

October to December 2021

“The Book of Deuteronomy” (Part 2)

by
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About the Author



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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 1

DEUTERONOMY 14:1-21

HEBREWS 11:6-16

*“...God is not ashamed
to be called their God...”*

ISRAEL CHOSEN AS A SPECIAL PEOPLE

Deuteronomy 14:1 states that the Israelites were the children of the LORD their God. They were chosen as a special people from the time of the call of Abraham who obeyed without knowing where he was going. He took God at His word by faith. The Lord promised to give him and his descendants the land of Canaan and to multiply his seed as the stars of heaven.

It says in the book of Hebrews that Abraham and other patriarchs died in faith having not received the promises. They had seen them a far off and were persuaded of them and embraced them (Heb 11:13). God worked out all things and Jacob ended up in Egypt with all his family. After more than four hundred years, the Lord brought them out to settle in the land that He had told Abraham about. God brought them out of Egypt through Moses. The Exodus experience was such a great revelation to them of the power of the Almighty God. The Lord also humbled the children of God in the events that followed. This happened so that they would not be puffed up and misunderstand the favour of God.

The Lord also gave them commands for certain external observations. The command in Deuteronomy 14:1 seems to have its background in Egypt. Its mention suggests that Israel was familiar with that practice. Egyptian history reveals that the Egyptians had a special regard for the dead. They had an art of preserving the bodies to last for centuries. They also had many rituals associated with death. Moses knew this was a practice of the heathen nations, and thus Israel would be acknowledging the power of other gods when they followed those practices. They were not to do so because they were a holy people unto the Lord.

THOUGHT: The LORD chose Israel to be a peculiar people unto Himself.

PRAYER: Father, grant me faith like that of Abraham.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2
DEUTERONOMY 14:1-21
GALATIANS 3:23-29

*“But before faith came,
we were kept under the law...”*

THE PROMISES TO ABRAHAM

The promises to Abraham and the choosing of Israel are best understood in the context of progressive revelation. The knowledge of God in the time of Abraham was not as clear as it is known today. They depended on general revelation and oral traditions. The book of Job which is believed to have been written during the time of Abraham also gives a glimpse of how much the people knew of God then. It was sufficient for their time and was the beginning of a fuller knowledge of God.

The revelation to Moses was clearer and its preservation was made possible as it was committed to writing. God did through Moses what He had not done in past generations. At the same time, He separated Israel as a special people, an exclusive nation. This is illustrated in the response of Jonah to God's call. He was called to go and preach to Nineveh and he was not willing to go because he thought that only the children of Israel deserved to hear the message of salvation. He refused to go and took steps to escape the commission of the Lord. The Lord then compelled him to go to Nineveh. The results of his preaching were a prelude to the preaching of the gospel to all nations of the world after the coming of Christ. This account was part of God's revelation.

Also in the Old Testament are many types of Christ. God's choice of Israel was not that Israel was more in number than other nations, but He loves Israel and chose Israel to demonstrate His power and glory. Today, when the door of salvation has been opened to people of all nations, we learn more of God through the events in the Old Testament. Paul said that the Law which was given through Moses was a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ. This is a reference to a teacher of children in the elementary school who uses teaching aids in the form of pictures to put across the message to the children. The nation of Israel stands in that position so that what the Lord intended to do was manifested in His dealings with them.

THOUGHT: People of all generations can know the one true living God.
PRAYER: Father, may my faith in Thee stand always.

LORD'S DAY, OCTOBER 3
DEUTERONOMY 14:1-21
1 CORINTHIANS 8:6-13

*"...for neither, if we eat,
are we the better; neither,
if we eat not, are we the worse."*

COMMANDS ON THE CLEAN MEAT AND THE UNCLEAN

The Lord was specific in matters of everyday life in Israel. In the text, He told Israel what they were to eat and what to avoid. These instructions were meant to regulate their eating habits and to teach them they were set apart unto the Lord. They were also required to be ceremonially clean. The mention of clean and unclean animals takes us back to the time of Noah when the Lord told him to take seven of the clean animals and two of the unclean. This was long before the time of Moses and Noah knew which ones the Lord was referring to.

In the case of Moses, there were spiritual reasons why some animals were forbidden. The clean animals that were to be eaten are listed in verses 4 to 6. The reason for giving a specific list was that the Lord wanted Israel's complete obedience. This was a lesson of perfection. The list of unclean animals is given in verses 7 to 8. The list for the clean and unclean among the water creatures and birds is also given. This same list is first given in Leviticus 11, and commentators have given the following remark:

"... the animal kingdom in many of its forms and creatures bears the image of sin and death, and is constantly reminding man of the evil fruit of his fall from God. It is in this penetration of sin into the material creation that we may find the explanation of the fact, that from the very earliest times men have neither used every kind of herb nor every kind of animal as food; but that, whilst they have, as it were, instinctively avoided certain plants as injurious to health or destructive to life, they have also had a horror naturalis, ... and have avoided their flesh as unclean" (Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament).

In the New Testament the church council ruled out the application of this law to the Gentile believers. In Acts 15:20ff, the apostles wrote to show the Gentile believers' exemption from these laws.

THOUGHT: The ceremonial law is abrogated in the new covenant.

PRAYER: Father, may I always discern truth from error.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 4

DEUTERONOMY 14:22-29

MALACHI 3:8-10

*“Bring ye all the tithes
into the storehouse...”*

TITHING IS NEEDFUL IN GOD’S SERVICE

Tithing was meant to render service before the Lord. Tithing originated from Abraham when he gave tithes to Melchisedec (Heb 7:1-2). Jacob also promised to give tithes in Genesis 28:22. This was before the Mosaic Law was given. Tithing is formally promulgated in Leviticus 27:30-33. These were to be given to the Levites and the Levites to the priests. The Levites and priests among them were ministers.

Israel was commanded to give tithes of the seeds of the field, the food crops and of their domestic animals. They could also give in the form of money. This was part of the worship of Israel and they had to deliver their tithes when they went to the place of worship. There were rules regarding the tithes, and honesty was required of everyone.

There were specific feasts that were appointed for Israel every year and part of those feasts was their sacrifice offering and contribution of the tithes. They were to eat in a place that God would appoint. In Israel’s history, Jerusalem was the appointed place as the Temple was there. When they had to travel to Jerusalem, they were told to change their gifts into money and they would buy again in the place of worship. They were also commanded to give the Levites their due so that they might be able to render their service without worry for their livelihood. This continued through the history of Israel. In the time of Nehemiah after the return from Babylon, tithe-giving was neglected. Nehemiah reprimanded the nation for their uncaring attitude. It was about that time also that Malachi commented and stressed the need to tithe and the blessings that would come with it. Tithing is continued to this day because it is a worthy and reasonable proportion to give to the Lord who said, *“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it”* (Mal 3:10).

THOUGHT: Tithing is necessary to render full service to the Lord.

PRAYER: Father, may I always give a worthy portion to Thee.

THE LAW OF DEBTS AND RELEASE OF CREDIT

The Lord wanted Israel to live in peace among themselves and keep the law of love. Debts could be one of the issues that contributed to lack of peace in the neighbourhood. It was thus necessary to have a law that guided and brought harmony in such matters. The laws that governed everyday life were needful for peaceful co-existence and in the worship of the Lord.

The law required that creditors release their debtors from their debt every seven years or sabbatical year. This year was also important because even the land was given rest, and there was no planting. As for debts, each creditor was required to release his debtors and not ask for repayment. There is wisdom in this law in that when a poor person cannot repay his debt for a long time, it means that he has no ability to do so. When the debtor is unable to pay and the creditor keeps demanding, there will be disharmony. When the creditor releases the debt, there is love and relief.

The Lord saw it necessary to put a law in place that would help to sustain good relations in the nation. This law, however, did not apply to strangers, so repayment of the debt may be exacted from the stranger-debtor. The reason for this is that a stranger may use pretence to defraud the creditor. Moreover, as a stranger, he would not be able to offer security for that debt. And also, as a stranger there would be no acrimony due to the debt. When the neighbourhood does not have any poor, then the law does not apply. This law of debt-release was a safety net that opened a door for those who are blessed with plenty to help the poor. Moses added that Israel should carefully hear the voice of the Lord and observe His commandments. He was greatly concerned that the children of Israel would be tempted to transgress the Law of God. This principle of debt-release must be adhered to.

THOUGHT: The love of money is always very strong in the hearts of people who live after the flesh.

PRAYER: Father, may I love my brethren in need, and may my heart be free from the love of money.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 6

DEUTERONOMY 15:7-11

LUKE 18:22-27

“...sell all that thou hast,
and distribute unto the poor...”

BE GENEROUS TO THE POOR

All our possessions come from God, and He provides for our basic needs. Moses commanded Israel that when they settled in the new land, they could lend to other nations if that need arose, but they were not to borrow from them. This was a precaution lest those nations desired to reign over them.

Israel was not to harden their hearts nor shut their hands from their poor brethren. They were to be open and lend to those according to their needs, even when the year of release was nearing. Otherwise, they would fail to help their poor brethren. And the poor would cry to the Lord against them and it would become a sin for them when they were not willing to lend. He stressed this point in verse 10: *“Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto.”* The poor would always be among them and the Lord insisted that they should open their hand wide to their poor and needy brethren, thus showing their love for their neighbours.

This act of generosity is enshrined in what the Lord Jesus Christ called the greatest commandment, that is to love your God, and your neighbour as yourself. This is also well described in this book. It is a means of blessing to the one who gives and also comfort to the one who receives. In the narrative of the rich young man in Matthew 19:16-22, he relied on and treasured his own riches. Thus when the Lord told him to sell all that he had and give to the poor, the desires of his heart were unmasked. He was rich and he did not want to part with his riches by doing good to the poor. Generosity towards the poor is a virtue that even the world recognises. God’s children must do better.

THOUGHT: My generosity is my testimony of my love for God.

PRAYER: Father, may I never close my bowels from the needs of the poor.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 7

DEUTERONOMY 15:12-18

JOB 31:13-15

“...did not one fashion
us in the womb?”

THE KEEPING AND RELEASE OF SLAVES

Servants also who worked as bond slaves had their rights. They were not slaves per se but they were like hired servants who worked under different conditions. They were given an opportunity to make a decision after serving for six years. When they decided to leave, they did not leave empty-handed. The master would give them some substance so that they could start a new life. The Hebrews were allowed to keep slaves of their own kin, but these were also allowed to exercise their rights. A Hebrew slave could serve only for six years and thereafter would be set free, but they would not go empty-handed. Moses said to the masters in verse 14, “*Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him.*” This would enable him to start life anew and when they prospered, the generosity would not be in vain.

Israel was to remember that they were also bondmen before in Egypt, possessing no land of their own. They had no rights and their masters had no consideration for their future. The Lord was now giving them land and many things that they desired to have. He thus wanted them to reciprocate God’s favour by treating their slaves humanely. He wanted to see if they truly loved Him, and thus would obey Him.

On the other hand, if the slave chose to remain with the master after six years, then the master should take an aul and thrust it through his ear against the door and he would be his servant for ever. The same also applied to the maidservant. Moses added again that it should not be seen as a burden to release a slave and give him a sizable gift. A slave was worth a double-hired servant. When the masters did justice to them, then the Lord would also bless them. The treatment of slaves in heathen nations was far below what the Lord had spelt out here. This is because the Law of God is superior to all of man’s laws.

THOUGHT: All people are God’s moral creatures and deserve equal treatment.

PRAYER: Father, may I show Thy true love to all people.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 8

DEUTERONOMY 15:19-23

LEVITICUS 22:15-16

“And they shall not profane the holy things of the children of Israel...”

THE SANCTITY OF THE FIRSTLINGS

The firstlings of animals also held a special place in the life of Israel. Each was to be sanctified unto the LORD (Deut 15:19). The firstborn had particular significance in the history of the Exodus. When the Lord was going to bring His children out of Egypt, the last plague was the slaying of all the firstborn of the Egyptians and also of their domestic animals. Here, Israel was commanded to sanctify all the male firstlings of herds and flocks. The firstling of the bullock would not be used for any work and they would not shear the firstling of the sheep. They would be slain and eaten before the Lord in the place which the Lord chose. This was a ceremonial meal just like the Passover. If any of these had any blemish, they would not be offered to the Lord but could be eaten within their gates as any ordinary meal. In the killing of animals, Israel was expressly forbidden to eat the blood.

Here is Matthew Henry’s comment on this text: “Here is a direction what to do with the firstlings. We are not now limited as the Israelites were; we make no difference between a first calf, or lamb, and the rest. Let us then look to the gospel meaning of this law, devoting ourselves and the first of our time and strength to God; and using all our comforts and enjoyments to his praise, and under the direction of his law, as we have them all by his gift.”

The laws of debt-release and labour as shown in the earlier part of Deuteronomy 15 were given so that peace was promoted and the Law of God was fulfilled. The sanctity of worship is necessary at all times. It is a sin to transgress any of God’s guidelines, yet there is temptation always to disobey. It was not Moses who gave these laws, but God.

Come to the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, for salvation and you will have peace with God. He was foremost in the promotion of the Law of God and He gave the right understanding of it.

THOUGHT: Anything that is named after the Lord is sacred and demands our reverence.

