly disregarded the fatherhood of God. Every man could have his weaknesses, even the children of God; but those are "***perverse and crooked generation***," in need of remembering God's work with their fathers, to turn back from the corruption of their hearts.

> ***"They have corrupted themselves. They are not His children, because of their blemish; a perverse and crooked generation. Do you thus deal with the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, who bought you? Has He not made you and established you?" (Deut. 32:5, 6)***

By their perverse behavior in their dealing with righteous God, they did him no harm; but they corrupted themselves; they are the source of their corruption and the cause of their perdition. It is said: "*O Israel, you are destroyed, who can help you?"* (Hosea 13:9); and, "*If you are wise, you are wise for yourself, and if you are scoff, you alone will bear it"* (Proverb 9:12).

It is as though he admonishes them, saying, 'you are destroying yourselves by your evil behavior; you are claiming to be the children of God, referred to Him. Is this how you pay back your Father, your God, who acquired you for Himself; He who created you, and who made you His own people and nation? He is an amazing Father; He created them, sustained them even in the wilderness, cared for them and bore their burdens! Could they not feel His heart flaring with love for them? What they are doing is out of denial and disregard of God's love for them and His blessings over them. According to the prophet: "*The Lord has a complaint against His people, and He will contend with Israel. O My people, what have I done to you? And how have I wearied you? Testify against Me. For I brought you up from the land of Egypt; I redeemed you from the house of bondage; I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O My people, remember now what Balak king of Moab counseled; and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him*" (Micah 6:2-5). It is really madness from a foolish and an unwise people!

Here he discerns between sins caused by weakness, together with a true yearning for holiness, and a strife for the sake of righteousness in God; And sins which come intentionally and persistently, with no true intention for repentance and return to God. The first kind may come from loving and striving children of God; whereas the second come from opponents of the truth, who assume that they are children of God, when they are actually His opponents.

"***He made you and established you****"* (6). All humans are God's creation; yet only those redeemed are His true children (John 1:12).

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[1] *Discourses Against the Arians, 2:6.*

4. REMINDING THE PEOPLE OF THE WORKS OF GOD

Having accused the people of breaking their covenant with God, he calls on them to mend their ways by remembering God's dealings with them, along the generations and since the old days; how God cared for them and provided them with every possibility.

"Remember the days of the old, consider the years of many generations. Ask your father and he will show you; your elders and they will tell you; When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, When He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance" (Deut. 32:6-9)

It is fitting for the believer to learn from his fathers, not only the word and commandments of God (Deut. 6:7; Exodus 12:26, 27), but also His works with them along the generations. And according to the words of the Psalmist: "*We will not hide them from their children. Telling to the generation to come the praises of the lord, His strength, and His wonderful works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a Law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children. That the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments"* (Psalm 78:4-7).

As it is fitting for the fathers to teach their children the commandments of God, and to tell them about His practical care for them; it is also fitting for the children to yearn to know these things, in order that they would become for them, the best leader and guide on their way.

By turning to history, testified by the fathers and elders, we realize that when God separated the sons of Adam into nations and peoples, He established boundaries to be committed, so that no nation should attack another. But, as far as Israel is concerned, He gave a special status, counting them as His own people.

Africa has been called the land of Ham (Psalm 78:51; 105:23, 27; 106:22); Europe was the portion of Japheth; and Asia was the portion of Sam; whereas Palestine was counted as the portion of God, offered to His own people. This division of the world into three sections among the three sons of Noah was called the 'collective immigration,' realized two centuries after the days of Noah, five centuries before the episode of Babel, when the world was separated into several peoples with many tongues.

In the Septuagint version, it came, that when the Almighty God divided the nations among the sons of Adam, He set boundaries for peoples according to the number of God's angels; as though He assigned every nation to one of His angels. But, concerning His people, He took upon Himself their leadership, being His own portion.

In the Jewish tradition, as well as that of the early Church, it came that God assigned an angel for every nation or people; yet that angel was not to commit his nation to a certain way of behavior. Whereas, concerning the Church of the Old Testament, as well as that of the New Testament, God assigned them to the Archangel the chief of God's hosts, to defend them; and to His Holy Spirit to be His own.

❖ Here, there is a testimony that there are angels assigned to the saints, and to all mankind[1].

[1] *In Matt. hom. 54.*

St. John Chrysostom

Some see that saying "*according to the number of the children of Israel*" means Canaan, the son of Ham, the son of Noah, and his 11 sons (Genesis 10:15) = 12. So the Lord intended for the 12 tribes of Israel to inherit the land of Canaan and his sons.

And saying that God "*divided their inheritance to the nations… and set boundaries of the peoples,*" he confirms that it is fitting for humanity not to have controversy among them. As according to the apostle Paul: "*He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation"* (Acts 17:26); and to the Psalmist: "*The heavens are the Lord's, but the earth He has given to the children of men"* (Psalm 115:16).

God gave the earth to mankind to live together in peace, each one to support his brother, and not to struggle against him.

It is amazing how God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Possessor of all, counts His people as His portion, and in them He find His pleasure, calling them: "*the garden enclosed"* (Songs 4; 12), where He is pleased to walk and finds comfort. We can say that God is the portion of the believer, the later being dependant on the Former, finding in Him his treasure, wealth, fulfillment, joy, and the pleasure of his heart; But to say that God, who is in need of nothing, counts man as His portion, that is a great honor to man, and an exalted fatherly favor, to count his child who has nothing, as His own and His portion.

- In case we intend to become the Lord's inheritance and portion, let us be strong and courageous… let us have nothing weak, nothing shaken, and nothing unfit to be inherited; as Christ who is glorified in His saints, says: "*My inheritance is perfect*[1]*."*

St. Jerome

It is as though God has brought His people out of bondage, and cared for them in the wilderness, not to give them a land that flows of honey and milk, but to grant them Himself, to become their portion, and for them to become His.

"He found him in a desert land, and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye" (Deut. 32:10)

What does he mean by saying "***He found him in a desert land***," but that the land of Egypt was, despite all its riches was counted as a desert land, as its people were living in bondage, under the cruel hand of Pharaoh. Or he means the wilderness through which they crossed, on their way to the land of Canaan. In that howling wasteland, God encircled them, protected them as a cloud shading them by day, and guided them as a pillar of light by night; and as St. Steven the archdeacon says about the prophet Moses: "*This is he who was in the congregation (the Church) in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai"* (Acts 7:38)

God allowed it for them to remain in the wilderness all those years to isolate them from the world, in order to forget the pagan abominations they learned in Egypt; and to learn that the Lord alone is their light, their shield, and their fulfillment, who provides them food from heaven, water from the rock, that with Him they are in no need of clothes, footwear or medications.

The Psalmist says: "*He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city for habitation"* (Psalm 107:7). He has always led us by the right way, even if it

[1] *On Ps. hom. 61.*

seems as though we are going in a closed circuit in a wilderness. He teaches us as ministers, the value of sure long range care of future generations, the way He cared for His people for forty years in the wilderness.

"***He kept him as the apple of His eye***" (10). We can understand that God is the apple of our eye, by Whom we can see the unseen things, and enjoy the help of His divine secrets. But for us to become as the apple of His eye, this is surely an amazing and exalted thing, as far as how God appreciate man, is concerned. There is no greater love, that the Mighty Creator counts man as the apple of His eye, caring for him, keeping him, as man keeps his eyesight!

St. Gregory of Nyssa, comparing the way the prophet Moses used to know God, face to face, to the yearning of a bride for the incessant kisses of her groom; singing: "*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth*" (Songs 1:2). As the soul encounters God and receives His kisses, she yearns for more kisses of His mouth. She seeks God, as though she has never seen Him before; and her yearning for Him will never stop. He says: [With every encounter and enjoyment of Him, it will increase more and more[1].]

"As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the Lord alone led him, and there was no foreign god with Him" (Deut. 32:11-12)

As the eagle stirs up its nest, then spreads and hovers its wings, to provoke its young to prepare to leave the nest and start practicing to fly; so did God, when He provoked His people by the ten plagues, to prepare to depart from Egypt, and to fly across the wilderness, toward the Promised Land. Or rather to bring them over to Him; saying: "*I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself*" (Exodus 19:4).

The love of eagles for their young is demonstrated, not just to protect them, but also to teach and instruct them on how to fly. It is not an idle love that can be deadly to them, but it is a positive love, which supports them and grants them new possibilities. In a similar way, God stirs up our life, to set forth in the wilderness of this world, amid the sufferings; to fly to God's bosom, where we find settlement and comfort. He does not stir us up toward a life of pleasure and looseness, but to protect us and encircle us, while flying to heaven, disregarding the afflictions and temptations of the world.

We have previously talked about the two wings of God during our study of the book of Psalms (Psalm 17:8); and we saw that, according to **St. Augustine**, the two wings of God are: 'Love' and 'Mercy[2].' Also they refer to the two wings of the Cherubim, which cover the Ark of the Covenant, where the glory of God used to appear. According to **St. Gregory of Nyssa** believes, it is fitting for the believer, not only to seek protection under the wings of God, but also to get back His wings, which he lost, through sin.

❖ The wings of God represent His power, blessings, non-corruption; and so on. All these divine attributes used to be in man when he was like God in everything. But our diversion to evil has deprived us of our wings. Now the proclamation of God's grace to us, and our enlightenment through rejecting corruption and worldly pleasures, would let the two wings of holiness and righteousness grow in us anew[3].

St. Gregory of Nyssa

❖ We can interpret this phrase (Deuteronomy 32:11; Psalm 91:1), concerning the

[1] *Commentary on Canticle, hom. 1.*
[2] *On Ps. 17 (16):8.*
[3] *Commentary on Canticle, 15.*

Savior who provided us with the cover of His wings on the cross … His arms were raised toward heaven, not to seek help; but to cover over us, we His miserable creation[1].

St. Jerome

He alone has stirred up His people toward salvation, whereas the foreign pagan gods were helpless to save the Egyptians.

"He made him ride in the heights of the earth, that he might eat the produce of the fields. He made him to draw honey from the rock" (Deut. 32:13)

He provided his people with impossible things. He gave them fruits from the desert, honey and oil from the rock (13). Yet the most amazing thing He gave them was His precious blood: "***You drank wine, the blood of the grapes***" (14).

By saying, "***He made him ride in the heights of the earth***," he means that He brought him over to successive conquests; he knew no fall nor defeat; but perpetually lived on the high summits. Instead of the bread of humiliation he used to eat in Egypt under bondage, he sat on the summits of mountains to feed on the fruits of the desert, where freedom and honor are.