PRAYER: Father, may Thy values indwell me always.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 9

DEUTERONOMY 16:1-8

MATTHEW 26:17-19

*“Where wilt thou that we prepare
for thee to eat the passover?”*

THE OBSERVATION OF THE PASSOVER (1)

God appointed three great annual feasts for Israel to observe. The details of the observation are given in Exodus and in Leviticus. All Israel were required to keep these feasts and the purpose of each is given. They served as reminders of what God had done for them and that He continues to sustain them. He blesses their herds and flocks and also the produce of the field.

The feast of the Passover was the main feast observed in the month of Abib which is the first month when the children of Israel came out of Egypt. Moses was told to keep this as the first month. It was first instituted when the children of God were spared from the last plague that befell Egypt. They were to kill a kid of a goat or sheep of one year and put the blood on the doorposts of their houses. When the LORD came, He would pass over every house that had the blood on the doorposts. Thus the feast got its name. Moses was then instructed of the Lord to keep this feast perpetually at the appointed time.

This is part of the Lord's instructions concerning the feast, *“For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever”* (Exod 12:12-14). In his last message to the children of God, Moses reminded them of what the Lord had told them earlier. They had also been keeping that feast during their forty years in the wilderness. It is important that they take heed to this immediate command.

THOUGHT: How do I remember what the Lord has done for me?

PRAYER: Father, may I not forget what Christ has done for me.

THE OBSERVATION OF THE PASSOVER (2)

The Passover lasted for seven days and unleavened bread was eaten to remember their redemption from Egypt. The sacrifice was not to be killed within their gates but in a place that God would appoint. The meat was to be roasted, not boiled, and everything had to be eaten in one night. Any leftovers were to be burned. The seventh day of the feast was to be a solemn assembly and no work was to be done on that day. Israel was given this feast as a reminder of their redemption from Egyptian slavery. However, for the children of God in all nations, it has the significance of redemption from sin.

The Law of Moses was given as a teacher of greater things to come. The Passover represented that picture of the Messiah coming to redeem His people from their sins. Israel under Moses did not have a full understanding of what all that meant, but when Christ came the full revelation was given. The feast ended with the weekly Sabbath, likewise the end of redemption and obedience to Christ is that eternal rest.

Thus the feast of the Passover has the message of the gospel. As Israel kept the feast in faith, so all who believe in Christ also have that eternal hope. The generosity of Israel was to be extended to the fatherless and the widow. The nation was to provide for their needs and thus they were to be included in these feasts. This was to tell Israel that everyone was important before the Lord. Those that had been blessed with wealth and good health were to render to the needs of those who were not able to have these things due to natural causes. They were all to rejoice in the place that the Lord would choose. Those thus blessed were to remember that they were once bondmen in the land of Egypt and the Lord extended His hand of deliverance to them. Everything else that the Lord had said to them was fulfilled.

THOUGHT: *"God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God..."*
(1 John 4:16)

PRAYER: Father, may Jesus Christ ever be my Passover.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 11
DEUTERONOMY 16:9-15
HEBREWS 10:1-7

*“For the law having a shadow
of good things to come,
and not the very image...”*

THE FEAST OF WEEKS AND OF TABERNACLES

The Feast of Weeks is also called Pentecost, which in Greek means fifty days. It was observed seven weeks from the beginning of the harvest season. In this, Israel was to give tribute of freewill offerings to the Lord according to the blessing of the Lord upon them. The whole family was to keep the feast including their menservants and maidservants.

The Levite who was within the gates of the family would also be included. It will be remembered that the tribe of Levi was not given inheritance in the Promised Land but were to live among all the tribes of Israel because they attended to the spiritual matters of the people of the nation of Israel. Priests were chosen from among them.

The Feast of Tabernacles was also to be kept for seven days after the gathering of corn and wine. In this Feast, the children of Israel were to make for themselves temporary booths and dwell in them for the duration of the Feast. Many years after Israel had settled in Canaan and when they had returned from Babylon, it is mentioned in the book of Nehemiah (Neh 8:14-18) that they read the Law and kept the Feast. It became part of Israel's annual calendar since Moses promulgated it. The entire household was also required to keep the Feast. It was a time of rejoicing and blessing. Though the Feast was ceremonial in nature, it was a reminder of how God had brought them out of the land of Egypt and provided for all their needs. Everyone looked forward to it and it was a joy as the Lord had commanded it.

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself and the Apostles gave full exposition of the understanding of those feasts that Israel was told to keep. The blessings that they had received were by the grace of God. That grace is to be extended to those who are needy in the midst of God's people.

THOUGHT: The feasts of the Lord are pictures of His saving grace.

PRAYER: Father, grant me the eternal joy of Thy feasts.

THE FEASTS, JUSTICE AND HOLY WORSHIP

All males in Israel were to appear in a place that the Lord chose to keep the feasts. Gifts were given according to the ability that God had given to them. However, they were not to appear before the Lord empty-handed. Serving the Lord involves material gifts or a personal voluntary offer to serve wherever needed. God has blessed everybody with some gift, small or big, and He has also bestowed material goods on many people. When the children of God were going to Canaan, they had little, apart from their livestock. God gave them a land of mountains and valleys and sufficient rain for them to get water for their mixed farming activities. As much as they were thus blessed, they were not to live at ease and fail to give what the Lord had told them to give. Besides, they were also to observe all the specification that the Lord had commanded in keeping all the feasts.

Justice and holy worship were to guide the nation. When Israel settled in the land, judges and administrative officers would be appointed among them. These would have to judge righteously without respect of persons. They were also commanded not to take bribes, so as not to pervert judgment. Everyone was to do that which was just. They were also to keep the place of worship holy and not allow any sacrilege. They were commanded not to plant any grove near the altar of the Lord or to set up any image. These were in line with the commands relating to the worship of God. Moses stressed that they must keep God's statutes.

The Lord had a purpose in appointing the mentioned feasts and they were to be kept according to His commands. Another reason for keeping these feasts was to attain some form of discipline in drawing closer to God on a regular basis. All these point to the redemption that comes through Christ, and His people's need to live righteous lives.

THOUGHT: Live by the statutes of the Lord.

PRAYER: Father, may I ever observe Thy precepts in faith.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 13

DEUTERONOMY 17:1-7

1 TIMOTHY 5:21-22

“...that thou observe these things
without preferring one before another...”

THE PUNISHMENT FOR IDOLATRY

Every aspect of life in Israel was guided by the Law of God. Idolaters were to be punished publicly after careful judgment. The priests and Levites gave the final judgment. The Law also prescribed guidelines for a king that God would appoint for the nation. He had to seek the right advice and follow the Law to the letter. The Lord would bless him and the nation for their obedience.

The right sacrifice to the Lord was a bullock without blemish. This was to preserve the sanctity of the sacrifice. Any service to the Lord is defined by perfection, thus the instruction concerning sacrifices is a picture of that requirement. Doing the contrary is an abomination in the eyes of the Lord. It was wickedness for any man or woman to transgress the covenant of the Lord.

The sin that is repeatedly prohibited is that of idolatry. Moses was alarmed especially after Aaron had yielded to the demands of Israel and made a golden calf when Moses had gone to meet the Lord. All other nations were idol worshippers and each was committed to those man-made deities. That environment could easily persuade Israel to follow their way of worship, thus the command to keep away is given again and again. The Law also prescribed punishment of all idolaters. The Lord knew that it was easy to bring false accusation against someone. Such a report would not be accepted at face value. The Lord instructed that an inquest be made. *“And it be told thee, and thou hast heard of it, and enquired diligently, and, behold, it be true, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel”* (Deut 17:4). The punishment for it was death and that was why judgment could not be done in a hurry. The penalty was carried out by stoning. The judge must be guided by the evidence of two or three witnesses. This was to prevent condemnation solely by hearsay. The witnesses were accountable for what they said and thus their hands were the first to stone him. They must tell the truth.

THOUGHT: Punishment is the only way to put away evil.

PRAYER: Father, may I not have other gods before Thee.

THE PROCEDURE OF PASSING JUDGMENT

When a matter of judgment was difficult, then an appeal was made at a place that God chose. This was the centre of the governing council of the nation. In the Mosaic era, civil affairs were also committed to the religious leaders. The priests, Levites and judges showed judgment that must be followed. The priests and the Levites were competent in interpreting the Law as they were trained in it. It was necessary to refer any delicate matter to these authorities.

They taught the judge to pass the sentence for a particular offence. He in turn was required to follow their advice, neither turning to the right hand nor to the left. The judge that did not hearken to the advice of the priests was held accountable for his offence. Such disobedience was also punishable by death. This was to ensure that evil was put away from the nation. The Law that prescribed judgment and the sentence during the Exodus was referred to Moses who meted out judgment. He was a spiritual leader and also a teacher of the Law as well as a national leader. This is why his father-in-law had to counsel him in Exodus 18 to adopt a better administrative system.

Though the responsibility of civil matters has been delegated to the civil authorities, Christians may find themselves in that position as civilians. The biblical ethical standards apply in the course of their duties. The Westminster Confession of Faith says that it is lawful for a Christian to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereto.

Holding a public office of any kind is sometimes a necessity for believers. Generally there will be just laws that govern the exercise of such an office. These ought to be attended to to the letter. It offers also an opportunity for them to bear a testimony for the Lord in their execution of those duties. It is all lawful to do so.

THOUGHT: Justice is a shield and defender.

PRAYER: Father, may I always do what is right in my duties for Thee.

THE APPOINTMENT OF A KING (1)

There was no need for Israel to have a king in the new land, but the people wanted one. Moses gave guidelines as the Lord commanded him on the selection of the king. Such a king would be set up by God's appointment. He must be chosen from their nation only and a stranger in no way could be their king. There were qualifications of the king.

The king appointed shall not multiply for himself horses. Historically horses were beasts of the battlefield. They were the strength of the army because of their speed and ability to ferry soldiers, weapons and food supply for the army. Without this the army would be weak to carry out any meaningful task. (Of course, this is overtaken today by technology, but the idea is similar.) Any king who would be superior militarily needed to have as many horses as possible. The Lord was telling Israel that their protection did not depend on their might but on the Lord Himself. Thus a king that would be appointed for Israel would have to depend on the Lord and acknowledge His sovereignty.

When David became the second king of Israel, he demonstrated from the beginning that success in any battle is from the Lord. He fought many battles but he always consulted the Lord for direction. In many of the psalms he wrote, he showed this truth. He was called a man after God's own heart because he followed what the law said about a king. A king must be dependent on God in building a just nation. In addition, he must not cause the people to return to Egypt. This land was a symbol of slavery and godlessness. Such a return would mean that they would cease again to be a nation. Above all, they would forfeit their right to serve the true and living God. The king also shall not multiply to himself wives or money. These are expressions of carnal prestige that the world sees as the chief goal in life.

THOUGHT: Carnal aspirations are out of place with God's moral precepts.

PRAYER: Father, may our civil leaders strive to lead the nation righteously.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16
DEUTERONOMY 17:14-20
ECCLESIASTES 12:13-14

“Fear God,
and keep his commandments:
for this is the whole duty of man.”

THE APPOINTMENT OF A KING (2)

When a king transgressed, God would have to teach him the hard way. King Solomon did not pay attention to what the Word of God said and fell into the trap of sin. As a result, he was a miserable. When he wrote Ecclesiastes, he expressed repentance because of his folly. The foreign women turned his heart away from the Lord, and he became an idolater. He gained nothing, but instead lost everything. Since he could not restrain himself, the Lord had to teach him a lesson in the school of life to bring him back to his senses.

Another enemy of a king is the love of money. As Apostle Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:10, *“For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”* God wanted orderliness and justice from the person He put into the high office of king.

The Law of God would guide the king, thus he must have a copy of it. This is the command with regard to the use of the book of the Law of God: *“And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them”* (Deut 17:18-19). Earlier the Lord had declared His laws to be superior, and could not be amended but remained for ever. The king was to observe the discipline in the law so that he would not see himself as above everyone and ignore God’s commandments. In that way, the days of his kingdom would be prolonged. The Lord fulfilled this in the house of David.

The giving of God’s laws was necessary. Israel needed the laws to guide them when they settled in the new land. The office of a king was of divine appointment, it needed to be sustained with God’s justice.

THOUGHT: The person appointed king had to keep the Law of God.

PRAYER: “O God of all creation, bless this our land and nation.” (Kenyan national anthem)

LORD'S DAY, OCTOBER 17
DEUTERONOMY 18:1-8
1 PETER 5:1-4

*“Neither as being lords
over God’s heritage, but being
ensamples to the flock.”*

THE SERVICE OF THE LEVITES

The spiritual service in Israel was entrusted to the tribe of Levi. The priests were appointed from among them. Moses also was a Levite, and his brother Aaron was consecrated as the first priest. They were not to have inheritance, but were to live by the offerings that Israel gave. Specifications were given about their heritage. Israel was commanded to observe the pure worship of God and shun the abominable idolatry of other nations. They looked forward to a Great Prophet that God would raise up from among them. The nation was afraid to communicate directly with God and was instructed to obey the true prophets only. Priests and prophets were the spiritual officers of the nation.

The Levites did not have any inheritance in the Promised Land. They were engaged in holy service, and were divided to serve among the different tribes of Israel. Their sustenance was to be from the offerings. The law teaches that specific parts of the sacrifice offered, as well as the firstfruits, were given to the priests. *“And this shall be the priest’s due from the people, from them that offer a sacrifice, whether it be ox or sheep; and they shall give unto the priest the shoulder, and the two cheeks, and the maw. The firstfruit also of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the first of the fleece of thy sheep, shalt thou give him”* (Deut 18:3-4). Moses repeated that the Lord had chosen the Levites to stand and minister before the Lord. They were to serve in the place that the Lord prepared for them. The Lord gave all these details because their welfare was important, and the whole nation was to be responsible for them.

The Levites also were to render their services faithfully and live worthy of their calling. There was a whole catalogue of responsibilities required of them. All priests were chosen from among them and specific directions of their appointment and cessation of their office were given in the Law. The Law also specified all the requirements of their service and how they must address every matter that came to their attention.

THOUGHT: Spiritual offices are given from above.

PRAYER: Father, may worthy spiritual leaders be raised today.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 18
DEUTERONOMY 18:9-14
1 SAMUEL 13:8-13

*“Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not
kept the commandment of the LORD
thy God, which he commanded thee...”*

THE PROPHETS, PRIESTS AND FALSE WORSHIP

Prophets were appointed directly by the Lord and, in some cases, priests were also given that duty. Notable among them were Jeremiah and Ezekiel. It was also forbidden for anyone to assume the work of a priest when they were not officially assigned by God. Saul and Uzziah were two kings who attempted to offer sacrifices. Both of them faced instant punishment and all Israel knew that they were transgressors. These incidents served as warnings to the rest of the people that they were to approach the sanctity of God's house with due reverence.

The office of the priest in Israel was necessary to render spiritual service for the nation. In the subsequent history of Israel during the intertestamental period, the nation was under foreign powers, but was given limited autonomy. The office of the priest was recognised as the only authority among the Jews. Its entanglement with political leadership compromised the office of the priest and brought much disgrace. The coming of Christ abolished that office of the Levitical priesthood.

The separation of Israel from the heathen nations was imperative. Israel was forbidden to be part of the abominable practices of nations. The Canaanites and the Egyptians were people who did not know the true God. They worshipped idols and had rituals that were abominable before the Lord, and were also inhumane. Moses indicated that they practiced human sacrifice. Israel was warned not to go after these abominations which included divination, observation of time (astrology), enchantment and witchcraft. There were also charmers, those who consulted familiar spirits, wizards and those who claimed to make contact with the dead. Moses said that all these practices were an abomination to the Lord. It was because of these that the Canaanites were driven out of their land. God is just. He uprooted the Canaanites out of their land because of their abominable practices and at the same time rewarded obedient Israel in giving them the land. When Israel also forsook Him, she was also uprooted from the land.

THOUGHT: Spiritual exercises are to be done in God's way.

PRAYER: Father, may our Christian service be rendered worthily.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 19

DEUTERONOMY 18:15-19

ACTS 3:20-24

“...him shall ye hear in all things
whatsoever he shall say unto you.”

A SPECIAL PROPHET FROM THE NATION

Israel was required to be perfect before the Lord their God. They were to be upright and sincere in their relationship with God. It is true that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and there is none that can be said to be perfect. However, the aim of the Law is to make God's people strive for perfection. If it was possible to be perfect on our own, then there was no need of Christ offering Himself for our sins. It is believing in Christ only that can take away our sins and make us perfect. In the context of the Mosaic Law, perfection was the obeying of every commandment that the Lord had given. It was easy for Israel and especially their children to get entangled with the Canaanites and copy their abominable ways and forsake the Lord.

The prophecy of Moses looked into the distant future of Israel and declared the coming of a Prophet like Moses: “*The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken*” (Deut 18:15). Moses also repeated in verse 18 how God revealed this to him and added that God would put His words into the Prophet's mouth. He spoke to them all that God commanded. Likewise, Israel was to listen to the words of that Prophet. He would be a special Prophet as Moses was a special prophet.

Though the Lord sent many prophets to Israel, they always knew that the special Prophet that Moses foretold was yet to come. The Apostles in the New Testament revealed that that special Prophet was the Lord Jesus Christ. The Jews were always expecting that Prophet and when John the Baptist commenced his ministry they mistook him for that Prophet that Moses had foretold. Peter in his sermon clarified that it was the Lord Jesus Christ. He came with the message of salvation.

THOUGHT: A true prophet is authenticated by God.

PRAYER: Father, grant me perfection in obeying Jesus Christ.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 20
DEUTERONOMY 18:20-22
2 PETER 1:19-21

*“For the prophecy came not
in old time by the will of man:
but holy men of God spake...”*

A CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION

Israel was afraid to communicate with God directly because of the fearful experience they had in Horeb. This Prophet who was to come would have to be their Mediator. God also approved their request. The gospel of Christ was thus preached through Moses and all have the obligation to obey.

Israel had requested not to have direct communication with God. It was thus appointed that God would speak to them through the prophets. Every prophet that assumed to speak a word in God's name, when God had not commanded him to speak, or spoke in the name of other gods, would die. The criteria of any prophet is thus given in Deuteronomy 18:22: *“When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.”* Many people take upon themselves the work of a prophet yet the Lord has not sent them. These are false prophets whom the Scriptures warn of very often. They will deserve the penalty prescribed in the text because they tell a lie and seek to mislead a multitude of people. These are people who fancy self-glory and are proud.

Knowledge of the Word of God and walking in His ways will keep one away from such deceivers. Israel was a nation under God. The channels of communication with Him had to be put in place to guide the people. Levites were set apart for that ministry. Separation from abominable practices was necessary. God also made plans for future generations and for the salvation of people of all nations. This came through a Special Prophet, His Son Jesus Christ. All can now come to God through Him (John 14:6). Have you been to Jesus for His cleansing power?

THOUGHT: A true prophet is always humble and truthful.

PRAYER: Father, give me the character of a true prophet.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 21
DEUTERONOMY 19:1-14
PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9

*“Those things, which ye have both
learned, and received, and heard,
and seen in me, do...”*

CRIMES AND THEIR PUNISHMENT

Common crimes have to be dealt with so that people may live in peace. Murder is a common crime today as it was in the old days. Deuteronomy 19:1-14 gives provision for those who may be guilty of manslaughter by setting aside cities of refuge so that the actions of these people may be judged justly. The witnesses in any case must be reliable and must be more than one. Punishment for the crime of shedding innocent blood is also given. Law and order are necessary in the new land.

One of the administrative requirements in the new land was the assigning of each tribe their settlement with clearly demarcated boundaries. The existing cities in the land that fell within a tribe's boundaries would be given to that tribe. On the western side of Jordan, Moses commanded that they set aside three cities of refuge. The land was thus sub-divided into three portions with the jurisdiction of each area linked to a particular city of refuge.

The main purpose of these cities of refuge was to secure the lives of people who might be guilty of manslaughter (i.e. killing without intention). Such a person could flee to any of these cities and the elders of the city would secure his life until his guilt or innocence was proven. The implementation of this scheme fell to Joshua who succeeded Moses as the leader of Israel. Moses knew that he was not going to cross River Jordan with Israel into the land of Canaan, but he had the responsibility of putting in order the governing of the new land. God did not give them instructions for every detail in their administrative work, but when the need arose directions would be given.

We recall that in Exodus 18, Jethro (Moses' father-in-law) helped Moses to set up an easy administrative system. That did not come from Jethro per se, but it was from God Himself. Moses saw the sense and embraced it.

THOUGHT: Common sense is always acceptable before God.

PRAYER: Father, grant me wisdom in time of need.

THE SOLUTION FOR MANSLAUGHTER

It is possible that one might accidentally kill one's neighbour. A scenario is described in Deuteronomy 19:5: *“As when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour, that he die; he shall flee unto one of those cities, and live.”* Circumstances may be different in different accidents, but such killing amounts to killing without intention.

One of the common accidents that cost many lives today take place on the roads. Modern governments have laws in place to settle such issues. In the Old Testament time, the provisions for such accidental killings were necessary. Anyone who had killed accidentally could escape to the city of refuge until his case was judged by the elders in that city.

In the meantime, it may be that in a fit of anger, those who have lost a loved one may want to take revenge. Thus, cities of refuge, being set apart, served the very important purpose of protecting the lives of those who may find themselves in that dilemma. A person who pursued someone who had fled to the city of refuge would be prevented from doing any harm to the “refugee.”

Such laws in the modern world would be in the hands of the civil government. The New Testament gives instructions to Christians of their duty to their governments. Thus, civil duties have been delegated to civil institutions, and the spiritual duties belong to the church.

In addition to the three cities of refuge on the western side of the River Jordan, three more were added. The addition was necessary because of the land allocation on the eastern side of Jordan.

THOUGHT: God has the answer to our human emotional outbursts.

PRAYER: Father, teach me to act rightly always.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 23

DEUTERONOMY 19:1-14

EXODUS 20:13, 15

“Thou shalt not kill...

Thou shalt not steal.”

THE PROVISION FOR INNOCENT BLOOD AND MURDER

Moses gave the commandment for the additional three cities of refuge: *“If thou shalt keep all these commandments to do them, which I command thee this day, to love the LORD thy God, and to walk ever in his ways; then shalt thou add three cities more for thee, beside these three”* (Deut 19:9).

It was a law that innocent blood should not be shed in the land. Anyone who intentionally kills contravenes this law and is guilty of murder. When such a murderer flees to one of the cities of refuge, the elders of his city shall send and fetch him from there. He will be delivered to the avenger of blood and shall be put to death.

It is expressly commanded that the people shall have no pity on such a person. This command was given during the time of Noah, long before Moses' time. Genesis 9:6: *“Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.”* This is a universal law.

However, today there are many voices calling for the abolition of the death penalty in the statute books of nations, and to substitute it with a life sentence. Nevertheless, as shown in Scripture, this is a divine law. In the New Testament, where authority is given to the civil government, it is said that a ruler does not bear a sword in vain, because it is meant to execute justice and revenge for innocent blood.

Moses also commanded in Deuteronomy 19:14 that none should remove his neighbour's landmark which they of old have set in their inheritance in the land that the Lord gave to Israel. This remark may seem unconnected to the text, but it is related to murder because from time immemorial, land disputes have frequently led to the shedding of innocent blood. It is therefore forbidden to prevent greater transgressions.

THOUGHT: I must love my neighbour and respect his property.

PRAYER: Father, may I observe the prohibitions of Thy Law.

RELIABLE WITNESSES

Deuteronomy 5:20, in the second giving of the Decalogue, says, *“Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour,”* i.e. do not tell lies. This is again a universal Law, but how many people lie every day? There is a need to promote the speaking of the truth, more so when bearing witness against another.

The settlement of any issue usually involves witnesses who can confirm the matter at hand. More so when a judgment has to be passed. It is in the Mosaic statutes as well as laws of natural justice that the testimony of one witness is not sufficient. There has to be two or three witnesses (Deut 19:15). Some witnesses may not be telling the truth and thus the need for diligent inquiry before any judgment is passed. If any bears a false witness, *“the judges shall make diligent inquisition”* (Deut 19:18). When found to have testified falsely, then the tables shall be turned against that false witness. He will have to suffer the consequences that he intended his brother to suffer. The understanding of Deuteronomy 19:21 (*“...life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot”*) is that every crime must receive a just judgment. The words may not be taken literally.

Any transgression of the Law of God is sin against God. God is the first Law-Giver and all good laws of man agree with His.

Private vengeance is forbidden. Any punishment must be carried out through judicial sentence. Jesus also submitted to the unjust sentence that false witnesses testified against Him. The judges must always exercise justice as required by the law. God’s children must not commit any crime. As for accidents, they are protected by the law. Trust in God and you will be free from the bondage of sin.

THOUGHT: Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

PRAYER: Father, may I always live by the truth.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 25
DEUTERONOMY 20
2 SAMUEL 12:9-10

*“Now therefore the sword shall
never depart from thine house;
because thou hast despised me...”*

WAR AS GOD’S ROD OF CHASTISEMENT

War is not pleasant as it involves the loss of many lives. In biblical times, God used war as a rod of chastisement. The history of Israel was characterised by war. They had to fight many battles in order to possess the land of Canaan. When God appointed their first king, Saul the son of Kish, the first assignment was to fight different battles. He had to save Israel from the domination of other nations. The reign of David, the second king, was also a time of many wars. In Deuteronomy 20, God gave them laws that they had to observe when they were engaged in any war. This was meant to instil discipline and to save many innocent lives. They also needed to safeguard their own welfare. God gave them direction.

When they were faced with aggression from their enemies, they were not to be afraid of the horses and chariots of the invading forces. This is against the rationale of anyone going to battle. It is always reasonable to be armed more than your enemy. However, this was not God’s approach.

God would go with them into battle. The Lord sought to demonstrate this in the capture of the first city in the land of Canaan, Jericho. He did not tell them to go with armed soldiers but rather with the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant. As instructed, they silently went round the city once a day for six days, and on the seventh day they went round it seven times and then the priests blew the trumpets and the people shouted. The walls of the city fell and they were able to capture it. On another occasion, during the time of judges, Gideon defeated the Midianites with 300 soldiers though he had initially gathered an army of 30,000. In these instances the Lord showed that His words were powerful and He was faithful to help His children.