He probably means by the heights of the earth, that the people set forth toward the mountains of Canaan, to enjoy the abundance of vegetables and fruits, the honey produced by bees among the rocks, and the oil from the olive trees.

It is a living portrait of the Christian who sets forth to live on the heights as a pledge of heaven; where no sin has authority on him; where he feeds on the fruit of the Spirit amid the wilderness of this world; enjoys the sweetness of Christ like honey; and the oil of the Holy Spirit, which supports the soul, and fills her with health and peace.

"Curds from the cattle, and milk of the flock, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the choicest wheat; and you drink wine, the blood of the grapes" (Deut. 32:14)

God presents us curds and fats as a spiritual food for the mature, and milk as drink for the little ones; and together with the spiritual food, He presents the spiritual drink – the wine, which refers to joy. He fulfills the needs of the mature and the little ones; and grants all the inner joy.

❖ What is the bunch of grapes hanging from the tree, but the One hanged from the tree in the later days, whose blood became a saving drink for the believer?! By the blood of grapes, he means the saving sufferings[2].

St. Gregory of Nyssa

5. A DENYING PEOPLE

After parading in his song the amazing assortments of the gifts of God, the prophet Moses spoke of the apostasy of the children of Israel from God.

"But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked. You grew fat, you grew thick, You are covered with fat. Then he forsook God who made him, and scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation" (Deut. 32:15)

Jeshurun is a poetic name, translated in the Septuagint version as 'the beloved.'

He says that Israel is like a horse that ate its full, grew fat thick, and covered with fat, then started to kick its owner. Foolishly, they scornfully esteemed God the Rock of his salvation; after He gave them of His goods, they kicked Him with their feet. And when He rebuked them through His prophets, they get furious like a wild

[1] *On Ps. hom. 68.*
[2] *Life of Moses, 268.*

cow and an ox, unused to carry a yoke. They are too proud to hear a word of rebuke, even from God who made them.

- The body and the food are not from the devil; but only the luxurious way of living[1].

- Although sorrows take away mercy, and draw compassion; riches on the other hand lead us to foolish pride, slothfulness, and haughtiness. That is why the Psalmist says: "*It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I may learn Your statutes"* (Psalm 119:71); and "*The Lord is known by the judgment He executes"* (Psalm 9:16)[2].

St. John Chrysostom

- The praise of the heretics is the oil, which they pour over the heads of men, with the promise of the kingdom of heaven, which makes the head thick with pride. In the Holy Bible being fat is something unacceptable. Being said: "***Jeshurun grew fat and kicked, grew fat, grew thick, covered with fat***" (15)[3].

St. Jerome

The worst sign of rebellion against God is idolatry:

"They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods. With abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to demons, not to God. To gods they did not know, to new gods, new arrivals, that your fathers did not fear. Of the Rock who begot you, you are unmindful; and have forgotten the God who fathered you" (Deut. 32:16-18)

Idolatry is the worst example of apostasy from God; through which they fall in the fallowing:

1. Instead of submission to God through the spirit of obedience and love, they provoke God to anger through rebellion and hatred; presenting their hearts, which are the throne of God, to become chairs for idols.
2. Instead of holiness, they practice abominations.
3. They reject God who is close to them, their Father who begat them, to bind to foreigners, who bear no spirit of fatherhood nor compassion for them. They exchanged the Father for foreigners.
4. Children might have some sort of excuse, if they fall into the same idolatry of their fathers. But to worship new gods, unknown to their fathers, that would be something un-excusable.
5. Verse 17, came as "***They sacrificed to demons***" in the Septuagint, Persians, Coptic, and Vulgate versions.

6. CHASTENING THE DENYING PEOPLE

Out of His love and care for their salvation, God chastises His denying people by several ways:

"And when the Lord saw it, He spurned them; because of the provocation of His sons and His daughters" (Deut. 32:19)

Is it possible for God to spurn His own sons and daughters? When God saw that His sons and daughters have clothed themselves with sin, He considered that they not wishing to unite with Him, as no fellowship could be between holiness and sin. By that they got themselves spurned; according to the words of the Psalmist: "*They were defiled by their own works; and played the harlot by their own deeds. Therefore the*

[1] *In 1 Cor. hom. 39.*
[2] *In Hebr. hom. 33:8.*
[3] *On Ps. hom. 51.*

wrath of the Lord was kindled against His people, so that He abhorred His own inheritance" (Psalm 106:39, 40).

"And He said, 'I will hide My face from them; I will see what their end will be; For they are a perverse generation; children in whom is no faith" (Deut. 32:20)

By saying, "*I will hide My face from them,"* God proclaims His displeasure for their deeds; having given Him their back and not their face. He admonishes them, saying, "*Saying to a tree, 'You are my father;, And to a stone, 'You gave birth to me,' For they have turned their back to Me, and not their face. But in the time of trouble they will say, 'Arise and save us'"* (Jeremiah 2:27). Although they are children, yet they have lost their sonhood to God because their unfaithfulness, un-seriousness, and non-obedience in God, their Father. They became of no value, with no goal, undependable, and untrustworthy.

They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God; They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols. But I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation; I will move them to anger by a foolish nation" (Deut. 32:21)

God often says, "***They provoked Me to jealousy**."* Which is quoted by the apostle Paul in Romans 10:19; and in Hosea 1:9, its goal is drawing the hearts to return to Him.

Having disregarded His compassionate fatherhood and became bound to abominations, God allows for their chastisement, using the same people from whom they learned the abominations: "***I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation; I will provoke them to anger by a foolish natio****n"* (21). What man assumes to be the source of his joy and pleasure would turn to become for his humiliation. Saying, "***I will provoke them to jealousy****"* bears a sort of divine love, inciting them to repentance. The apostle Paul sees in this (Romans (10:19), a prophecy about the acceptance of the Gentiles to faith; and the return of the Jews at the end of days to accept the Savior Messiah. The way the Israeli people rejected God and worshipped what is not God; God, to provoke them to jealousy, also rejected Israel and called the Gentiles a holy nation for Him, hoping that, at the end of days, they might return to Him, and forsake their denial of the Savior.

❖ It is fitting for them to be able to reconsider and re-evaluate their actual situation; not only as far as their lack of faith is concerned, and their refraining from proclaiming peace, and glad tidings of good things (Isaiah 52:7), nor concerning the word which was planted all over the world. But concerning the fact that they turned to be in a lesser position than the Gentiles who earned a greater honor[1].

St. John Chrysostom

"For a fire is kindled in My anger; and shall burn to the lowest hell; It shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains" (Deut. 32:22)

If they depend on their great number; they will be consumed as though by fire, to burn to the lowest hell; namely, to extreme misery. And if they depend on their strength, the foundation of their mountains will be set on fire. There is nothing to hinder the divine chastisement that would befall the wicked, who oppose the truth. Some scholars believe that this phrase bears a prophetic thought about the burning of the temple in the days of 'Titus' the Roman leader; when no stone of its foundation was left upon another that was not thrown down (Matthew 24:2).

"I will heap disasters upon them; I will spend My arrows upon them" (Deut. 32:23)

[1] *In Rom. hom. 18.*

God's judgments of chastisements are like arrows that fly with exalted speed, which cannot be opposed (Job 6:4; Psalm 21:8, 12; 38:2-3; 6:7; 91:5). If our Christ is the divine Arrow by whom the soul is shot; to cry out, saying, *"I am wounded with love"* (Songs 2:5). So are the chastisements of the Lord, shot toward the soul, to become crushed by repentance, to return to be healed by the Savior from all her wounds.

The chastisements mentioned here are:

(1) "***They shall be wasted with hunger***" (24). God allows for famine of the material bread, that man realizing his inner famine, would seek the bread that comes down from heaven. And as the prophet Amos says: "*'Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord God, 'that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord"* (Amos 8:11)

(2) "***Devoured by pestilence***" (24), "***and burning consumption***" (24); when the water of the whole world would not be enough to grant the soul coolness and peace. Only the tears of repentance can remove that burning heat caused by corruption and flared by sin.

(3) "***Bitter destruction and poison***" (24)

(4) "***I will also send against them the teeth of beasts, with the poison of serpents of the dust***" (24): When the wild beasts would devour man, and serpents would sting him with their poison. Danger would surround him on all sides.

(5) War with all its destruction:

"The sword shall destroy outside; There shall be terror within, for the young man and virgin; the nursing child, with the man of gray hairs. I would have said, 'I will dash them in pieces, I will make the memory of them to cease from among men; had I not feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should misunderstand, lest they should say, 'Our hand is high, and it is not the Lord who has done all this' " (Deut. 32:25-27).

Allowing the evildoers to chasten His children: When the Lord sees that they, filled with pride, say, "*Our hand is high; and it is not the Lord who has done all this*" (27), He chastens them also because they have insulted Him.

The worst and bitter-most chastisement of all, under which man could fall, is to fall under the hand of his fellow man. In war, in captivity, or in bondage; who becomes sometimes more fierce than the wild animals, and more ferocious than death; when man may yearn for death to save him from the hand of his fellow man and does not find it.

So the wicked puts himself in a bitter situation; when the merciful God becomes his Chastiser; when his body suffers from hunger and thirst; when he feels, as though in a furnace of un-quenchable fire; when his being faces destruction; when nature attacks him; and when his fellow man turns into a deadly arrow aimed at him. And once he realizes the great abyss into which he fell, he would then resort to God his Savior to lift him up and support him. When man bears the fear of God, he would fear all these things no more; but they would turn to his edification, and would become the cause of his victory and his crown.

But God, who does not wish for the perdition of the sinner, but for his return to Him, does not chasten without limit, and His anger is not forever; but as His anger is love, and His chastisements are for salvation; He becomes merciful toward His people who return to Him.

1. He reverses His anger, lest the enemy assumes that the conquest he gained over His people, is because of his own might and power, and not through God's allowance to chasten His people (27).

2. It is fitting for the people who fall under chastisement, to come back to reason, and to regain their spiritual insight, to realize the goal and significance of the chastisement.

"For they are a nation void of counsel, nor is there any understanding in them. Oh, that they were wise, that they understand this, that they would consider their latter end" (Deut. 32:28-29)

It is fitting for the people to understand that, what befell them of devastation is not because of the military might of the enemy, but because they rejected God their Rock in whom they sought refuge.

He calls His people *"a nation void of counsel, nor is there any understanding in them;"* as once they forsook God, they lost wisdom, vision, and prudence.

By human logic, *"**How could one chase a thousand; and two put ten thousand to flight?!**"* (30). That could not be, "***Unless their Rock had sold them, and the Lord had surrendered them**"* (30). There is no other cause for their un-natural destruction except their forsaking of God their Protector and Defender, who temporarily delivered them to their enemies.

❖ Faithful is He, who, by one, can chase a thousand, and can put ten thousands to flight, as conquest in battle is not realized by number but by righteousness[1].

St. Gregory of Nyssa

He compares between God the true Rock who protects His people, and the pagan gods in whom the Gentiles seek refuge, as their rocks; saying, "

"For their rock is not like our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges" (Deut. 32:31).

Even our enemies themselves would judge that the Lord God of Israel could not be compared to the rocks of pagan gods.

If God has allowed for the pagans to chasten His people, it is because they became evil: "***For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah. Their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter. Their wine is the poison of serpents, and the cruel venom of cobras**"* (Deut. 32:32-33). Their life became like that of Sodom, their deeds like those of Gomorrah. They turned into a people who bear inside them the deadly venom.

Some believe that the vines here refer to the venomous teachings of the pagans that they adopted.

3. The loving God does not hasten to chasten, but He is very longsuffering. But if His people persist on their evil, He would present to them what they have put in the stores, and sealed through their stubbornness, to let them fall under bitter chastisements.

"Is this not laid up in store with Me, sealed up among My treasures? Vengeance is Mine and recompense. Their foot shall slip in due time. For the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things to come hasten upon them" (Deut. 32:34, 35)

Some believe that God is here speaking about the people of Israel and their worship of idols; for which He will remain longsuffering until the time is ripe to chasten them. Others believe that He means what they have done to the prophets whom they killed and persecuted along the generations. Whereas others believe that it also applies to the Canaanites and the other pagan nations, whom God did not hasten to chasten, but has ultimately scattered before His people.

4. The defeat that came upon the people had not been because of the might of

[1] *St. Gregory of Nyssa: Answer to Eunomius' Second Book.*

the enemy, but a judgment of the Lord their God, to bring them back to Him through repentance, like a physician who uses his scalpel to heal their ailments.

"For the Lord will judge His people, and have compassion on His servants. When He sees that their power is gone, and there is no one remaining, bond or free, He will say, 'Where are their gods, the rocks in which they sought refuge? Who ate the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise and help you, and be your refuge.'

'Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God beside Me. I kill, and I make alive. I wound and I heal. Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand. For I lift My hand to heaven, and say, 'As I live forever, if I whet My glittering sword, and My hand takes hold of judgment, I will render vengeance to My enemies, and repay those who hate Me. I will make My arrows drunk with blood. And My sword shall devour flesh, with the blood of the slain and the captives, From the heads of the leaders of the enemy.'

Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people, For He will avenge the blood of His servants, and render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people" (Deut. 32:36-43)

He both judges His people, and has compassion on His servants; namely, He decides to chasten them, yet through His divine mercies. Or, once they return to Him, He would judge against the nations that humiliated them; who take pride in their gods, as rocks in which they seek refuge.

God allows for wounding the soul by chastisements to heal her of her ailments and corruption. And when He wounds her by the wounds of divine love, she sings saying, "I am wounded by love" (Songs 2:5). The Lord Christ, the true Love, the Word of God and the two-edged Sword wound her. He wounds her by the arrows of heavenly spiritual knowledge, to moan day and night, and yearn for greater knowledge, when she sees God face to face.

❖ The Holy Bible teaches us that "*God is Love*" (1 John 4:8); having aimed His Only-Begotten Son "*the polished Shaft"* (Isaiah 49; 2) toward the chosen ones, planting His triple point in the spirit of life.

The head of the arrow is faith that binds the striker of the arrow to those stricken by it. It is as though the soul ascends by means of divine lifts, to behold inside her the sweet arrow of love beautifying her with its wounds.

It is a nice wound and sweet pain; by which "life" pierces the soul; as through the tears of the "shaft," the soul opens up her entrance door[1].

St. Gregory of Nyssa

❖ If someone is flared at any time by the true love for the Word of God; if someone received one of the sweet wounds of this polished shaft, as it is called by the prophet; if someone is wounded by the shaft of His knowledge, worthy of every love; that he yearns and longs to it, day and night; that he cannot help talk of anything but it, listen only to it, and desire nothing but it; in such case, the soul truly says, "*I am wounded by love*." She receives her wound from Him, of whom is said: "*He has made me a polished shaft. In His quiver He has hidden me"* (Isaiah 49:2).

It is fitting for our souls to be hit by such healing wounds, to be wounded by such spears and shafts.

As long as "*God is love*," they say about their souls, "*I am wounded by love*."

[1] *Sermons on Cant. 4.*

Indeed it is the drama of love, when the soul says, "*I have received the wounds of love*."

The soul that flares with yearning to the wisdom of God; namely, that can behold the beauty of His wisdom, would say the same way: "I am wounded by wisdom"

And the soul that contemplate on His exalted ability, and is amazed by the power of His Word, would say, "I am wounded by the ability…"

And the soul flared with her love for God's justice, and contemplates on the justice of His ordainments and care, would truly say: "I am wounded by the justice."

And the soul that beholds the greatness of His goodness and His compassionate love, would also utter the same way.

But the wound that embraces all these things is the wound of love, by which the bride would proclaim, "*I am wounded by love*[1]."

Origen

- It was not possible for Saul of Tarsus, the Persecutor, to die, if he was not wounded from heaven (Acts 9:4). And it was not possible for Paul, the preacher, to rise up, except by the life he was given by the blood of Christ[2].

- Saul was destroyed; and Paul was built.

Jeremiah was told: "*I have this day… to root out and pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant…"* (Jeremiah 1:10). It was the voice of the Lord, saying: "***I wound and I heal***" (39). He strikes down the corruption of the work, and heals the pain of the wound; like what physicians do when they cut, wound, and heal; when they hold and use the knife to heal[3].

- It is fitting for the un-healthy to be wounded to become healthy[4].

- The Lord, our divine Physician uses His tools and His ministers also use them… according to His words, "***I wound and I heal***" (39)[5].

St. Augustine

God confirms His love for man; and that when He opposes, He opposes the evil one; exposing the pagan gods that, although they devour the flesh of sacrifices and drink the blood of the drink offerings; yet are helpless to save those who worship them. The Lord says: "*Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress"* (Judges 10:14). "*Where are your gods that you have made for yourselves? Let them arise, If they can save you in the time of your trouble"* (Jeremiah 2:28). God wishes that His bride would return to Him, unite with Him, and not remain in her adultery. He wishes that she would say: "*I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now"* (Hosea 2:7).

The enemy mockingly says to the people of God: "*Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you"* (Isaiah 37:10). "*Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?"* (Daniel 3:15) Whereas God proclaims His presence among His people, as the source of their conquest and victory, saying: "***I, even I, am He, and there is no God beside Me… I live forever***" (39, 40). He is the only God, of absolute authority; with no competitors, and in no need of any other; whoever acquires Him will acquire victory; "***He kills but not forever; He wounds and heals***" (39). As said by the prophet Jeremiah: "*Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because*

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[1] *Comm. On Cant. 3:8.*
[2] *St. Augustine: On Ps. 102.*
[3] *St. Augustine: On Ps. 51.*
[4] *On Ps. 114:7.*
[5] *St. Augustine: Letter 219:2.*

His compassions fail not… Though he causes grief, yet He will show compassion," according to the multitude of His mercies" (Lamentations 3:22, 32); and by the prophet Hosea: "*Come, and let us return to the Lord. For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up"* (Hosea 6:1).

Debating with the Arians, **Pope St. Athanasius** compared Deuteronomy 32:39 with what came in (Hebrew 13:8) , that "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever,*" to confirm the deity of the Lord Christ[1].

Lifting His hands to heaven, God swears by His own Name, saying: "*As I live forever"* (40), to proclaim that He will turn the evil of His adversaries over their own heads.

Moses ends his song by calling the people to rejoice in the Lord (43), giving three reasons for joy:

- Calling the future church of the Gentiles to practice her joy in the Lord; when the gentiles will come to be His people rejoicing by Him.
- God will grant His Church victory and conquest over the enemy.
- God proclaims His mercies. He probably means the return of the Jews to faith through their receiving the Lord Christ; to rejoice together with the Church of the Gentiles; for all to become one rejoicing church.

7. A CALL TO OBEDIENCE:

Having delivered his farewell song, which although bearing bitterness because of its anticipation of the people's rebellion and apostasy, Yet it ended with joy; and a call of many to the Lord. Now Moses calls them to obey all the words of this Law.

"So Moses came with Joshua the son of Nun and spoke all the words of this song in the hearing of the people. Moses finished speaking all these words to all Israel, and he said to them: 'Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe – all the words of this law.

For it is not a futile thing for you, because it is your life, and by this word you shall prolong your days in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess'" (Deut. 32:44-47)

Moses came (44), most probably from the Tabernacle, where God provided him with this prophetic song to utter before all his people. Now he is calling them to receive those divine words as being their life; and to give them to their children, to experience the true life, particularly in the Promised Land.

Joshua (44), his name was before 'Hosea,' meaning 'salvation,' then changed by Moses to 'Joshua,' meaning 'God is salvation' (Numbers 13:8, 16). The first name appeared in the Hebrew version.

Moses bids his people farewell. His days came to an end; whereas how prolonged would be their days, depend on their obedience. It is Jesus alone who can say to them: "*I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20).

8. A DIVINE COMMAND TO MOSES TO ASCEND THE MOUNT OF NEBO

"Then the Lord spoke to Moses that very same day, saying: Go up this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, across from Jericho; view the land of Canaan, which I give to the children of Israel as a possession; and die on the mountain which you ascend and be gathered to your people, just as Aaron your brother died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his

[1] *Discourses Against the Arians, 1:36; 2:10.*

people; because you trespassed against Me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin, because you did not hallow Me in the midst of the children of Israel. Yet you shall see the land before you, though you shall not go there, into the land which I am giving to the children of Israel" (Deut. 32:48-52)

The Lord commanded him to ascend the Mount of Nebo to see the Promised Land from there, but not to go there, because of his and his brother Aaron's transgression against the Lord at the waters of Meribah Kadesh (32:47; Numbers 27:14); because they did not hallow Him in the midst of the people. Most probably because Moses and Aaron did not glorify God's name before striking the rock by Moses' rod (Numbers 20:10). Although God forgave Moses for what he did, yet He persisted on reminding him of his weakness up till his last moments, to let him steadfast in his humility, remembering his weakness.