Adhering to God’s directives on war would avoid crimes. Even though wars cost lives, God used wars to chastise His disobedient people.

THOUGHT: A Christian can only fight in a just war.

PRAYER: Father, save our land from unnecessary wars.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 26
DEUTERONOMY 20:1-4
PROVERBS 10:11-12

*“Hatred stirreth up strifes:
but love covereth all sins.”*

THE ATTITUDE OF ISRAEL TOWARDS WAR

When there is a need to wage war, due care must be taken to save innocent lives. Israel had to fight to capture the land of Canaan. God guided them in their wars. When the time for battle was near, the priest were to approach and speak to the people. The hearts of the people must remain courageous as the priests spoke these words: *“...Hear, O Israel, ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them; For the LORD your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you”* (Deut 20:3-4). God gave them this assurance.

The same principle applied many years after this. Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, also trusted the Lord in battle. He prayed and had the singers to sing praises to the Lord. He was faced with the three armies of Moab, Ammon and Mt Seir. He did not need to fight, for after that the children of Mt Seir fought with Ammon and Moab. In the end, each helped to destroy the other from the invading armies. Jehoshaphat told Judah that the battle was the Lord's and they could see that victory was theirs without effort (2 Chron 20:16-23). The key to the victory of Israel was their attitude towards the war that was before them. It was their faith in God that would give them advantage over their enemies.

The task that was ahead of them, as Moses was speaking, was very great. They had to capture the land of Canaan by force. The estimated population of Israel at the time was two million; they needed courage to have success. They waged war out of necessity to fulfill God's will and plan.

THOUGHT: It is God who determines the outcome of any contest.

PRAYER: Father, may I seek peace in every conflict.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 27

DEUTERONOMY 20:5-9

PSALM 93

*“The LORD reigneth,
he is clothed with majesty.”*

THE PEOPLE TO BE EXEMPTED FROM WAR

Fighting for one's nation is seen as patriotic and something to be proud of. It is also an adventure to many young people. Although one may be killed in battle, many still see it as an honour. Today, many nations have a compulsory military service for their young people. Regardless of such laws, there will still be some who will not like to enrol for different reasons.

During the time of Moses, the young men were required to be in the battle-front. However, different groups of people were exempted, and Moses gave reasons for it. A man who had built a new house but had not dedicated it did not go to war, because if he was killed in war, then another one would be needed to dedicate his house. The second group exempted included a person who had just planted a vineyard and had not eaten the fruit of it. Again, if he died in battle, another person would eat his fruit. The third was one who had betrothed a wife but had not taken her. Also, if he died in battle, another would have to take his wife. A house, a vineyard and a wife were the things that make a home. These exemptions laid emphasis on the importance of a stable home, which led to a stable nation.

The purpose of going to war was not for adventure but rather that people might live in peace. When there was peace, then could one build a stable home. There was thus clear reason for the giving of this law of exemption. In addition to these, the officers were asked to screen the people before letting them go to war. Those who were fearful and fainthearted were barred from going, lest they influenced the other fighting men. Those who were not prepared to fight might discourage the rest of the army.

The officers then were to appoint captains of war. Their initial approach towards cities outside of the Promised Land would be to proclaim peace, not war, in the city that they intended to capture. If the inhabitants were willing to surrender without fighting, then no blood would be shed. This was an easier solution.

THOUGHT: Godly wisdom in times of war is essential.

PRAYER: Father, may our nations always seek peace, and not shed blood.

THE TREATMENT OF VICTIMS OF WAR

The law that Moses gave them was applicable in the battles that Israel fought. It specified the people who were to die in the battle. Those who were not armed would not be killed. All males were to die by the edge of the sword, for they were always armed or they would also be potential fighters. The unarmed would be the women and children and these were spared and taken captive. The cattle also and other valuables would be taken as the spoils of war. Israel was to apply these laws in all strange cities outside of the Promised Land in subsequent wars.

Today, there are laws among nations that govern the treatment of prisoners-of-war. Nations and individuals who break these laws may be liable for trial for war crimes. The genesis of those laws is the law that Moses had delivered to Israel from the Lord. The nature of the conquest of Canaanite cities depended on what God commanded. In some instances Israel was commanded not to leave anything that had breath. They were to destroy all because their mandate was not only to capture their land but it was a means of punishment for their idolatry and all their wickedness. The list of the nations they had to destroy is given in Deuteronomy 20:17. The destruction was also to ensure that they could not teach Israel their abominable form of worship.

Direction was given on the manner of besieging a city. In the siege, they were not to cut down the trees because a tree of the field was a man's life. Trees that had no fruit may be destroyed and out of these they could build bulwarks against the city and subdue it. These were concluding details that helped Israel to wage a war that would not disadvantage them and, at the same time, showed that they were obedient to God. The siege would continue until the enemy surrendered. The enemy might choose to fight back and one party would win, the other lose.

THOUGHT: War is the product of human sin and depravity.

PRAYER: Father, set us free from the dark chapter of war and let us express love one for another.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 29

DEUTERONOMY 21:1-9

GENESIS 9:6

*“Whoso sheddeth man’s blood,
by man shall his blood be shed.”*

LAW ON UNRESOLVED MURDER

Murder is a common transgression in all generations. The guilty party always does everything possible to conceal his identity. Moses anticipated that this would be one of the problems the nation had to face. The Lord gave him direction on the resolution of such hidden murders. The taking of human life is a most grievous sin. When such happens, everyone is taken with great fear. The Lord gave a law to Israel so that such a matter may get a just solution.

He gave a scenario where a person might be found murdered in the field and the murderer was unknown. The elders of the nearest cities would come together and determine the nearest city. Logical steps would be taken and questions would be asked if there was any witness to the crime. When none yielded any evidence, then an oath would be taken according to the given instructions. The elders of the city shall take a heifer that had not been profaned and had not drawn a yoke. They would bring the heifer to an uncultivated valley and strike at the heifer’s neck in the valley. The priests would come and bless the name of the Lord and by their word would every controversy and every stroke be tried. The elders of the nearest city to the slain man would wash their hands over the beheaded heifer. They would swear that their hands had not shed that blood nor their eyes had seen it. They would also ask for forgiveness from the Lord as they were innocent. In this way, they would put away the guilt.

The Law against murder simply states: *“Thou shalt not kill”* (Deut 5:17). The instructions given for murder were meant to discourage potential criminals, that they would not be able to get away with their heinous acts without punishment.

THOUGHT: The Law of murder is not limited to the external act.

PRAYER: Father, help me to preserve life.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 30
DEUTERONOMY 21:1-9
MATTHEW 5:20-26

“...whosoever is angry with his
brother without a cause shall
be in danger of the judgment.”

LOVE OVERCOMES HATRED

The Law prescribes the death sentence as the punishment for murder. In the present legal systems, it is almost universal that the laws of many nations follow this biblical pattern in dealing with this crime. The prescription against this hurtful manifestation is love.

The Lord Jesus also commented on the matter to give the prohibition of murder a perpetual validity. He said, “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Matt 5:21-24). He identified the root cause of murder as anger and this must be dealt with before it progresses to loss of life. The use of abusive language towards another also amounts to murder. The Lord thus discouraged that kind of attitude towards one another, and encouraged reconciliation as an expression of love. When a community of God’s people live together in peace, the bond of love gives them peace and prosperity.

The immediate recipients of these laws were the children of Israel as they prepared to enter Canaan. They are no different from those who are reading these words today. They had their human weaknesses. They needed counsel to overcome and to live in harmony.

THOUGHT: “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” (1 Cor 13:13)

PRAYER: Father, let love reign in our midst.

MARRIAGE OF CAPTIVE WOMEN AND POLYGAMY

The topic of war was revisited in connection with marriage. Fighting became a necessary part of the everyday life of Israel as they sought to occupy Canaan. Even when they had settled in the land, war was still with them. In times of peace, all nations maintained an army and a great store of arms to defend themselves from any potential enemy. There will be victims of war: either by death, maiming or captivity. The present law pertains to the treatment of captive women.

Israel was not allowed to kill the women and children but was to take them captive. Thus, when they took them captive, they might desire to take the women as wives. This process required some discipline as the captives also needed humane treatment. The man who desired would bring the woman home and shave her head and cut her nails. She would then be given one month to mourn the loss of her parents. These acts were tokens of her purification and separation from heathen idolatry unto the true God of Israel. Then the man could marry her. If he did not wish to marry her, then he was obliged to set her free unconditionally. God loves all people and He is the advocate for the disadvantaged, thus He gave laws to Israel to safeguard the welfare of the captives.

Polygamy and divorce were prevalent among the children of Israel because of the hardness of their hearts. There was ambiguity in their understanding of the law of marriage, thus the people married as they desired. Long before Israel became a nation, most of the patriarchs mentioned in the Bible were polygamous. However, none of such marriages had the harmony or love desired of a family unit. The Lord also knows that a man cannot love two women equally. As there probably will be children, the Lord counsels a man who has two wives that the relationship he has with his wives must not negatively impact the children. A man will love one woman and hate another. If the firstborn son was born of the hated wife, the son will have all the rights of the firstborn regardless of the parents' relationship.

THOUGHT: God does not forsake the disadvantaged.

PRAYER: Father, help us to sustain good, godly relationships.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 1
DEUTERONOMY 21:18-23
GALATIANS 5:22-26

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love,
joy, peace, longsuffering,
gentleness, goodness, faith...”*

HARMONY IN THE FAMILY

The mention of polygamy and the giving of this law (in Deuteronomy 21) do not mean that God approves of polygamous marriages. When the Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful for a man to put away his wife for any cause, the Lord answered that He who made them in the beginning made them male and female. When they marry, the husband and wife become one flesh. The Pharisees then asked for clarification on why Moses gave them a law that allowed divorce. Jesus answered that Moses gave them that law because of the hardness of their hearts but in the beginning (i.e. at creation) it was not so (Matt 19:3-9). God tolerated both polygamy and divorce because of the hardness of the hearts of the Israelites. The eternal law that brings love and happiness is one man and one woman only in a marriage. Any breach of God’s order amounts to the sin of adultery.

Children are part of the family and they need discipline. One of the Ten Commandments is *“Honour thy father and thy mother”* (Deut 5:16). The specific law given in Deuteronomy 21:18-21 touched on a son who was beyond parental control, one who had failed to keep the commandment. Such a son would be brought before the elders of the city and the parents would accuse him. The offences included being stubborn, rebellious, disobedient, gluttonous and drunk. When these offences were proven and there was no repentance, then that son would be put to death by stoning.

According to Deuteronomy 21:22-23, other offenders were executed by hanging on a tree, and were made a curse. [Note: The sinless Lord Jesus Christ *“hangeth on a tree”* (Gal 3:13) and was made a curse because of our sins.] These laws were given to guide the nation Israel on how they were to resolve these grave matters. (Much of these today belong to the judicial laws under the civil government.) These also instruct the reader that all things are to be done decently and in order. The best, however, is to avoid these sins totally. Salvation in Christ is the answer (Gal 5:22-24).

THOUGHT: Obeying God’s commandments leads to happy homes.

PRAYER: Father, may harmony and peace reign in my home.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 2

DEUTERONOMY 22:1-5

1 CORINTHIANS 11:3-15

*“Meekness, temperance:
against such there is no law.”*

LAWS FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

There are ten main commands given in Deuteronomy 22, and each represents an aspect of the Ten Commandments. Others are ceremonial in nature. God gave these commands to guide Israel to relate to Him rightly. Here is a brief summary of the ten instructions.

A stray ox or a sheep: As an expression of love for their neighbours, Israel was commanded to bring back a stray ox or sheep to their brother. If the owner was not known, the finder could keep the animal in his house until the owner was found. The same would be done also for an ass or a garment. Nothing that was lost and found should be hidden from the owner. Failure to heed this command is stealing.

An ox that fell down: It was also the same in the case of an ox that fell into a pit. Everyone was obliged to lift it up. Saving the life of an animal was important, for in so doing one shows kindness to them. According to the Lord Jesus Christ, this was allowed even on the Sabbath Day. In addition, as the animal was useful to its owner, its return would build good relationship between finder and owner. It may seem too insignificant to be included in divine law, but God has a higher purpose in giving such commands.

Men and women’s clothing: The next commandment touches on clothing: *“The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God”* (Deut 22:5). The text does not provide a particular pattern of cloth for either gender, but what is important is decency. Clothes are designed differently for the two genders. The main assertion of this law, however, is that in the beginning God created a male and a female. Their physical appearances are not the same and that difference has to be maintained and with a pure heart of submission to God.

THOUGHT: God keeps an eye on even the small matters.

PRAYER: Father, may I understand Thy purpose in giving all commandments.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 3

DEUTERONOMY 22:6-7

MATTHEW 10:29

*“...and one of them shall not fall on
the ground without your Father.”*

CONSERVATION OF ANIMALS

Mankind is a special creation of God: He made man in His own image. This does not refer to the physical appearance, but to God's spiritual and intellectual faculties. Biology wrongly classified man as an animal. That quality that God gave to man at creation sets man apart from animals. The difference at creation must be maintained today.