Moses accepted his chastisement before his death. Yet he did enter the Promised Land the day the Lord Christ transfigured on the Mount of Tabor. Before his death he saw the Promised Land from afar. Yet his soul rejoiced, counting what his people gained, as his own.

❖ The great Moses, who previously escaped to Median for fear of Pharaoh; did not fear to go back to the land of Egypt, when he got the divine command to do so (See Exodus 3). Again, when he was commanded to ascend the Mount of Nebo to die there, he did not hesitate, but set forth with joy[1].

Pope St. Athanasius

[1] *Defense of His Flight, 18.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 32)

LET ME TESTIFY TO YOU BY MY PERPETUAL PRAISE

❖ Moses expressed his joy in You by the incessant praises of his heart.
He testified to You in the midst of Your people even in His praises.
How great is Your love!
You are the Rock of ages, where my soul seeks refuge.
You are perfect in Your deeds; You are mere goodness.
Your care for me surpasses any reason.

❖ Any corruption in me is of my own making;
I drink of the same cup I mix.
You remain good, and no harm can come to You.
Every opposition or denial will come back to me.
Save me from my corruption and my murmur, O You of perfect goodness.

❖ Your works to me along history surpasses every reason.
You gave me everything.
You granted me a portion of land, so as not to fight against my brethren.
You granted me Yourself as a portion; to give You my life as Your portion.
I need You, O the Source of riches.
Yet You, with Your exalted love, count me as Your joyful portion!

❖ You keep me as the apple of Your eye, O You amazing in Your love.
You stir my nest with afflictions; and hover like an eagle over me.
So that I would forsake the nest of the world, and fly together with You in heaven.
You will bear me to Yourself, O my glory.
You stir my nest, so as not to remain in an idle childhood.
And in my setting forth, You sustain me, so that I need nothing.

❖ You gave me in abundance; so I ate, became fulfilled, and grew fat.
Instead of offering a thanksgiving sacrifice to You, I foolishly kicked.
My heart was preoccupied with the goods, and denied their Giver.
Who will take away my denial and the foolishness of my heart?
Stretch Your hand to chasten me.
I shall not be sure of any other hand.
It wounds and heals. It kills and lets live.
Aim the arrows of your chastisement toward me.
They wound my heart, but not to kill, but to flare it with love.
You wound the body with strike that seems cruel.
To realize by Your grace the deadly wounds of my soul;
When my sin makes me lose even my carnal blessings;
Nature come to be against me; and turns into a deadly shaft to wound me.
Who will save me from my sin but Your divine mercies?

❖ Let my soul rejoice together with Moses the great among the prophets.
Let me anticipate my ascension as though on Mount Nebo, to enjoy my setting forth to You.

CHAPTER 33

MOSES BLESSES THE PEOPLE

Having sung his song, by which he intended to end his life with joy despite realizing what will befall the people when they deny faith and fall under the divine chastisement, the prophet Moses blessed the people as a whole, and then blessed every tribe alone. We have not heard anything about Moses' wife or his biological children. He did not give any of them a command, nor cared for putting their material affairs in order before he dies, but he counted the people as a whole as his children; and did not wish to depart from this world before he blesses them.

He started by blessing the people as a whole, and so he ended it, as one holy congregation. Together with his care for each tribe individually, yet no single tribe of them will enjoy the blessing unless it unites with its brethren in a oneness of spirit and thought, and all become one people for One God.

After speaking frankly and clearly, as a father and a leader of his people, through his prophetic song, revealing what will dwell on them because of their apostasy from faith, he did not intend to let this song be the last of his talks. Although he was filled with grief for what will happen to his people, for whose edification he dedicated his whole heart and possibilities in the Lord, he gave his blessing to every single tribe. He did not want to give the impression that he is departing from the world, full of anger, but comfortably desiring for his people to be blessed in the Lord.

Before he departs, the prophet Moses provided his people with his commandment, and blessed them in a poetic style, the way Jacob blessed his children (Genesis 49:2-27). While the blessing uttered by Jacob, paraded the deeds of his children, some of which was shameful, that of Moses here, parades the works of divine grace, as far as their covenant with God is concerned. He gave thanks to the God of salvation and covenant (2-5); mentioned the tribes by their names, presenting each with a prophetic blessing (6-25); then ended his talk by praising the Lord of Israel (26-28), and by a promise that the chosen people of the Lord will gain victory over their enemies (29).

From the first verse, it is obvious that, either the blessing was written after the death of Moses; that Moses probably wrote the part that preceded the blessing; or that it was written by someone who heard Moses speaking. In any case, this blessing is a prophetic peace mixed with prayer and thanksgiving (Luke 2:28).

Simeon's name was omitted, probably to keep the number of the tribes as 12; taking into consideration that it has been included later on in the tribe of Judah. These blessings bore words of comfort that revealed God's thoughts and grace that He gives to His people.

1.	**Moses blesses the people**	**1.**
2.	**God's glory among His people**	**2-5.**
3.	**The blessing to Reuben**	**6.**
4.	**The blessing to Judah**	**7.**
5.	**The blessing to Levi**	**8-11.**
6.	**The blessing to Benjamin**	**12.**
7.	**The blessing to Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh)**	**13-17.**
8.	**The blessing to Zebulon and Issachar**	**18-19.**
9.	**The blessing to Gad**	**20-21.**
10.	**The blessing to Dan**	**22.**
11.	**The blessing to Naphtali**	**23.**

12. The blessing to Asher 24-25.
13. A collective blessing 26–29.

1. BLESSING THE PEOPLE

"Now, this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death" (Deut. 33:1)

This verse is considered the headline of the whole chapter; which reveals Moses' fatherly love and his yearning for their growth and salvation, although he was going to die without sharing with them what they were destined to gain.

"***Moses the man of God***" (1): These words show that Moses was not the author of this chapter. Caleb called Moses by this title (Joshua 14:6); and was also used as a headline of Psalm 90.

2. GOD'S GLORY AMONG HIS PEOPLE

The prophet Moses revealed the foundation on which his brethren would be blessed; namely, the proclamation of God's glory for their sake at different locations: From Sinai, from Seir, from Mount Paran, and with ten thousands of saints.

"And he said: 'The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of saints" (Deut. 33:2)

He starts the blessing by his beholding the Lord coming from Sinai, in glory like the shining of the sun; he beholds God providing His people with His Law or commandment, to let them walk according to the heavenly Law, in order to enjoy an angelic nature, and to have a fellowship in the blessed heavenly life. There He granted them His fiery Law, to let them become fiery beings, in the image of God, the consuming fire.

In the **Targum of Jerusalem**, it came that God came down on the Mount of Seir to present His Law to the Edomites, who rejected it because it included the commandment, "*You shall not kill;*" Then He presented on Mount Paran to the Ishmaelites, who rejected it because it included the commandment, "*You shall not steal.*" And when He came to Mount Sinai to present it to Israel, they said, "*Whatever the Lord says we shall hear.*"

God came down in glory and splendor to present His Law and to talk to His people; being said: "***He dawned forth***" and "***He shone***." Some believe that when God came down to present His Law to Moses on Mount Sinai, He also proclaimed the splendor of His glory. Dawning forth on Mount Seir and shining on Mount Paran, which are far from one another; it is as though the dwelling of God's glory on Mount Sinai spread over the whole region that the distant mountains dawned forth and shone.

Others believe that God's glory came down on Mount Sinai where the prophet Moses received the Law – which has the priority, having been the most important event in the whole Old Testament – And proclaimed His glory on Mount Seir; as it came in the book of Judges: "*Lord, when you went out from Seir, When You marched from the field of Edom, The earth trembled and the heavens poured, The clouds also poured water; The mountains gushed before the Lord, This Sinai, before the Lord God of Israel*" (Judges 5:4). God's glory also appeared on Paran; being said: "*The glory of God appeared in the Tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel*" (Numbers 14; 10).

"***He came with ten thousands of saints***" (2). 'Saints' came in the Septuagint version as 'angels,' which is probably the true meaning (see Acts 7:53). Scholars have different interpretations for this expression; whether it is a fourth location where the

Lord proclaimed His glory, or it refers to God's coming in general, being surrounded by tens of thousands of saintly angels; according to what came about His coming in the epistle of Jude (14); and in the Psalms: *"The chariots of God are… thousands, even thousands of thousands"* (Psalm 68:17).

God appeared to His people to provide them with His "*fiery Law*" (2); as it was presented "*in the midst of fire*" (Deut. 4:33); acts like fire that consumes evil, to purify the soul of corruption. And the Holy Spirit came upon the Church of the New Testament in the form of divided tongues of fire (Acts 2) for the disciples to present the fiery gospel, and to turn the souls into flaring fire of love toward God and men.

As to saying, "***From His right hand came a fiery Law for them***" (2) the right hand refers to power as well as to blessing. By the Law we enjoy the power of God, and gain the blessing.

"Yes, He loves the people. All His saints are in your hand; they sit down at Your feet. Everyone receives Your word" (Deut. 33:3).

The hand refers to the divine care. In the book of Revelation, the seven churches appear in the hand of the Lord Jesus (Rev. 1:16). His hand is spacious to embrace the catholic (universal) Church since Adam and to the end of ages. The Lord says about His sheep: " *neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand"* (John 10:28). As to His people sitting down at His feet, everyone receives His words. This refers to when the people stayed at the foot of the mountain, waiting for the prophet Moses who ascended to the top to encounter God, to receive the Law, and to deliver it to the people. Their staying at the foot of the mountain that smoked before the amazing glory of God was like the sitting of students at the feet of their teacher, with the spirit of humility and of the desire of learning.

The glorious God appears (33:2-5), being the true King of all the tribes; with His fiery Law, representing His love for His people; and holding His holy people in His right hand, to let no one be deprived of His love. They desire sitting at His feet; while He lovingly takes them in His bosom. With His love, He intended to present His Law to them. It is fitting for them to sit at His feet in humility, to demonstrate their desire for learning and discipleship; and in order to enjoy His Law as their inheritance:

"Moses commanded a Law for us, a heritage of the congregation of Jacob. And He was King in Jeshurun, when the leaders of the people were gathered" (Deut. 33:4, 5)

The Law of the Lord is our inheritance, our treasure, and our riches. The Psalmist says: "*Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, For they are the rejoicing of my heart"* (Psalm 119:111).