Bird's nest, eggs and young ones: Man is obliged to live with other creatures that God has made. God even remembers the little bird that builds her nest in your field or on a tree next to your house. Jesus says that He cares for them and that not even one sparrow will fall to the ground without the knowledge of the heavenly Father. God cares for all His creatures. The command regarding the birds is given in two verses here (Deut 22:6-7).

If anyone came across a nest (with the mother bird and its eggs or birdlings) on a tree or on the ground, and he wished to keep it, he was not to take the mother bird together with the young. It would be well with the finder and his days would be prolonged. This law applied to the care of all other animals; they must be preserved for God made them for a purpose. God allowed man to kill animals for food but not to let them go extinct.

There has been a campaign to protect vultures in Africa because they help to keep the environment clean as they feed on carcasses. All other birds are equally useful. God's command here to preserve them has a noble purpose.

THOUGHT: Kindness to animals is God's law.

PRAYER: Father, help me to know Thy purpose in Thy creation of all things.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4

DEUTERONOMY 22:8-10

PROVERBS 12:1-2

*“Whoso loveth instruction
loveth knowledge...”*

LAW OF THE HOUSE AND FARM

Safety in building a house: Anyone who builds a new house was required to put a battlement (parapet wall) on its roof so that people would not fall from it. Though the ways of building houses differ over time as well as in different geographical areas, safety is always of utmost importance. Israel was also given such a law by God (Deut 22:8). Today, regardless of advanced methods of construction, many buildings still pose great danger to people. Failure to follow safety regulations amounts to breaking the sixth commandment, *“Thou shalt not kill”* (Deut 5:17).

Sowing in a field: God gave a law that dealt with agricultural practices: *“Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, be defiled”* (Deut 22:9). It is logical that when the seeds are not mixed in a farm, it yields maximum fruit. However, the lesson here is one of biblical separation. As God’s people went about their daily work in the fields, they would be reminded that they were to live separated lives unto the LORD.

Yoking an ox and an ass: God prohibited His people to yoke and use an ox and an ass at the same time to plough the fields. In 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul used the phrase *“unequally yoked”* with reference to this law. Once again, the point here has to do with the doctrine of biblical separation. These agricultural prohibitions served as physical reminders to the children of Israel that they were to remain a separated people of God and not be unequally yoked with the heathen nations. Animal labour has largely been replaced by machines today, though animals are still used in some parts of the world. Nevertheless, the lesson of biblical separation remains valid and relevant today.

THOUGHT: God gives just and good laws for the benefit of His creatures.

PRAYER: Father, help me to abide by Thy laws.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 5

DEUTERONOMY 22:11-30

MATTHEW 19:1-10

*“Ye are bought with a price;
be not ye the servants of men.”*

THE LAW OF TEXTILE AND CHASTITY

Wool and linen: Israel was forbidden to wear a mixture of wool and linen. As with the laws that dealt with their farming practices, this law was given to Israel to remind them of the need to be separate from the world. Through their daily activities, Israel would be reminded that they were God’s people, and were to be different from the heathen nations.

Another law also had to do with cloth: *“Thou shalt make thee fringes upon the four quarters of thy vesture, wherewith thou coverest thyself”* (Deut 22:12). God wanted Israel to be visibly and clearly set apart from the rest of the world even in such minute details. Their outward conduct must also represent their inward thinking. They would show others through their dressing that they were a people separated unto God. God sought to teach in this way by giving them these laws.

Laws of chastity: The longest section here, Deuteronomy 22:13-30, has to do with the law of marriage and the prohibition of adultery, with the details of marriage arrangements also given. God’s way in marriage plans is equally important today. Jesus and Paul dealt with this subject in the New Testament and gave a fitting update. They spoke strongly forbidding divorce and separation, attributing the Mosaic law in this regard to the people’s hardness of heart and referred the disciples to creation as God’s order of marriage (1 Cor 7).

The study of these laws is helpful in establishing principles for our lives today. We need to have an honest and disciplined conduct in our everyday life. God gave these laws to Israel to make them worthy and dependable people.

THOUGHT: The full understanding of God’s laws in everyday life makes it worth living.

PRAYER: Father, may I live each day with full understanding of Thy precepts on my everyday life.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 6

DEUTERONOMY 23:1-8

PSALM 82:1-5

*“God standeth in the
congregation of the mighty;
he judgeth among the gods.”*

PEOPLE FORBIDDEN IN THE CONGREGATION

The laws of daily conduct in the life of Israel touched on both ceremonial and moral matters. The priests were responsible in enforcing these laws and in giving advice on the right course of action. These laws were detailed and diverse. They touched on individuals and one's relation to other people. It also concerned ethics of commerce and vows before the Lord. All these served as teaching aids in knowing God.

The ceremonial law was specific about the physical qualities of anything involved. Any person with blemish on any part of the body was not allowed into the congregation of the Lord. In addition, the Ammonites and the Moabites were not allowed into the congregation of Israel up to the tenth generation. This was because they did not provide food for the children of Israel when they came out of Egypt, but they fought to drive them out. In that effort, they hired Balaam to curse Israel. God did not allow them to destroy Israel, and thus the sons of Jacob should not seek their peace. These people who lived in the east of Jordan were also on par with the Canaanites as they were enemies of Israel. The main transgression on their part was that they were idol worshippers and their morals were abominable. Israel therefore was not to have any spiritual fellowship with them; and in addition they were not to share any material goods. Any commerce with them was prohibited. Thus they were not permitted into their congregation.

Only the Edomites and the Egyptians were allowed to fellowship with Israel. The Edomites were the children of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob. They were blood brothers to Israel and were not to separate from them. Israel was told to associate with them and not to abhor them. The Egyptians were also not to be abhorred, for Israel received much benefits from them, in their time. Israel grew in Egypt for four hundred years and became a great nation. Their children were allowed to enter the congregation in the third generation.

THOUGHT: My relationship with the Lord comes with boundaries. Keep them and I will find acceptance in Him.

PRAYER: Father, help me in my fellowship with my brethren.

LORD'S DAY, NOVEMBER 7
DEUTERONOMY 23:1-9
PSALM 26:1-7

*"I have hated
the congregation of evil doers;
and will not sit with the wicked."*

SUSTAINING CEREMONIAL CLEANLINESS

The exhortation to Israel, in Deuteronomy 23:7, to accept the Edomites and the Egyptians was like giving them thanks for their hospitality. Gratitude is a virtue that binds a people together and builds peace. Israel was told to accept the children born of these nations as part of them (Deut 23:8).

Israel was admonished to keep away from any wicked thing when they went to war against their enemies (Deut 23:9). They were set to capture the land of Canaan and there would be great temptations to take precious spoils for themselves. However, God meant what He said, and Israel was to obey it without compromise. Israel was faced with that temptation in the capture of Jericho (Josh 7). This was Achan's confession after he had committed that trespass: *"... Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it"* (Josh 7:20-21). His act had directly contravened what the Lord had commanded Israel. As it turns out, it did not take long for Israel to see the consequences of that sin. Their attempt to capture Ai (their second city) was met with strong resistance and a number of them were killed. God revealed to Joshua: *"... There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel..."* (Josh 7:13). Joshua quickly investigated, and Achan was caught and given the maximum punishment. The Law was that they were not to touch an unclean thing no matter how beautiful it might be. They had to resist the temptation. Achan did not, and he became an example.

God's Word has sounded an alarm, but not all listen. May we be wise to listen to the warnings in God's Word.

THOUGHT: The consequences of wilful sin are regrettable.

PRAYER: Father, keep me away from all wilful sin.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 8

DEUTERONOMY 23:10-18

JOHN 14:6

*“Jesus saith unto him,
I am the way, the truth, and the life...”*

THE TREATMENT OF OTHER PEOPLE

In Deuteronomy 23:10-11, Israel was also told that when they went forth to battle, any man who was unclean should not come into the camp until after sunset. He had to wash himself before returning to the camp. This was to ensure that every soldier was ceremonially clean in order for the camp to be holy. The Lord also was specific in His instructions concerning proper sanitation in the camp of Israel (Deut 23:12-13): a place was set apart outside the camp for them to ease themselves. Every person had to carry a paddle with his weapon and use it to ensure the waste was covered by the soil. The camp was to be kept clean because *“the LORD thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy: that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee”* (Deut 23:14).

A servant who had run away from his master was to be given refuge (Deut 23:15-16). He shall not be delivered back to his master. This may seem to contradict the command for servants to obey their masters. Adam Clarke suggested that this referred to a servant who ran away from an idolatrous master that he might be joined to God’s people. This seems to be a logical explanation in this context as it stresses the need to love your neighbour rather than to oppress. Such a person should be given refuge.

Then there were those whose conduct was an abomination: harlots and sodomites (Deut 23:17-18). Even the *“hire of a whore, or the price of a dog”* were not to be brought into God’s house. They were not to be used to pay for anything that one may have vowed to the Lord.

These laws, applicable to the daily life in those days, were given to set apart the children of Israel, who were His witnesses on earth, from the heathen nations. Likewise, there are instructions in God’s Word that guide the New Testament church on living as the spiritual witness of Christ on this earth. Note His words in John 14:21.

THOUGHT: (Read 2 Timothy 3:16.)

PRAYER: Father, keep me following the steps of Christ.

MONEY AND THE KEEPING OF VOWS

The treatment of people also includes our financial dealings with them. Israel was commanded not to lend money to their brothers with interest (Deut 23:19-20). They could only charge interest to strangers. The understanding here is that the borrower is poor or has an urgent need. The common understanding was that one would lend what was needed and the same amount would be repaid. Strangers would be treated as commercial dealers and were thus obliged to pay interest for the money that they borrowed. The text concluded that God would bless the generosity of those who lent to their brethren.

These were laws of daily conduct that the Lord gave to Israel. They were to live in harmony with one another in the Promised Land that God was going to give to them. The Lord gave these laws to instruct the infant nation. The laws which were of civil nature were delegated to the civil government. In the fullness of time, the ceremonial part of the law was abrogated. However, the moral aspect of God’s law remains perpetually.

A vow is a commitment that cannot be reversed. Thus, it was a law that a vow made must be fulfilled (Deut 23:21-23). It is thus important that one does not rush into making a vow. All vows also must be lawful or God’s hand would overrule them. In the book of Acts, more than forty Jews made a vow not to eat anything till they had killed Paul. Since their commitment was unlawful, God defeated their resolve (Acts 23:12-22). A vow goes hand in hand with telling the truth. Committing oneself to that would be lawful. When you make a vow, will you be faithful to honour your words?

In relation to the neighbours, they were allowed to eat what was in the field or vineyard to their full. But they were forbidden from carrying anything out (Deut 23:24-25). This was meant to discourage stealing and to maintain the law of kindness to one’s neighbour.

THOUGHT: A believer’s testimony includes his use of his money.

PRAYER: Father, may I always be honest.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 10 *“That whosoever shall put away his wife,
DEUTERONOMY 24:1-4 saving for the cause of fornication,
MATTHEW 5:31-32 causeth her to commit adultery...”*

LAW OF FAMILY

The law of marriage and divorce comes up often. The laws of morality in the text began with guidelines concerning marriage and the tolerance of divorce. This matter had earlier been clarified. Remarriage and paternal leave for a bridegroom were also codified. Other laws touched on commerce and lending of money, all have much to do with family life. Labour wages and assistance to the poor in the community were also discussed as part of family life.

Marriage is legal and binding between a man and a woman and is permanent. Writing a bill of divorcement and putting away one's wife was allowed under the Mosaic code. It was a contentious issue. Many have questioned it and done what they thought was right. The Westminster Confession (chapter 24.2) states that “marriage was ordained for mutual help of husband and wife; for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the church with an holy seed; and for preventing of uncleanness.” As such, the bond of marriage cannot be broken by man.

The question then arose concerning this Mosaic statute which Jesus gave a clear answer to. He also made reference to this law in the alternate reading. In His remarks, He disallowed divorce except in the case of adultery. He also stressed the importance of the one-man-one-woman marriage. In the Mosaic code, a divorced woman could be remarried to another man, but if she was divorced again or the second husband died, she could not come back to the first husband. In this regard, the church follows the verdict of Christ today and there should be no confusion. An official statement on the doctrine of marriage is given. All churches will have such a statement on this law. Civil governments also have a Marriage Act. In multi-religious nations, this law is made to cater to all communities. Some religious groups will allow polygamy, but Christian marriages are monogamous and church ministers are usually licensed to solemnise marriages in keeping with that doctrine.

THOUGHT: Stable families are built on God's commandments.

PRAYER: Father, give us homes where Thy Word is the guide.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 11

DEUTERONOMY 24:5-7

LUKE 11:33-36

*“Take heed therefore that the light
which is in thee be not darkness.”*

MORE LAWS FOR SOCIETY

In Israel, the young people were needed to fight to conquer the Promised Land, thus military service was compulsory. This kept them away from their families for long periods. As such this law in Deuteronomy 24:5 was given to allow a newly married man to take a one-year leave so that he may be with his wife to cheer her. The giving of this statute shows the importance of marriage in society. God ordained marriage between a man and a woman for companionship, and time must be spent for this no matter how busy the couple may be in other duties. The family is a basic institution in society, and the stability of the family is the foundation of a stable nation. This piece of legislation contributed to the strength of Israel as a nation.