When the heads of the people gathered together, Moses was among them like a king or a leader of all Israel, presented the Law of the King of kings; whom they unfortunately later on rejected. The Lord says: "*You said to Me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' when the Lord your God was your king"* (1 Samuel 12:12).

"*He was king in Jeshurun"* (5), may refer to Jehovah (Compare 1 Samuel 12:12), to the King Messiah, mentioned in verse 3, or to Moses.

3. THE BLESSING TO REUBEN

"Let Reuben live, and not die, nor let his men be few" (Deut. 33:6)

The number of this tribe probably diminished because of the sin of Dathan and Abiram, children of Reuben, who joined Korah in opposing Moses (Numbers 16:1, 3, 3o). But Moses with his spacious heart, not bearing bitter memories, seeks blessing

for the tribe. Reuben, the firstborn of Jacob, although have lost his firstborn status, yet Moses began by him to save his face. Although the portion of this tribe was designated east of the River Jordan, but its men were committed to cross over the Jordan together with the other tribes to fight with them (Numbers 32:27), until all them get their inheritance. That is why Moses sought for them to live and not to die, nor be few, albeit they are not to enjoy the honor of the firstborn. As their portion was on the frontier, he confirmed to them that God would protect and support their men, so as not to be devoured by the surrounding nations.

That is the beginning of every blessing; to enjoy together with Reuben to live "the eternal life," and not to die "the second death;" our possibilities and glories not to be few; to enjoy the eternal glory, and to be counted in the sight of heaven as an exceedingly great army (Ezekiel 37:10).

4. THE BLESSING TO JUDAH

"And this he said of Judah: Hear, Lord, the voice of Judah, and bring him to his people; Let his hands be sufficient for him, And may You be a help against his enemies" (Deut. 33:7)

The blessing to Judah preceded that to Levi; as, in the Old Testament, the king's honor (the royal tribe of Judah), is greater than that of priesthood; although both join together in the Person of the Lord Christ, being the King and the Priest. Judah precedes Levi. Moreover, as the priesthood of the New Testament, connected to the priesthood of Christ, is greater than that of Levi.

Judah, the royal tribe, feeling his weakness, resorted to God as his support.

The blessing to Judah is directed to David as a symbol of the Lord Christ. David is known as a man of prayer, whose voice God hears, and as a man of action, who strives with his hands to conquer his enemy. Our Christ intercedes with His blood, and loves practically by His cross. What is the voice of Judah which God hears for the sake of his people but that of the Lord Christ, the intercessor between God and men, for the sake of the forgiveness of His people. He sets forth to the battle to fight by Himself on behalf of humanity. And in complete humility He resorted to the Father, although He is One with Him, in order that in Him we enjoy the divine help. Together with Reuben, we seek to enjoy the eternal life, so that death would have no authority over us. And together with Judah, to enjoy our acceptance by God the Father, to be counted as children of prayer, accepted by Him, bearing His power in our spiritual strife against the enemy.

5. THE BLESSING TO LEVI

"And of Levi he said: Let your Thumim and your Urim be with your holy one, whom you tested at Massah, and with whom you contended at the waters of Meribah. Who says of his father and mother, 'I have not seen them,' nor did he acknowledge his brothers, or know his own children. For they have observed Your word and kept your covenant.

They shall teach Jacob your judgments, and Israel your law. They shall put incense before You, and a whole burnt sacrifice on Your altar. Bless his substance, Lord, and accept the work of his hands. Strike the loins of those who rise against him, and of those who hate him, that they rise not again" (Deut. 33:8-11)

Here the prophet Moses speaks of the tribe to which he belongs, although he does not refer to the fact, nor to his own role, but to that of his brother Aaron the high priest and his successors; the bearer of the Thummim and the Urim over his chest (Exodus 28:30), by which he recognizes the will of God, to deliver it to the people.

The Urim refers to the enlightenment, the vision, or the wisdom; and the Thummim to the perfection or integrity. Our Christ is the High Priest, in whom we enjoy the integrated life, and the eternal life.

"***Your Thummim and Your Urim***" (8), are interpreted in the Septuagint version as 'Your light and Your truth' (Psalm 43:3).

He called him 'the righteous or the saint,' anointed as the high priest of God, the symbol of the Lord Christ, who is alone Holy. Despite the holy life he enjoyed, yet in weakness he fell at the waters of Meribah, together with the prophet Moses, and both of them were deprived of entering the Promised Land. That is why there was the need for the High Priest of the coming goods, who is alone without weakness - our Lord Jesus Christ.

Aaron dedicated himself to the Lord, and came to be as though he has not seen his own father and mother, nor did he acknowledge his brothers or children according to the flesh; having become a father to the whole congregation with no exception. The mission of the Levites committed them to care for the people more than their own families. But the Lord Christ, the sweet Fragrance, is interceding for us before the Father; He is the burnt sacrifice, capable of salvation.

Because the goal of this tribe is: **dedicating to God, keeping of the commandments, observing the covenant, teaching, and offering the pure worship**, It is said: "*My covenant was with him (Levi), one of life and peace, And I gave them to him that he might fear Me; So he feared Me, and was reverent before My name*" (Malachi 2:5).

Blessing of the Levi was very important; having no portion in the land, the Lord being his portion, who fulfills all his needs, Moses prays to God to bless his substance or his possibilities.

6. THE BLESSING TO BENJAMIN

"Of Benjamin he said: The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him, who shelters him all the day long; and he shall dwell between His shoulders" (Deut. 33:12)

This probably means that God carried Benjamin on His shoulders like a shepherd. Or a prophecy that the temple was to be built by the frontier of this tribe. Benjamin came directly after Levi, because the temple where the priests work was to be on the frontier of the portion of Benjamin. Benjamin even came before Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh), because Benjamin was to be next to the house of David and the temple; and to have more honor than Samaria, in the portion of Ephraim. Jerusalem was to be a portion of this tribe (Joshua 18:28). And although Zion, the city of David, was to be a portion of the tribe of Judah, yet the Mount of Moriah, over which the temple was to be built, was a portion of Benjamin. That is why the temple over the mountain, was like the head between two shoulders; namely, God with His temple, "*dwells between the shoulders of Benjamin.*" Setting the temple over the Mount of Moriah, a portion of Benjamin, refers to the fact that Benjamin dwells in the shadow (safety) of the temple; namely, under protection of the Lord Himself. And as the Psalmist says: "*Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, So the Lord surrounds His people from this time forth and forever*" (Psalm 125:1, 2).

'Benjamin' means 'son of the right hand.' It is as though, as man seeks to live forever, and not to submit to the second death (the tribe of Reuben); to practice the royal life through the perpetual prayer, together with the strife in the spiritual battle (the tribe of Judah); dedicating his life to keeping the commandment and worshipping

God (the tribe of Levi); he will be worthy of being the son of the right hand; to be counted as for the Lord, to abide in Him, to be protected under His shade, and to settle down between His shoulders (the tribe of Benjamin). Benjamin was called "*the beloved of the Lord;"* as Benjamin was the beloved son of Jacob, the son of his right hand (Genesis 49:27). King Saul came of this tribe, so did the apostle Paul. Whoever is attached to the Lord, would become His beloved, would enjoy safety in Him, and would find comfort between His shoulders; namely, in His bosom.

7. THE BLESSING TO JOSEPH (THE TWO TRIBES OF EPHRAIM AND MANASSEH)

"And of Joseph he said: Blessed of the Lord is his land, with the precious things of heaven, with the dew, and the deep lying beneath, with the precious fruits of the sun, with the precious produce of the months, with the best things of the ancient mountains, with the precious things of the everlasting hills, with the precious things of the earth and its fullness, and the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush. Let the blessing come on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers. His glory is like a firstborn bull, and his horns are like the horns of the wild ox. Together with them, he shall push the peoples to the ends of the earth. They are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh" (Deut. 33:13-17)

In Jacob's blessing, he gave Joseph the greater portion (Genesis 49); so did the prophet Moses.

Joseph's strength lies in that he was the 'Nazarite of his brothers,' as he was called by Moses, and in his ability to destroy and conquer his enemies. And as the 'Nazarite' or the 'dedicated,' is the person who is separate from others to dedicate his life and possibilities on account of the kingdom of God; so Joseph was separate from his brothers, sold as a slave, and lived his youth in Egypt, far from them for their sake; having said to them: "*Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as He is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones"* (Genesis 50:19-21). It is as though God allowed for him to be temporarily separated, in order to preserve the life of his brothers; so he is counted as the 'Nazarite' of his brothers.

The blessing to the two tribes that came from Joseph was both, great in quantity and great in strength. The fertile cities came to be their portion to inherit. Here, it is proclaimed that the source of fertility or the blessing is the grace of God "***the precious things of heaven****"* (13). Great was his blessing, even to his land, watered by the blessings of the Lord from heaven, and by the deep springs coming from underneath. So God blesses man in his body (his land), raining over him the water of the Spirit; and flooding in him the springs of the Spirit from underneath; namely, his body would bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit; and would come to be the fruitful and beloved paradise of God; according to the words of the Psalmist: "*You visit the earth and water it. You greatly enrich it*; *the river of God is full of water"* (Psalm 65:9).

Besides blessing the land, the rain, and the springs, God blesses the work of the sun, the moon, and the stars for man's sake. Through the heat of the sun, supported by the moon, the land gives its most precious produce. Some understand verse 14, that God uses the seasons of the year, connected to the sun, the moon, and the stars, to provide man with the increase of fruits at the right season. Such is God's blessing to the inner paradise of the soul. The Sun of righteousness would shine on

her with His light, and provide her with His spiritual heat, to let her enjoy the unique increasing fruits. And the Church (the moon) would shed her light on her; would surround her with her saints like the stars of heaven; to become perpetually fruitful; producing the right fruit in the right time.

While other lands might moan because of drought, and for their barren mountains and hills, this tribe enjoys the most precious fruitful trees. The soul would rise as though on the mountains and hills of the word of God; would not live at the foot together with others; but would ascend, together with the disciples Peter, James, and John, in the company of Christ, to where she enjoys the transfiguration; to realize the secrets of the Old Testament Law (Moses) and prophets (Elijah); and to live on Mount Tabor in the exalted glory of God. The believer would live like the steadfast and un-shaken mountain of God.

Together with the fruits of the mountains and hills, the lower lands and the valleys would provide this tribe with plentiful produce; so that he would rejoice for the precious gifts of God of crops of grain, vegetables and little plants. Wherever man might be, he would know nothing but perpetual fruition, would enjoy the heavenly blessings coming from above; and would thank God for His temporal earthly blessings, to fulfill the needs of his body as well as those of his brethren. By that the blessing would dwell over his head, and he would be counted as the 'Nazarite' of his brothers, as he sees that all the blessings within his hands are not only for his sake, but also for the sake of the edification and perpetual growth of his brothers.

By the precious things of the earth, he probably means what it presents to him of precious minerals and valuable stones; according to the words of 'Job': "*As for the earth, from it comes bread, and underneath it is turned up as by fire; Its stones are the source of sapphires, and it contains gold dust"* (Job 28:5, 6). Beside the bread that the earth offers to fulfill the body; it also offers the precious minerals and valuable stones for industry and adornment. So the believer would find exalted blessings that fulfill his soul by the heavenly bread, and adorn her with the splendor of God's glory.

Then the prophet Moses crowns these blessings that come upon this tribe; of the water of rain, of the springs, of the fruits of the mountains and hills, and of the precious minerals and the valuable stones, by what is greater, namely, the encounter of man's will with the divine will, to carry in him a holy will, accepted by God, and the pleasure of Him who dwelt in the bush, as he (Moses) was called to ministry, that was burned with fire, but was not consumed (Exodus 3:2).

That is the exalted blessing, when God draws the heart, mind, and thought, to Himself, and brings the believer into His exalted secrets, particularly His salvation works, of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, in order to set forth bearing a living evangelic testimony, yearning to draw every soul, away from the bondage of Pharaoh, to set forth, across the wilderness, toward the heavenly Canaan.

Reaching up to the enjoyment of the holy will, as the greatest of blessings, Moses says: "***Let the blessing come on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers***" (16).

That is concerning the increase of spiritual blessings; But as far as the blessing of strength; the prophet sees him like a firstborn ox, which was a symbol of royal greatness. He is strong and capable of having conquest over the peoples to the end of the earth. Joshua son of Nun, led his people over to the Promised Land; and on his hands they had successive conquests over the Canaanites and took over their land. He is of the tribe of Ephraim son of Joseph, in whose portion was the royal city of the kingdom of Israel – the kingdom of the North. And of Manasseh came Gideon, Jephthah and Jair, the Judges who were the pride of their country, filled with blessing

and strength.

Some believe that describing Joseph as a firstborn bull, refers to the fact that he gained the firstborn status that Reuben lost (1 Chronicles 1; 2); and because Bashan, a portion of Manasseh was famous for strong bulls (Psalm 22:12). The bull for the Jews has been one of the most important animals, on account that he was well received by the Lord as an animal of sacrifice, and because of its benefit as a working beast in agriculture.

"***His horns are like the horns of the wild ox***" (17), with which he strikes and conquers; besides having special kind of beauty. The tribe of Ephraim was known for its might and authority.((Psalm 75:5, 10; 89: 17, 24; 112: 9; Daniel 8: 3; Luke 1: 96; Revelation 17: 3) .

He gave Ephraim the tens of thousands, and to Manasseh the thousands; according to the prophecy of Jacob that Ephraim the younger son of Joseph would be greater than his brother (Genesis 48:19), which was actually realized (Numbers 1:33-35).

8. THE BLESSINGS TO ZEBULUN AND ISSACHAR

"And of Zebulun he said: Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out, And Issachar in your tents! They shall call the peoples to the mountains. There they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness. For they shall partake of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hidden in the sand" (Deut. 33:18, 19)

These two tribes were mentioned together, because they both were the sons of Jacob from Leah; and they were neighbors in their portions of the land of inheritance. The tribe of Zebulun was famous for having marine ports (Genesis 49; 13); through which people of different nations used to pass; many of whom entered faith, forsaking idolatry. The blessing here, refers to their preaching, evangelic testimony, and opening of their hearts to others. They grew very rich through marine trading, as a symbol of their riches in spiritual work.

What does he mean by "the treasures hidden in the sand?"

Jonathan son of Azoel believes that, because the sands on the shores of Zebulun were of the best kinds for the industry of glass, it was like a treasure within their hands. So were the scales of fish in the sand there, for the industry of the precious purple textile. Whereas some others believe that these words are symbolic expression of their great wealth by the marine trade.

As Zebulun rejoices over his marine trade; so also Isacchar rejoice over his trade in their tents. God has granted every man and every nation what fulfill their needs, some on land and others in the sea. Letting us all rejoice wherever we are, we should never feel haughty because of our special talents, nor feel depressed because of those of others. Every one of us should work with what he has! Zebulun should thank God for his marine ports; and Issachar, for the prosperity of his trade through tents; "*As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor – this is the gift of God*" (Ecclesiastes 6:19).

By the marine trade, as well as by that through the tents, they called the nations to the mountain where the temple of the Lord was set; namely, they used their labor as a chance to testify to the Lord, and to call others to minister to Him.

The ministry of the Lord Christ started in the land of Zebulun (Matthew 4:14-15); after which those people were called to the mountain; namely, to the kingdom of Christ, called "*the mountain of the Lord's house*" (Isaiah 2:2).

Some believe that (the sons of) Issachar, because they were living in tents, they were well aware of the days of the feasts more than others; and they used to call others to celebrate them. Whereas others believe that the tents here had certain educational significance, as some of those people used to seek more education and knowledge. That got them some role of leadership, although they were neither a royal, nor a tribe of priesthood; yet they symbolized positive labor and feeling of responsibility.

God granted them several riches; that when they called others to go up to the 'mountain of the lord's house,' they were good living role models to them, when they were seen coming carrying many gifts with abundance. The prophet Isaiah, speaking of the glory of the Church of the New Testament, and her spiritual riches, says: *"The abundance of the sea shall be turned to you; and the wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you"* (Isaiah 60:5). Her trade turned to the glory of God: *"Her grain and her pay will be set apart for the Lord, it will not be treasured nor laid up, for her grain will be for those who dwell before the Lord, to eat sufficiently, and for fine clothing"* (Isaiah 23:18).

9. THE BLESSING TO GAD

"And of Gad he said: Blessed is he who enlarges Gad. He dwells as a lion, and tears the arm and the crown of his head. He provided the first part for himself, because a lawgiver's portion was reserved there. He came with the heads of the people. He administered the justice of the Lord, and the judgments with Israel" (Deut. 33:20-21)

Gad was one of the tribes that had their portion of the Promised Land east of the River Jordan. Moses prophesied that the blessing to Gad would be:

1. *"**enlarged**."* After having their portion of the land, their territory was greatly enlarged Being men of war, they made war with the Hagrites, conquered them, took away much spoil, and dwelt in their place (1 Chronicles 5:18-22).

By the spirit of conquest and victory, like a lioness, they tore the arm; namely, the strength; and the crown of the head; namely, the honor and glory of their enemies. "*Some Gadites joined David at the stronghold in the wilderness, mighty men of valor, men trained for battle, who could handle shield and spear, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as gazelles on the mountains"* (1 Chronicles 12:8).

2. *"**He provided the first part for himself**;"* namely, Gad wisely cared to have their portion ahead of all, east of the River Jordan, before crossing the river to its west bank. And as the Psalmist says: *"For men will praise you when you do well for yourself"* (Psalm 49:18). So it is with him, who cares for the salvation of his soul, and who gives priority to the inheritance of the soul over the needs of the body; He would be worthy of praise. Gad was not driven by selfishness in taking what he did; as he set forth to fight for the sake of the rest of the tribes: *"**He came with the heads of the people. He administered the justice of the Lord**"* (21). They were obedient to Joshua son of Nun; answered him, saying: *"All that you command us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go"* (Joshua 1:16). And so they did (Joshua 4:12, 13). "*And when Joshua sent them away to their tents, he blessed them"* (Joshua 22:7).

As (the sons of) Gad were swift in movement; they were referred to in the distribution preceding those of Reuben (Numbers 22:2). Whereas Joshua carried out the distribution of the land among the tribes; Gad and his company got theirs from Moses, the lawgiver; according to the Law; namely, through the care of God (21)

10. THE BLESSING TO DAN

"And of Dan he said: Dan is a lions whelp; He shall leap from Bashan" (Deut. 33:22)

The Jewish tradition connects the tribe of Dan to apostasy. They were described by Jacob as a snake (Genesis 49:17); and by Moses as the whelp of a lion; namely, they had the head of the snake and the heart of the lion.

Interpreters believed that as Bashan was a location where lions abound, the tribe of Dan were known for their strength. "*The border of the children of Dan went beyond these, because the children of Dan went up to fight against Leshem and took it; and they struck it with the edge of the sword, took possession of it, and dwelt in it. They called Leshem, Dan, after the name of Dan their father"* (Joshua 19:47)

The tribe of Dan was raised as a whelp of a lion, grew up, and came to search for preys among the Philistines.

11. THE BLESSING TO NAPHTALI

"And of Naphtali he said: O Naphtali, satisfied with favor, and full of the blessing of the Lord, possess the west and the south" (Deut. 33:23)

This tribe was given the beautiful fertile land west and south of the Sea of Galilee.

To this tribe he looked with surprise, commending them. While the blessing refers to the will of God; the source of pleasure, the fullness of blessing, and the possession of both the west and the south, refer to the fact that the Lord Christ, the King of kings, has shined with His splendor there. And as the evangelist Matthew says: "*Leaving Nazareth, He (Jesus) came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness saw a great light"* (Matthew 4:13-16). The Lord Christ considered Capernaum as His own town (Matthew 9:1; Mark 2:1).

The fullness of blessing here, might refer to the fertility of its land, because of which the Jews believed that the tribe of Naphtali used to be the first to present the firstfruits to the temple; and that the inhabitants of Capernaum and Bethsaida were known for their wealth.

12. THE BLESSING TO ASHER

"And of Asher he said: Asher is most blessed of sons. Let him be favored by his brothers, and let him dip his foot in oil. Your sandals shall be iron and bronze. As your days, so shall your strength be" (Deut. 33:24, 25)

His land was famous for the production of oil. The prophet Moses presents four prophecies about Asher, which bear in themselves the signs of blessing. Leah said, when Asher was born; "*Happy am I!"* (Genesis 30:13).