In Deuteronomy 24:6 is the law governing the lending of money, pledges and wages. A twin millstone was an important item in the home. It was used for grinding grain, enabling the family to have a meal for the day. The life of the family depended on the twin stones. Thus, neither of these stones could be taken as a pledge when one lent money. The sanctity of human life was also stressed in this law.

Like the millstone, a piece of cloth (used as a pledge) might be the only cover that the poor had against the cold of the night. Therefore, it was to be returned before the end of the day, and not kept overnight.

The sanctity of life thus led to slave trading being forbidden (Deut 24:7). The penalty for this transgression was death. The punishment for breaking the law was meant to do justice to the victims and to deter others from committing the same crime. Human trafficking is still common today. Such a law would be appropriate for the civil authorities to put in place.

Keeping these laws is a shining testimony for the Lord.

THOUGHT: Keeping just laws is well pleasing to God.

PRAYER: Father, may love reign in our families.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 12
DEUTERONOMY 24:8-9
EPHESIANS 2:4-6

*“Even when we were dead in sins,
hath quickened us together with Christ,
(by grace ye are saved).”*

LAW ON GUARDING AGAINST LEPROSY

Moses also gave laws on health and infectious diseases. Leprosy was a contagious skin disease which could spread from person to person when they lived together and shared things. In the days of Moses there was no known cure. The case of Naaman shows that lepers were not entirely isolated in public life, for this Syrian captain of the army was able to travel and attend to his duties (2 Kings 5). There were also different species of leprosy where the infection came slowly. However, in the cases of Miriam in Numbers 12:10 and King Uzziah in 2 Chronicles 26:16-21, the infection was instant because it was divine punishment.

In Leviticus 13-14, detailed rules were given for those infected with leprosy and how to cleanse them. The priests were responsible for diagnosing and giving the correct remedy for it, they were the only ones who would declare a person clean after one was healed. They also taught the people the procedures to follow in dealing with the disease. In instances when the Lord Jesus healed lepers, He commanded them to show themselves to the priest and do as it was written in the Law of Moses. He said this because the Mosaic code was still applicable and the priests had to certify that they were truly healed and declare them clean. They were to offer the sacrifices that were prescribed. Though much of the law of leprosy was ceremonial, it did help greatly in the control of the disease.

Even today there are infectious diseases that require isolation of the victims to stop its spread. (Who can forget the devastation of COVID-19?) Sin is also spiritual leprosy and the biblical prescription for it must be followed to contain it. Flee any form of leprosy. When Scripture stresses the need of biblical separation, it is meant for the good of our spiritual health.

THOUGHT: Daily Bible reading is an antidote to spiritual leprosy.

PRAYER: Father, forgive my sins and keep me away from all such sinful habits.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 13

DEUTERONOMY 24:10-22

JOHN 15:12-17

*“These things I command you,
that ye love one another.”*

LAWS OF FAIR TREATMENT

The Lord wanted Israel to have a harmonious society where everyone was given a fair treatment. Rewards and punishments were given in equal measure. Employers were commanded not to oppress their hired servants. Both Israelites and strangers were to be treated equally. Their wages must be paid before sunset because they were poor and that was their bread. When they cried to the Lord against the employer, it would be sin to the person who withheld their pay. In pursuit of justice, the fathers would not be punished for the sins of the children, neither the children for the sins of the parents. Everyone must carry his own cross. Strangers, the fatherless and widows must be given fair treatment in judgment. Having had the harsh experience of being strangers in Egypt, they therefore should not subject others to cruel treatment.

The last law here (Deut 24:19-22) relates to the harvest fields. It is God who waters all the fields that the crops may yield good fruit. If the sheaves were forgotten in the field, the owner should not go back for them but leave them for the poor to glean. The same applied to olive fruits and grapes. Those not gathered were left for the fatherless and widows. This was a means which God used to provide for those in need. Jesus spoke of the Heavenly Father feeding the birds of the air and giving beauty to the flower and clothing the grass of the field. In equal measure, He will also feed and clothe those who do not have worldly goods. This law is one means that He uses.

God created man as a moral being; the laws given here were needed to guide Israel in the new land. The people, the priests and judges were guided by God to create an orderly nation. God is not an author of confusion (1 Cor 14:33), but He is orderly. Jesus says that we love Him when we keep His commandments (John 14:15). He gave His life to pay for our sins. Submit to Him and have an orderly life that is pleasing to our Lord.

THOUGHT: *“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”* (John 15:13)

PRAYER: Father, may the counsel of Scripture guide me.

CONTROVERSY AND RIGHT JUDGMENT

Israel needed many instructions regarding their sojourn in the land. Good family relations were needed to sustain peace and harmony in the nation. The people lived in communities and were not isolated from others. The laws given in Deuteronomy 25 had to do with matters of controversy and right judgment, treatment of domestic animals, inheritance of widows, right measures on commerce and vengeance on the enemies of Israel.

When the Lord gave these laws to Moses, He anticipated different scenarios. It is a given fact that judges need clear laws to guide them in reaching the right judgment in any case. They were commanded to *"justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked"* (Deut 25:1). That is the meaning of justice. When they passed a sentence and a wicked person was worthy to be beaten, then the judge should cause him to lie down and be beaten before his face according to his transgression.

The maximum number of strokes of a cane that one could be beaten with was forty and not more. It was thus a rule of practice that one would be beaten up to thirty-nine strokes, thus playing safe in case there was an error in counting. In 2 Corinthians 11:24, Paul said that he was beaten forty strokes less one. When he was converted, the Jews accused him of heresy and this was part of his "punishment." The case of Paul was like that of the Lord Jesus because the Jews did not understand the truth of the gospel and they termed it heresy. It was in such instances that the prescribed penalty was not to exceed the given limit.

Regardless of instances of misuse of the law, it was put in place to ensure that everybody received a just judgment in any matter of controversy. It was a simple and logical law that the judges needed to guide them in arbitrating between man and man.

THOUGHT: The judgment seat of Christ will give perfect justice.

PRAYER: Father, help me to exercise fairness in dealing with others.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 15

DEUTERONOMY 25

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-13

*“I can do all things through
Christ which strengtheneth me.”*

THE TREATMENT OF DOMESTIC ANIMALS

The law in this regard is simple: *“Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn”* (Deut 25:4). The ox here is symbolic of all domestic animals (an ass, a horse, a camel, a dog and others). They are helpful in many ways and thus the owner must provide for them. Proverbs 12:10 says that a righteous man regards the life of his beast. Animals cannot be neglected but must be accorded fair treatment and kindness. One may not have these animals but the law is universal.

Paul used this same text in reference to the shepherds of God’s flock. As much as an ox must eat from the corn wherein he labours, it is equally necessary for a pastor to receive support from the congregation he feeds in spiritual things (1 Tim 5:17-18). It is also asserted in the law that a labourer is worthy of his reward. This law is relevant today because there is need of ministers to serve God’s flock.

It is not uncommon in churches today that the pastors and missionaries are neglected. This forces them to look for alternative means for their upkeep, which takes much of their time and as such the ministry of the gospel may be neglected. In the Old Testament era, Moses had given specific commands regarding the welfare of the priests. When they were provided for, they were free to render the spiritual service that was needed. The nature of the worship in the Old Testament required the presence of the priests at all times. Their ministry was needed to carry out the worship as was prescribed; their upkeep was equally an absolute necessity.

When one thinks of domestic animals and God’s care upon them, then the welfare of our shepherds also needs attention. Each renders service to the physical and spiritual welfare of man. They must receive their just reward.

THOUGHT: God’s order in creation teaches great lessons.

PRAYER: Father, help me to fulfil my obligations to Thee and man.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 16
DEUTERONOMY 25:5-12
MALACHI 2:14-16

*“...Because the LORD
hath been witness between thee
and the wife of thy youth...”*

THE REMARRIAGE OF WIDOWS

The subject at hand is also part of family life. Here, the inheritance of widows was allowed, but this came with strict instructions. This was a necessary statute because there were always widows who were left by their husbands who died mainly at war. This was a law that touched again on the subject of marriage.

The law allowed the widow to be remarried to a brother of the deceased or a near kinsman; and the first son that would be born would bear the name of the dead husband. This kind of arrangement is exemplified in the case of Ruth, the wife of one of the sons of Elimelech. When Naomi, the mother-in-law, asked Ruth to go back to her parents, Ruth refused to go and chose to remain with Naomi. Thus, they both left Moab for Israel. Ruth was a hardworking young woman and she laboured to provide for their domestic needs. Naomi applied this law and sought the help of the kinsmen of her husband. At last, Ruth was married to Boaz and had a son, Obed (Ruth 1-4).

This law was given to ensure that Israel would continue to exist as a nation, for the Messiah must come from Israel. In the New Testament era, the Apostles spoke of the remarriage of widows. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul answered a question raised about marriage. He asserted that a widow or a widower is free to remarry whosoever they will but only in the Lord.

Another remark related to marriage (Deut 25:11-12) was that the wife was not to interfere when her husband was involved in a fight with another man. She was not to defend her husband by putting forth her hand to take the other man by his private parts. That would be an offence and she was liable to be punished. Once again, the reason for this law was to ensure that the man could carry on his family line.

THOUGHT: Marriage must be between one man and one woman, and only death parts the union.

PRAYER: Father, grant Thy grace to widows.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 17
DEUTERONOMY 25:13-19
PSALM 95:1-3

*“Thy testimonies are very sure:
holiness becometh thine house,
O LORD, for ever.”*

HONEST TRADE AND VENGEANCE AGAINST ENEMIES

Deuteronomy 25:13-16 teaches that correct measures must be used in commerce and at home. A bag of diverse measures was not allowed. This was to prevent stealing from unsuspecting customers. Any business dealing had to be clean and honest. The traders were not allowed to use diverse measures. God was helping Israel to create a workable economic system. All the weights were to be just or else it would be an abomination before God. Israel had to adhere to these rules to safeguard their welfare and do justice one to another in the trading of their goods. God was concerned and He wanted them to lack nothing as they settled in the new land. Where God is the Leader, there must be decency and order.

In Deuteronomy 25:17-19, Moses instructed on vengeance against the enemies of Israel. They were to remember the treatment that Amalek showed them as they fought them when they came out of Egypt. They wanted to prevent them from going to Canaan and the Lord fought for Israel and defeated them (Exod 17:8ff). They smote Israel and feared not the Lord. The Lord would eventually give their land to Israel. The Amalekites would finally be blotted out as the Lord commanded Israel to do.

The laws given here were measures to safeguard sanity in their society. Believers must always adhere to the biblical moral code. Love the Lord Jesus Christ and look to God for greater blessing. Jesus said that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and no man can go to the Father but by Him (John 14:6). The gospel as revealed in the New Testament is the reference point for all believers to lead them in the right path.

The lessons that Moses taught Israel in the sermons in Deuteronomy were his last words before he died. He was conveying God's message to Israel, and they were to adhere to God's Word.

THOUGHT: Moses was a great teacher after the pattern of Jesus Christ.
PRAYER: Father, give me always a clear comprehension of the lessons taught in Thy Word.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 18

DEUTERONOMY 26:1-4

PSALM 46:1-3

*“God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.”*

EXPECTED BLESSINGS IN THE NEW LAND

As Israel was set to settle in the land of Canaan, everything was put in place and all needful preparations were commanded. This was to make it easy for Israel to go about their everyday life and build their relationship with God. Farm produce would be their lifeline (as represented by *“milk and honey”*). The first fruits of the land were to be taken in a basket and offered to the Lord. Tithes also were given to support the spiritual leaders and the needy among them. Foremost in their service for the Lord was their obedience to His commandments.

Israel would surely possess the land of inheritance that God had given to them. While Moses spoke to them, they were anticipating settling in that land soon. Almost all of them were children when they left Egypt and none of them had ever owned land. During the Exodus, the Lord provided them with daily food and all they had to do was to collect it in the morning in the fields. Their clothes and shoes did not wear out all those years. They also tended livestock and used the animal products as was needed. The new settlement would come with new economic activity.

Moses thus gave them direction regarding their service for God. They were to take the first fruits in a basket and take it to a priest in the place where God would appoint. This was where the Tabernacle would be pitched and, in subsequent history of Israel, it was the Temple which was a permanent building. There the priests would receive the people's offerings and give them direction in other aspects of worship. They were to acknowledge before the priests that God had given them the land. These were the opening words of the short speech to be given at the offering: *“...A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous: And the Egyptians evil entreated us, ... And when we cried unto the LORD God of our fathers, the LORD heard our voice... and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits...”* (Deut 26:5-10).

THOUGHT: God is always our sufficiency.

PRAYER: Father, may I receive Thy gifts with thanksgiving.

RECOLLECTION OF GOD’S POWER IN THE EXODUS

The king of Egypt nine times resisted the departure of Israel even though his land was greatly devastated. The last plague was the death of the first born, of both man and beast, in every Egyptian household. This included the prince of Egypt who would sit on the throne of the kingdom when his father died. This made the Egyptians hasten the departure of the children of God without delay. They did not even have time to bake with leaven the dough that they kneaded. The Egyptians wanted to see them out of Egypt as quickly as possible so that they might be spared further destruction.