1. Increase in number of his children, who would enter into a covenant with God; enjoy Him as a source of blessing.

2. Favored by his brothers; namely, being with them in unity, love, and good will.

3. Enjoy so many good things, that he, not only would anoint his body with oil, but also would even dip his foot in fragrant oils.

❖ The Lord says that the priest and the Levi, as they had on them no oil or wine, passed by the wounded man, and could not bandage his wounds (Luke 10:31, 33)

. Isaiah proclaims: "*Wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores; not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment"* (Isaiah 1:6). To soothe and heal such wounds of

her children, the church has got the secret oil. In such oil, Asher has dipped his feet[1].

St. Ambrose

4. Asher had an abundance of minerals in their land that they used to make their sandals of iron and bronze; which symbolically refer to strength, splendor, and ability to tread on rough ground.

"***As your days, so shall your strength be;"*** which means having strength in their life that would never fail.

13. A COLLECTIVE BLESSING TO ALL ISRAEL

"There is no one like the God of Jeshurun; who rides the heaven to help you, and in His excellency on the clouds" (Deut. 33:26)

God is worthy of every praise. He is above, below, behind, before, and around His people. His person stands beyond nature and secrets, a Lord and Savior of His people. Every nation is proud of her God, but there is no One like the God of Jeshurun.

The whole people was called "Jeshurun;" namely, (the straightforward people); or as it came in the Septuagint version, 'the beloved people.' God hastens to help them, riding heaven as a divine chariot; "*and His excellency on the clouds."* The clouds refer to the inability to apprehend the secrecy of excellence of God's love, support, and care for His people. He has the authority on the whole nature; dedicating it on account of His people.

"The eternal God is your refuge. And underneath are the everlasting arms. He will thrust out the enemy from before you, and will say, 'Destroy!' Then Israel shall dwell in safety, The fountain of Jacob alone, In a land of grain and new wine; His heavens shall also drop dew.

Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you? A people saved by the Lord, The shield of your help, and the sword of your majesty! Your enemies shall submit to you, and you shall tread down their high places" (Deut. 33:27-29)

Concerning the possibilities and swiftness, He rides the clouds to help His people; and concerning experience, He is the ancient, eternal, and unchangeable God; who stretches His arms underneath them, to keep them from falling. His arms will never be defeated or destroyed by an enemy, to snatch His people from within them. As long as the Church is perpetually borne on His everlasting arms, she will never drown. She is borne on the Rock of ages; and "*the gates of Hades shall not prevail against her*" (Matthew 16:18). "*He will dwell on high; His place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; Bread will be given him, His water will be sure"* (Isaiah 33:16).

He is eternal before ages, and will never submit to time; and as it came in Habakkuk: "*Are you not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? We shall not die"* (Habakkuk 1:12).

The people shall never need a weapon for protection; but the Lord Himself will be their weapon; They will become their shield and sword; God made Himself a refuge for His people (27); where they safely dwell; the soul abiding by God, feels at home, in true security. The Psalmist says: "*Return to your rest, O my soul. For the Lord has dealt bountifully with you"* (Psalm 116:7); "*You are my hiding place. You shall preserve me from trouble"* Psalm 32:7). God will grant His people a conquest over the enemy, to destroy him, and to be feared.

[1] *St. Ambrose: Letter 41:19,20.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 33)

OPEN MY MOUTH TO BLESS

❖ You granted me a mouth and a tongue to bless and not to curse.
Be in my mouth; to bless everyone I encounter.
Let me enjoy Your blessing on the tongue of Your prophet Moses.
Let me sit at Your feet, together with those at the foot of the mountain.
To look at the fiery mountain of God;
So that my soul would be filled with the splendor of Your glory.
And Your word would shine inside me.

❖ Together with Reuben, let me see You, O the Grantor of life.
I shall never fear death, as long as You dwell in me.

❖ Together with Judah, let me realize that Your ears are inclined toward me.
Listening to the hidden prayers of my heart,
And responding to the supplications of my soul,
Destroying my enemy, and fighting my sins,
To gain by You successive conquests.

❖ Together with Levi, let me dedicate to You my whole life.
You, alone, are my portion.
I shall not be preoccupied by a father, mother, spouse, or children; You, alone, are everything to me.
To love them in You; and to minister to You in them.
Make me holy, to become a witness to You, O the Holy One.
Accept my priesthood; and smell my prayer, a sweet fragrance.
Receive from my hands sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise.
Teach me to keep Your covenant forever.

❖ Together with Benjamin, grant me a place on Your right hand.
Call me Your beloved; for my soul to find peace in You.
Let me find refuge under Your wings
And to dwell in security between Your shoulders.

❖ Together with Joseph's two sons: Ephraim and Manasseh grant me good things of Your love.
Bless my land, to produce an increase of fruits
Transform my depths into steadfast mountains that bear great fruits.
Fill my land with precious minerals.
Beside the spiritual riches, grant me strength, beauty, and honor.
You are my riches, my strength, and my glory.

❖ Together with Zebulun, let me minister to You in the seas.
And with Issachar, let me testify to You in the tents.
Accept my ministry both in the sea and on land.

❖ Together with Gad, Grant me to care for the salvation of my soul.
Let the land of my heart be spacious, to receive every stranger and needy.

❖ Together with Dan, make me like the whelp of a lion.
Full of youth, vitality, and strength of Spirit.

❖ Together with Naphtali, grant me fertility in my land; not to become ever barren.
But to perpetually bear an increase of the fruit of the Spirit.

❖ Together with Asher, dip my feet in oil.
Flood me with blessings, that I wash my feet with spiritual fragrant oils.
Let me wear iron shoes, to walk along the rough roads without fear.
Let my feet become anointed with love; and make them walk firmly with the spirit of strength.

CHAPTER 34

MOSES ON MOUNT NEBO

This is the final chapter. After presenting the three farewell sermons, then the final song, and the blessing to all the tribes, the prophet Moses went up to Mount Nebo 'Pisgah,' to look at the land that God promised to give his fathers. Then he delivered his spirit according to the word of the Lord. And the Lord Himself buried him in a grave that no one knows to this day (5, 6). The people wept and mourned for the man who talked to the Lord "*face to face*" (10).

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1. MOSES ON MOUNT NEBO

"Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is across from Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land of Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the South, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar.

Then the Lord said to him, 'This is the land of which I swore to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have caused you to see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.

So Moses, the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord" (Deut. 34:1-5)

God designated to Moses the place where he would die (Deut. 32:49, 50). He left the people in the plain of Moab, and went up, according to the word of the Lord, to the top of Mount Nebo, in a region called 'the top of Pisgah' (a word meaning 'a break,' probably on the top of Mount Oshah). As Moses used to encounter with God on the mountain to receive the Law; even his death took place on Mount Nebo; on a high location where he could see, by faith, what his fathers were promised, and what is now realized to his people; so that his soul would rejoice, as though he has, himself gained that promise.

Moses has been on many aspects, a model minister to the Lord; whose slogan was "*As the Lord say."* He was not confused by that command of the Lord, but counted death as a divine gift; having consummated his mission, and the time came to set forth to God who sent him. Although he knew the place where he would deliver his spirit, he did not avoid it, but went up to it with complete freedom of his will. He probably was rejoicing over the completion of his mission in peace; and counted death as an ascension. He went up to the highest location there, alone and with no help of anyone, although he was 120 years old.

No one saw him dying; either because of God's intention to keep his grave hidden, so that the Jews would not worship him; or He probably intended to confirm that the children of God need no human help at the moment they depart from this world, as God Himself is their help.

From up there, the prophet Moses looked down to see Canaan, the Promised Land; and his soul rejoiced for the realization of the divine promise; And looked up to

behold the heavenly Canaan.

Moses' eyes were not dim with age; but seeing all Canaan from the top of the mountain could not be through natural ability; but God granted him that grace to let him rejoice over what his people were to enjoy in the near future.

Moses, the 'great among the prophets;' and the first leader of his people, was called '***the servant of the Lord***' (5), a title referring to a distinguished position enjoyed by someone working in the court of the King of kings; and who has a special place in the sight of God. This title was also enjoyed by Abraham, the Patriarch (Genesis 26:24); by Joshua son of Nun (Joshua 24:29); by David, the first righteous king of his people (2 Samuel 7:50); as well as by the prophets, the witnesses of truth (2 Kings 9:7).

It did not stop at certain persons, but, because the Lord yearns for every member of His Church to have his personal living role. Israel was called by this title (Isaiah 41:8). And even intending for foreigners to realize His holy will, a foreign king was called by this title (Jeremiah 25:9).

But, as the incarnate Word of God Himself became "*the Servant of the Lord*;" and have got four praises by the name of "praises to the servant of the Lord" (Isaiah 42); He wishes for every soul to connect to Him to gain His honor and to enjoy His salvation praises. I have previously dealt in some detail with the titles "*the Servant of Jehovah*" and "*the Servant of the Lord*" in my commentary on the book of Isaiah[1].

Until the coming of the incarnate Word of God, "*there has not risen in Israel a prophet like Moses"* (10*);*

But as the Son Himself came, there was no comparison between the Son, the Owner of the house, and the servant of the house (Hebrews 3:1-6).

"And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; But no one knows his grave to this day" (Deut. 34:6)

The Lord Himself buried Him; probably by His angels. God cared for Moses' dead body; as the death of the righteous is precious to him. He did not bury him with his fathers, but in the land of Moab, in a place known by no one. Although God cares even for our dead bodies, yet we should not be preoccupied with the place we are to be buried.

Riparius, priest of Aquitane, wrote to **St. Jerome**, concerning Vigilantius, who opposed honoring the relics of saints and celebrating their feasts; considering their relics as defiled things. **St. Jerome** responded to him, presenting examples from the two Testaments about honoring the relics of those who repose in the Lord. In his message he said: [I ask Vigilantius: Are the relics of Peter and Paul defiled things? Was that of Moses a defiled thing; he of whom was said – according to the Hebrew text – that "*the Lord Himself buried him"?*[2]]

St. Jerome[3] compared between the death of Moses and that of Joshua, saying that in case of the death of Moses, Israel held days of mourning; which they did not do for Joshua when he died (Joshua 24:30). If Moses symbolized the Jews under the Law, Joshua, on the other hand, symbolized the Christians under the leadership of Jesus Christ. Through the Law, there could be weeping, as though for a night; but through Jesus, only joy, as though for a day (Psalm 30:5).

It was said: "*Moab will wail over Nebo"* (Isaiah 15:2). On the mountain where Moses ascended to look at the Promised Land from afar, and his soul rejoiced; the

[1] *Cf. The author: Isaiah, Alexandria 1988, p. 19-21 (in Arabic).*
[2] *St. Jerome: Letter 109:1.*
[3] *St. Jerome: Letter 60:6.*

Moabites wailed for the location they considered as a center of defense. What makes the heart of the believer rejoice, would destroy that of the denier of faith.

❖ What does history say about this? Moses, the 'servant of Jehovah' died, according to a command by Jehovah. No one knew his grave to this day. His eyes did not grow dim; nor his natural vigor abated. From this we learn that, when someone consummates such great tasks, he would be worthy of being called by such an exalted name "the servant of Jehovah;" a way to say that he is better than any other. No one ministers to God, and not becomes more exalted than any other in the world. This, as far as he is concerned, is the crown of a virtuous life; the goal consummated through the word of God.

History speaks of a 'life-giving death,' not followed by a grave, does not cause dim eyes, nor abating of the natural vigor.

What then should you learn from what was said? You should have one goal of life; to be called a minister of God, by the life you live.

When you defeat all the enemies (the Egyptians, Amalekites, Edomites, and Medianites etc.).

When you cross over the water; become enlightened by the cloud; enjoy the sweetness by the tree; drink from the rock; taste the food coming from above; ascend the mountain through purity and holiness; when you get teachings concerning the divine mystery, by the voice of trumpets.

When you approach God, through belief in the un-penetratable darkness; and there, you learn the mysteries of the tabernacle, and the honor of priesthood.

When you engrave in your heart the divine teachings you received from God.

When you destroy the golden calf (namely, when you uproot from your heart the lust of greed).

When you rise up to the heights, to oppose the magic of Balaam (namely, you expose the deceiving magic, that mislead some people by the philosophies of Cicero; to turn into irrational animals, and forsake their nature fitting for them).

When you achieve all that, and in you the rod of priesthood "*spouted, put forth buds, produced blossoms, and yielded ripe almonds*" (see Numbers 17:8), without drawing any moisture from the ground, but would have a unique power of fruition (its almonds, that would be at first rough and have bitter taste, then would turn inside sweet and fit for eating).

When you destroy everything opposite to what is fitting for you, as when the earth swallowed Dathan, and when fire consumed Korah; Then you would have approached your goal; namely, the goal for the sake of which you have done all those things[1].

St. Gregory of Nyssa

2. MOSES' UNABATED NATURAL VIGOR

"Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor abated" (Deut. 34:7)

In Psalm 90, the prophet Moses says: "*The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow"* (Psalm 90:10). How could he say that while he lived 120 years? He counted his days as have come to an end when he reached 80 years of age; and the 40 extra years as a gift from God, to go on ministering on account of His kingdom.

Moses lived 120 years; his eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor abated; a reference to the enjoyment of the believer of perpetual enlightenment and youth,

[1] *Life of Moses, 314-317.*

while his inner soul would never be affected by blindness or frailty of old age. The inner man of a true Christian would never know frailty of old age; but the Holy Spirit would renew his youth like the eagle (Psalm 103:5).

Moses' eyes did not grow dim like Isaac (Genesis 27:1), or Jacob (Genesis 48:10); but his natural vigor was not abated like a young man full of strength and vitality. The face whose skin shone through the reflection of God's splendor on it (Exodus 34:30) would never grow old.

❖ How could the eye that is perpetually in the light; grow dim by the darkness, from which it separated itself? A man, who through every mean has reached non-corruption in his life, would never get corrupted, as he has truly become an icon of God. He, who does not divert in any way from the divine attributes, would bear in himself its distinguishing signs; would appear in everything conforming to the original; and would never participate in any corruption[1].

St. Gregory of Nyssa

3. THE DAYS OF MOURNING FOR MOSES

"The children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. So the days for weeping and mourning for Moses ended" (Deut. 34:8)

The Targum of Jonathan says that the Lord commanded Michael the archangel to guard the grave of Moses. Although God buried Moses, and a unique angelic funeral was held for him; yet God did not keep the people from expressing their feelings; they wept thirty days for their amazing leader!

4. JOSHUA THE SUCCESSOR OF MOSES

"Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses has laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the Lord commanded Moses" (Deut. 34:9)

Like Moses who was full with the spirit of wisdom, so was his disciple Joshua; through the laying of Moses' hands on him; namely through his ordination. Why didn't he lay one hand on him? He did like Jacob, when he blessed his two grandchildren Ephraim and Manasseh, by laying his two hands like the sign of the cross; the right hand on Ephraim on his right side, and his left hand on Manasseh on his left. So we should receive the spirit of leadership through the cross of Jesus the Lord of glory.

5. THE END

"But since then, there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land, and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel" (Deut. 34:10-12)

The book ended by revealing the greatness of Moses, in being so attached to God, that he saw him face to face; and as it was said, God used to speak to him, not through visions and dreams, but directly, frankly, and publicly. It is as though the source of his strength was encountering God and debating with Him.

God has made on his hands a salvation from the bondage of pharaoh; and has proclaimed through him the divine glory, especially when He delivered to him the Law on the Mount of Sinai.

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[1] *Life of Moses, 318.*

These final verses give the impression that they were written by someone who came after the time of Joshua; probably added by Eleazar the son of Aaron, or one of the elders after the death of Joshua (Joshua 24:31).

As a prophet, Moses led the people (Hosea 12:13), delivered to them the proclamation he received (29:29); and referred to Christ (18:15). Face to face (10), in all the mighty hand (12). God's work through Moses was not by mere words, but by unforgettable works. The signs and wonders that were done in Egypt were divine preparation for the greater work of redemption that took place on the Golgotha.

MOUNTAINS IN THE HOLY BIBLE

Mountains in the Holy Bible have a special status; being the locations favorite to God to encounter His people, or to present gifts or certain proclamations. On them men of God got conquests over evil, or from them believers carried wood to build the temple of the Lord. Choosing mountains as locations to give heavenly divine blessings, was to call the believer to lift up his heart, mind, and all his feelings, above everything earthly, to encounter his heavenly Father.

The Psalmist used to lift up his eyes to the holy mountains in anticipation of divine help.

If the prophet Moses received the divine Law on the mountain, saw Canaan from the top of a mountain, and there he delivered his spirit in the hands of God, who cared for both his spirit and his body; That was to confirm to us our need to ascend the "mountain of the Lord's house;" as it is said: "*It shall come to pass in the later days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains; and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it"* (Isaiah 2:2).

What is this mountain but the Person of the Lord Christ, the true Rock that flows the water of the Spirit on His people (1 Corinthians 10:4), the Mountain that the prophet Daniel saw filling the whole earth (Daniel 2:35, 45). **St. Augustine** says: [The mountain as we learn from the prophetic testimony is the Lord Himself[1].] And **Origen** calls us to ascend the high mountains, saying: [It is enough for you not to stay on the ground, nor to dwell in the plains, or to linger in the lowly places[2].]

Probably the most prominent mountains mentioned in the Holy Bible are:

(1) **Mount Ararat**: In nowadays Turkey, where the ark of Noah came to rest (Genesis 8:4); where the Church, that was saved from the great flood of the world, comes to rest in the heights, in heaven itself, having no place in the low places.

(2) **Mount Sinai**: Or Horeb; North-east of Egypt; where the prophet Moses received the Law (Exodus 19:2-25). We go together with Moses up the mountain to enjoy receiving the commandment, engraved in the depths of the soul, not on tablets of stone, but on the heart itself, by the fiery Holy Spirit.

(3) **Mount Ebal**: Opposite to Mount Gerizim; where Moses was commanded to build an altar for the Lord, once they enter into the Promised Land. As the believer could not offer his life a sacrifice of love to God, while preoccupied with lowly things.

(4) **Mount Gerizim**: On which the Lord Christ spoke to the Samaritan woman by the well (John 4:20), who left back her water-pot and set forth to the city inviting all its people to come to see, to hear, and to experience what she did: the sweetness of the work of the Savior, Lover of mankind.

(5) **Mount Nebo**: (or the Pisgeh): On the top of which Moses saw from afar

[1] *Sermons on N.T. Lessons 39:2.*
[2] *In Num. Hom. 3.*

the Promised Land with his own eyes, but did not enter into it. Having been a symbol of the Law; he was helpless to bring the believer into heaven – the eternal Canaan; but reveals it to him from afar, to bind himself to Jesus (Joshua son of Nun), who alone can bring him into it. It was said that God buried Moses on that mountain with His own hands, as it was imperative for the body, namely, the letter of the Law, to die, in order for us to enjoy the life risen in Jesus Christ through the Spirit.

(6) **Mount Carmel**: On which the prophet Elijah overcame the prophet of Baal (1 Kings 18:9-42). Whoever does not ascend the Lord's mountain, would not be able to destroy the devil, his hosts, ministers, all his tricks, and authority.

(7) **Mount Gilboa**: Where king Saul and his sons were killed in a battle against the Philistines ((1 Chronicles 10:1, 8). On the holy mountains the prince of this world would fall and go down dead.

(8) **Mount Aaron**: Represents the northern frontier, reached by the children of Israel, led by Joshua, in the land of Canaan.

(9) **The Mount of Olives**: On which the Lord Christ gave His talk on His ultimate coming (Matthew 24; 3). Forsaking the earthly things, man ascends as though on the Mount of Olives, to sit at the feet of the Savior to taste His sweet promise of His second coming.

(10) **Mount of Lebanon**: The source of Cedar wood used by king Solomon to build the temple of Jerusalem (1 Kings 5; 14, 18). So that is how the soul ascends on the Lord's mountains; on the tree of the cross together with her crucified Groom; unless she is crucified together with Him, she would not be able to set His holy temple in the inner Jerusalem; in the depths of the heart.

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY
(Chapter 34)

GRANT ME THE GIFT OF DEATH

❖ When will my mission be successfully realized?
To ascend together with the prophet Moses, and receive the gift of death.
I wish I would not die at the foot of the mountain.
But to ascend to the top of the holy mountain.
To rise up above every earthly thought and temporal lust.
There, my heart would flare, yearning to see You.
I do not seek a place where my dead body would be buried.
Nor someone to care for shrouding and burying me.
As, whether I live or die, I am Yours.
You take care of me until I encounter You.

❖ Stretch Your hand to work through me.
Let me rejoice, getting in touch with the leaderships of the new generation.
You are the true Leader along all generations.

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