This was not the last mighty act, there was one more miracle before the children of God were completely separated from their former masters. The Red Sea was parted by the power of the Lord, and they crossed on dry land. When the Egyptian army followed in an attempt to get them to return to Egypt, the Lord made the waters to return and they all drowned. The children of God sang a song of victory led by Moses and Miriam. Fast forward to the end of the Exodus journey, they had reached the last stop before they crossed the Jordan River to occupy the Promised Land. They were to look back and acknowledge the blessings of God upon them. When they settled in the Promised Land and had their first harvest, they must not forget the Lord. They would have to give an offering as they were commanded. Israel could not live without giving thanks to God for all that He did for them.

The blessing of the fruit of the land was what God promised. He brought Israel to a land flowing with milk and honey. The expression is a representation of the fertility of the land as it would give them delicious and nutritious food. Today, that land is generally a desert but it produces plenty of food through irrigation and the use of modern technology. God’s technology is always at the forefront. That land was equally productive under primitive farming methods because God was there. The firstfruits were brought before God to acknowledge His hand in their production.

THOUGHT: Gratitude is the hallmark of a righteous person.

PRAYER: Father, may I ever acknowledge Thee.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 20
DEUTERONOMY 26:11
JEREMIAH 32:26-28

*“Behold, I am the LORD,
the God of all flesh:
is there any thing too hard for me?”*

ACKNOWLEDGING THE BLESSING OF GOD

When the first fruits were brought to the priest, he would then take those fruits and put them before the altar of the Lord. The acknowledgement was a thanksgiving to the Lord for He had been faithful to His promise.

Looking back, in Egypt, the Lord was in the process of making Israel a great nation. Jacob went to Egypt as one household. The Lord had brought Joseph to that land earlier. Despite the sad circumstances that brought him there, Jacob went there by a royal invitation. He and his family were given the best land in Egypt to dwell in. There were seventy-five souls that went into Egypt and, after 430 years, they were an uncountable multitude. According to Balak in Numbers 22:5, *“they cover the face of the earth.”* Numbers of different groups are given in this book and a conservative estimate puts the total population of Israel when they left Egypt at two million. The Egyptians felt threatened by their large number, so they oppressed the children of God and did all manner of evil to them, including the murder of their male infants. The children of God cried to the Lord, and God heard their cry.

In Exodus 2:24, it was added that God remembered His covenant to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In Exodus 3:9, the Lord told Moses that the cry of the children of Israel was come to Him and He had seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppressed them. He then commissioned Moses to go to Pharaoh to ask for the release of Israel, that they might leave Egypt. As expected, the Egyptian king did not allow them to leave. Nevertheless, the Lord brought them out, and the process was a great show of His might. He visited the land with ten plagues. They were the most unbearable plagues as they were wrought by the supernatural power of God. Moses spoke of these well-known historic events to instruct Israel to acknowledge the Lord as they settled in the new land.

THOUGHT: The marvels of God’s power never end.

PRAYER: Father, may I never stop trusting in Thee.

TITHING AND KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS

Tithes and firstfruits were all gifts for the Lord that were commanded. What was given to the Lord's house was for the benefit of strangers (who might be poor), the Levites (who were the spiritual ministers) and the fatherless and widows. The Lord Jesus also remarked that the poor are always with us so we must not let them go hungry when God has blessed us with much.

Apart from the giving of the firstfruits, tithing was also commanded. Israel was to commence tithing in the third year after settling in the land. This portion was to be given and it became a perpetual command to guide Israel in their giving. Do you give your tithes? Acknowledging and keeping the commandments of God was part of the everyday life that Israel was admonished to adopt when they moved into the new land. As they requested blessings from the Lord, they were to ensure that they followed His command to love Him with their whole heart. In so doing, the Lord would make Israel a great nation. They would be exalted above others as a holy people.

In the church today, the spiritual minister is the pastor. He also, like the ox that treads on the corn, cannot be muzzled. Provide for your pastor from what God has blessed you with. The principle is enshrined in this Mosaic injunction mentioned earlier. Believers in Christ have this privilege as children of Abraham by faith.

Service for the Lord is foremost in the eyes of all who fear His name. His promises are sure. Resolve to obey Him and render due service. It takes deliberate effort to do this with sincerity. Ministering to the needy is God ministering to them through you. A regenerated heart only can do what God commands. What can you render to the Lord for His goodness?

THOUGHT: Giving to the Lord's work is part of our duty to God.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee that there is no lack in Thy house, for Thou art the great Provider.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 22
DEUTERONOMY 27:1-8
JOHN 4:20-24

*“God is a Spirit:
and they that worship him must
worship him in spirit and in truth.”*

WORSHIP AND SPIRITUAL LESSONS IN CANAAN

Moses gave detailed guidelines to Israel as they entered Canaan. The first thing they were commanded to do was to set up an altar made of stones not touched with an iron tool. This was a memorial for the historic crossing. They were also to build an altar to offer sacrifices in worship. The twelve tribes of Israel were divided into two groups so that one group would pronounce blessings upon Mt Gerizim and the other group curses upon Mt Ebal. This was God’s way of communicating with them.

The memorial in the crossing of River Jordan was the first act of worship. The constant reminder to Israel was that they were to remember the Lord and keep His commandments. Everything that the Lord told them was to be obeyed and followed at all times, just like orders given to an army. The rule is that they must obey orders first. If there be complaints, they could be raised later. Israel was set to enter the land that they had longed for during their forty-year journey. Moses himself was not crossing with them; the Lord had told him that he would die on that side of Jordan. Joshua was already anointed to lead Israel. The new leader had the responsibility to ensure that all that the Lord had told them through Moses was obeyed. Besides the altar, Moses told them to write upon the stones the words of the Law of God. The monument that they were going to set up at the crossing point of River Jordan was a reminder of what the Lord had done for them and the written words would always remain to bear a testimony.

The place of worship in the land of Canaan was indicated to Israel. They were also to set up the stones upon Mt Ebal and plaster it with plaster and build an altar unto the Lord God. They were not to lift any iron tool upon the stones but were to use whole stones. Thereon they were to offer burnt offerings unto the Lord God. They were to offer peace offerings and eat and rejoice in the Lord in that place. The words of the law were to be written plainly upon the stones. The worship commanded was to honour God and remind them of His presence.

THOUGHT: Worship is a natural response to God’s goodness.

PRAYER: Father, may I keep the Lord’s Day for Thy worship only.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 23

DEUTERONOMY 27:1-8

1 CHRONICLES 16:12-29

*“Give unto the LORD the glory
due unto his name.”*

THE WRITTEN WORDS AND TRUE WORSHIP

It is possible that the writings that were written on the stones of the altar were the Ten Commandments and some key verses in the Law. These served as a reminder to Israel that they were serving the true God. Also, they were to always obey what He had commanded them.

The command to write is an eternal testimony that the words of God are the truth and they never change. This also supports the fact of Mosaic authorship of the whole Pentateuch. It took careful copying by the scribes to transmit those writings from generation to generation. God used this as a means of preserving His Word. Regardless of the method used in the transmission of the written words, God promised to preserve His words for ever. They were written in stone at the time of Moses, and they are still available today. The writings that Israel was commanded to write were the first copies of the Law as they had to reproduce what Moses had written.

Those inscriptions also informed Israel that their altar was dedicated to the worship of the true God, and thus they could not touch the idols of Canaan. They were commanded to destroy them. Worship was the first act that Israel was commanded to offer as they entered that new land. God had continued to feed them with manna up to the crossing of the Jordan River, then the bread from heaven ceased. There had to be a contrast between the altar and worship of Israel and that of the Canaanites. Those heathen nations offered sacrifices to demons and worshipped idols. These were an abomination to the Lord and Israel was commanded to destroy their idols and never to follow their manner of worship. The altar and the monument that they were going to set up in Jordan and in Mt Ebal were a testimony of the manner of their worship and their faith in God. God through Moses had identified the place of worship as they settled in Canaan. Moses, the priests and the Levites told them to take heed as they were God's people.

THOUGHT: The sanctity of worship depends on God's truth and the right exercise of it.

PRAYER: Father, may I offer Thee worship as Thou hast prescribed and that honours Thy name.

THE ADMONITION TO OBEY THE LAW

The admonition to obey the law of God constantly arose because Moses knew that it was easy for Israel to break the commandments of the Lord. Here, in Deuteronomy 27:9-10, he and the priests and Levites spoke again plainly on the need to obey.

Guzik made the following three observations about these two verses:

1. *“And Moses and the priests the Levites spake unto all Israel...”* (Deut 27:9a): Much of the book of Deuteronomy is written after the same pattern as ancient agreements between kings and their subjects. Here, the idea is clear: God is the king, and the people of Israel are His subjects. He has told them what He expects of them, and what they may expect from Him.
2. *“...this day thou art become the people of the LORD thy God”* (Deut 27:9c): Now that the agreement was settled, and this could be said to Israel. The contract was signed, and Israel willingly submitted itself to the LORD God, recognising Him as their king.
3. *“Thou shalt therefore obey the voice of the LORD thy God, and do his commandments and his statutes...”* (Deut 27:10a): If the LORD is our king, then it is fitting that we obey Him this way. Moses, and all the leadership of Israel simply declared a fact that was obvious to everyone.

The opposite of this instruction would be rebellion. Moses had had enough of this during the wilderness journey and thus he had to stress the importance of obedience. Disobedience was not limited to Israel. It is a universal problem. This is due to the depravity of the human heart. The Scripture severally warns God’s children against yielding to the temptation to disobey God. Today, this is directed at you, dear reader.

THOUGHT: Holiness leads to true obedience.

PRAYER: Father, may I be careful to observe Thy admonitions.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 25
DEUTERONOMY 27:11-26
GALATIANS 3:23-27

*“Wherefore the law was our
schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ,
that we might be justified by faith.”*

THE SPIRITUAL LESSON FOR ISRAEL

The tribes were grouped into two groups to recite the curses and the blessings. Moses had a monumental duty in leading Israel from the time they left Egypt. The journey, with all the obstacles they met on the way and their entry into Canaan after forty years, was no mean task. But God's hand guided them, and they reached their destination. Leading such a large group of people required great skill. Moses at first was overcome by multiple responsibilities due to poor organization. In Exodus 18, his father-in-law counselled him on the best way to overcome the obstacles. So, he appointed heads for the twelve tribes and other junior officers all the way to leaders of fifty. The camping arrangement of Israel, as they journeyed in the wilderness, was according to the tribes. Now as they entered Canaan, Moses charged the people and identified those who were going to stand upon Mt Gerizim to recite blessings and those to stand on Mt Ebal to recite the curses. He said, *“These shall stand upon mount Gerizim to bless the people, when ye are come over Jordan; Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin: And these shall stand upon mount Ebal to curse; Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali”* (Deut 27:12-13). The Levites were to stand and speak with a loud voice to all the men of Israel.

The list of the curses was given here in verses 15 to 26. The list of blessings to be recited was not given at this point. Each of these curses was placed upon all who transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and all the people would affirm with “Amen.”

All the activities commanded here were part of the spiritual education for Israel so that they would always remember their duty to God. The Law here in the Old Testament was a lesson of God's redemptive plan in pictures. When a person believes in Jesus, he is justified by faith. This is the common aim of the Law and the Gospel. The true gospel leads to true salvation. Do you obey the basic truths of the gospel?

THOUGHT: The true Redeemer, the Son of God, has come.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for giving me understanding of Thy redemptive work.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 26
DEUTERONOMY 28:1-14
HEBREWS 10:35-39

“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.”

DILIGENT WALK WITH GOD BRINGS BLESSINGS

Moses persisted in the theme of obedience. He gave a lengthy sermon on the merits of obedience and the demerits of disobedience. This message speaks of the blessings that come with obedience. Diligent walk with God is the key to these blessings. The greatness of the nation rested on their obedience to the Lord. God would shower natural blessings and a favourable climate on them as Israel strove to follow Him wholeheartedly.

When Israel diligently hearkened to God's law; He would set them above all nations. This was an indication that God intended to make Israel a great nation. That privilege came with a deliberate effort on the part of Israel to obey the Lord. There must be no procrastination or negligence when it came to spiritual matters. Diligence was key and all blessings would come upon them when they obeyed the voice of the Lord. Both the city and the field were important. In the field, they found their food as they tilled the land and kept their animals. The city provided shelter and protection. Thus the Lord promised to bless these two entities of their habitation. The Lord specifically mentioned that their children, their fields and livestock would be blessed. This meant that their basic necessities would be provided for and they would lack nothing.

The Lord was giving them a home and provision of bodily nourishment in addition to freedom and a reputation as a strong nation. These were things that Israel never had as they were strangers in Egypt. In all generations, there was a strong bond between man, the land and their animals. This relationship had to do with life and identity. People are naturally proud to have what they can identify as their own. Israel was promised that privilege when they obeyed the Lord. The basket and the store referred to the preservation of food. They could not produce what they needed in every season, but they were able to preserve and store when there was abundant harvest. God promised to bless.

THOUGHT: God's love is manifested in His blessings.

PRAYER: Father, may nothing hinder Thy blessings to me.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 27

DEUTERONOMY 28:1-14

PSALM 23

“The LORD is my shepherd;

I shall not want.”

GOD’S PROVISION OF SAFETY AND FOOD (1)

In those ancient days, there was no technology as there is today, but Israel had learned in Egypt the efficient methods of preserving food to last for a long time. Earlier when the Lord revealed the interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream to Joseph, he had told them of seven years of fruitful harvest and seven years of famine. Joseph’s counsel was that the food harvested in the seven years of plenty should be preserved for the seven years of famine. This worked well and all nations had to come to Egypt to buy grain. The provision of good harvest was one thing, and preservation was another. All that knowledge came from the Lord and Israel carried it to the new land and God’s hand was with them in all their labour so that they lived well.

The Lord promised to bless them as they went out and came in. This promise inspired the writing of many psalms and the words of Psalm 121 represented this expression. It says: *“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.”*

The enemies of Israel shall be smitten and scattered in “seven ways” (Deut 28:7). “Seven ways” means they would be completely defeated. The blessings promised to Israel means that everything they set their hands on would be blessed. Moses added, *“The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways”* (Deut 28:9). God is faithful to His promises.

THOUGHT: God’s stores are ever full.

PRAYER: Father, may Thy riches in glory be my satisfaction.

LORD'S DAY, NOVEMBER 28

DEUTERONOMY 28:1-14

MATTHEW 14:13-21

*"They need not depart;
give ye them to eat."*

GOD'S PROVISION OF SAFETY AND FOOD (2)

The subsequent history of Israel illustrates what the Lord promised them here. A case in point here is that of Elijah who had to escape from King Ahab after announcing the drought that would come to the land for three and a half years. There would then be no water and food. For a time, Elijah sheltered in Brook Cherith and the Lord commanded ravens to bring him bread and flesh every day. When the brook dried up, the Lord told him to go to Zarephath of Zidon. Here the Lord sustained him in another miracle in the house of a widow. They were provided for until the Lord brought rain (1 Kings 17:2-16).

The greatness of the nation rested on obedience, a point that Moses repeatedly stressed. The Lord promised to establish them as a holy people. This means that they would be a people who worshipped the true God and were blessed with salvation. They were to keep the commandments of the Lord and walk in His ways. The ways of the Canaanites and their worship were an abomination to the Lord because they went after idols and in effect denied God as the Creator. As for Israel, all the people of the earth would recognise the Lord's presence and fear. This was the testimony of Rahab as Israel was set to capture the first city, Jericho, in the land of Canaan. She testified that the hearts of the inhabitants of the city had melted because of Israel and were greatly fearful (Josh 2:9-11). The blessings are well described in Deuteronomy 28:11: *"And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee."*

Moses repeated these words because the people needed assurance so that they would go to the land with confidence.

THOUGHT: God's promises never failed then, and will never fail now.

PRAYER: Father, may I trust Thee at all times, good or bad.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 29
DEUTERONOMY 28:1-14
JEREMIAH 14:22

“...we will wait upon thee:
for thou hast made all these things.”

CONDUCTIVE CLIMATE GIVEN AS A BLESSING

Nowadays, there is much talk in the media about climate change. When the normal weather pattern changes, many economic activities are affected. Israel depended on God even in the matter of climate.

God has many treasures, and He promised to open them for Israel. Rain is one of the greatest miracles of nature. When there is a prolonged drought, some are led to think of God. Unbelievers may be led to acknowledge that it is only God who can give rain. When there is sufficient rain, the land will be able to produce well, and man and beast will have enough food. Israel was promised great blessings so that they would have enough and could lend to others. God would make them a nation above, not below, others; and the head, and not the tail. The condition given to them was that they should not go to the right hand or the left from the words of the Lord nor serve other gods. Though Moses said many things to them, the point he stressed was the same. Israel needed to obey the Lord only, and in turn the Lord will bless them. Obedience to the Lord is a source of blessing to all people.

Moses was specific here and the promises run through the whole of Scripture. The pronouncements also were prophetic as illustrated in the subsequent events of the history of Israel. Faith and obedience to the Lord in all generations bring these blessings. Trusting and obeying God must always guide our walk with Him. The gospel of Christ shows that obedience is the way to God's blessing. Obey Jesus and you have that assurance of the everlasting home. This is also the message that Christians deliver in evangelism. The requirement for salvation is faith alone. The world needs to know God and His saving grace, and the message of obedience will be relevant.

THOUGHT: *“The heavens declare the glory of God...”* (Ps 19:1)

PRAYER: Father, may I see Thee in the things that Thou hast made.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 30

DEUTERONOMY 28:15

HEBREWS 2:1-3

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?”

CURSES COME OUT OF DISOBEDIENCE

The consequences of disobedience are the opposite of blessings. It is a curse as stated in this longest chapter of the book. The curses occupy fifty-four verses over against fourteen on blessings. The pronouncement of Moses was prophetic because every curse he mentioned came to pass in the subsequent history of Israel. This is so because people easily disobey God and sin brings misery to many. The curses came with devastating punishments and led to a very sad time for a people so favoured by the Lord. The pronouncements of these curses are also instructive and worthy of attention. When there is obedience, then there will be blessing.

All curses will overtake them and come with great destruction. Moses opened with an express assertion of what would follow. He said, *“But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee”* (Deut 28:15). He pronounced a long catalogue of curses that would follow when Israel failed to follow the commandments of the Lord.

A curse is defined in these words: “This word as noun and verb renders different Hebrew words, some of them being more or less synonymous, differing only in degree of strength. It is often used in contrast with “bless” or “blessing” (Deut 11:29). When a curse is pronounced against any person, we are not to understand this as a mere wish, however violent, that disaster should overtake the person in question, any more than we are to understand that a corresponding ‘blessing’ conveys simply a wish that prosperity should be the lot of the person on whom the blessing is invoked. A curse was considered to possess an inherent power of carrying itself into effect” (ISBE).

Choose blessing, not a curse.

THOUGHT: God is true to His word, and a curse will come to pass.

PRAYER: Father, may I choose the path of life, not death.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 1

DEUTERONOMY 28:16-20

EZEKIEL 5:13-17

“...I will bring the sword upon thee.

I the LORD have spoken it.”

CURSES BRING DEATH WITHOUT DIGNITY

Deuteronomy 28:16-20 continues to paint a sad picture of what curses will bring as a result of disobedience. The city and the field were vital places that offered home and food. When God was obeyed, there was comfort and satisfaction. However, with a curse there was no shelter or grain. Children and cattle would be decimated by diseases. The Lord would send these as punishment.

Though man sometimes wishes a curse on others as vengeance for grievous sins, man has no power to carry out that punishment. Such punishment can only come by God's permission. The nature of curses that come due to general disobedience is explained. The plants and trees of the field and livestock would not yield anything. There would be no harvest of fruits or grain, nor milk or meat from the domestic animals. Their offspring and their animals were cursed. This would be sad because all their labour would be in vain. Their everyday activities would be cursed in their going out and coming in because they had forsaken the Lord.

Their health would be greatly affected as the Lord said that He would make pestilences cleave unto them until they were consumed. That is, God would punish their evil doings with deadly epidemics which they would not have a cure for, and they would be destroyed. In addition, there would be no rain and they would be given to their enemies. Everyone accepts that only God can give rain in the seasons that He has ordained. He can also use the calamity of drought to punish people who turn away from Him. Victory in war also cannot be taken for granted. God's people can only fight in a just war and the outcome is in the hands of the Lord. However, if Israel forsook the Lord, He would give them to their enemies. There is nothing more painful than to be a victim of war. Sin brings such chastisement. Obedience to the Lord alone can bring blessings.

THOUGHT: Crying to God brings hope in calamity.

PRAYER: Father, may I always be inclined to heed Thy warning.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 2

DEUTERONOMY 28:21-28

JEREMIAH 4:5-9

“...the priests shall be astonished,
and the prophets shall wonder.”

PESTILENCES SHALL BE PART OF THE CURSES

Moses continued to give the details of the consequences of the curses. Death due to pestilences would be very saddening. Everyone would be affected and there would be no one to take care of the welfare of another. These would be epidemic diseases (comparable to Covid -19, the latest in a series of pestilences of this generation). Such can easily wipe out entire populations.

Moses foresaw all these that were to befall Israel and mentioned them at length in his message to emphasise the importance of obedience. When these words are read today and the passing of many generations since then, there is almost a similar pattern. This is so because it is God, the Creator of the universe, who uses these calamities to punish sin. Here is part of the description, “*The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it. The LORD shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish*” (Deut 28:21-22). The mention of brass and iron describes the heat that would be experienced, the heat of a furnace that is required to smelt these metals.

Not only would diseases infect people and animals, even the weather would bring death, rain would become dust to destroy life. In addition, the nation would be made helpless before its enemies who would kill or scatter the people all over the earth. The corpses would be left in the fields to rot away and become meat for the fowls of the air. Other calamities are thus described, “*The LORD will smite thee with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed*” (Deut 28:27). In addition, there would be madness, blindness and astonishment of the heart. All these would bring misery and death.

THOUGHT: Untold misery is the consequence of disobedience.

PRAYER: Father, may I escape the curse of disobedience by obeying Thee.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 3
DEUTERONOMY 28:29-35
PSALM 78:1-7

*“...shewing to the generation to come,
the praises of the LORD
and his strength...”*

MULTIPLE CALAMITIES THAT COME WITH CURSES

The diseases that were to come would not only be of epidemic proportions, they would affect every part of the human body. There would be skin diseases, madness, depression and blindness, with no known cure at that time. They could only stare at death as there was no physician to assist them. Every conceivable disease would come upon them, as the text describes vividly. Their bodies also would be smitten with sores from head to foot and their health would fail completely. These extreme punishments would drive them to madness.

In those conditions, they would have no opportunity to seek for assistance because they would be slaves under another nation. Their wives would be taken from them and their houses inhabited by others. Their farms and their animals would be taken from them violently and not be restored to them. Their children also would be taken away from them to be sold into slavery or death and the longing for them would bring great grief. These were calamities associated with war and the enemies would not have mercy. They robbed whatever was valuable; they killed and they deprived their victims of any livelihood or peace. The aftermath of any war is misery. When God's people rebel against Him, His punishment comes with these calamities.

When the curse of God comes without His restraint, it will be devastating and no man can resist it. These prophetic punishments were told to Israel so that they might fear the Lord and avoid those sad consequences.

Moses uttered these words before Israel settled in the land of Canaan. The history that followed centuries later speaks of such vengeance that befell the nation of Israel. This again affirms the fact that God is always true to His words. When God speaks, His people must listen and they will be blessed instead of cursed.

THOUGHT: God never misses the appointments in His diary.

PRAYER: Father, may my ears be ever attentive to Thy voice.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 4
DEUTERONOMY 28:36-46
2 KINGS 17:10-18

*“For they served idols, whereof
the LORD had said unto them,
Ye shall not do this thing.”*

APOSTACY IN A FOREIGN LAND

The Lord multiplied Israel during the four hundred years in Egypt to prepare them to become a nation. When Moses led them out of Egypt, they were large enough a population for nationhood. The Lord did not make Moses their king. Moses was a spiritual leader, while God led them as their King. In Deuteronomy 28:36-46, Moses predicted that Israel would have a king. The nation and their sovereign would one day be carried to a foreign land, just like how the children of God were in Egypt.

In that land there would be no knowledge of God and they would serve the idol gods of wood and stone. This prophecy was fulfilled in 2 Kings 17:5-6: *“Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.”* The king of Assyria brought idol worshippers to live in this land, as well as Israel. This idolatry was around since the time of Jeroboam the first king of the divided kingdom. The narrative in 2 Kings continues to reveal how the Lord sent lions that killed those people and this compelled the king of Assyria to ask Israel for a priest who would teach them about the God of Israel. Israel never returned from the Assyrian captivity and the words of Moses were fulfilled.

Other calamities that Moses predicted was the invasion of locusts and worms: *“Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field, and shalt gather but little in; for the locust shall consume it. Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine, nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat them”* (Deut 28:38-39). Also, olive trees would cast their fruits before they ripened and the nation would be deprived of their necessary food. Captivity of their sons and daughters was also repeated. In Deuteronomy 28:45, Moses stressed the certainty of his words.

THOUGHT: Punitive measures from God are a sign and wonder.

PRAYER: Father, grant Thy people grace to flee idolatry.

PAIN OF CAPTIVITY

The full picture of exile in a foreign land is horrifying. Moses said these words to Israel as a warning. Captivity is a painful condition as one is deprived of all freedom and is subjected to the will and whims of a cruel authority. When this came to Israel, it was because they disobeyed the commandments of the Lord. All who disobey the Lord will face some form of punishment. Sin makes one a slave unto death. This was the subsequent picture painted in the history of God's chosen people. The description of the nation in exile was horrible. They added to their pain by further rejecting the Lord and saddening consequences followed.

The Israelites were prisoners of war and they found themselves in inhuman circumstances. In death there would be no one to bury the other. Corpses became meat for the vultures. Moses warned against disobedience to prevent all these, but sadly they came to pass. As it happened, the people and their king would be taken into captivity and forced to act against their will. As slaves, they had no home nor freedom, and were subjected to the dictates of their foreign masters.

Reading the words of Moses was like reading the history of Israel in advance. In divided Israel, the northern kingdom adopted idolatry as their religion and worshipped idols. Every king that came after Jeroboam walked in his own ways and some even did worse. This transgression of the commandment of the Lord was in effect the rejection of God. Prophets were sent to warn the kings, but none listened to them. Subsequently, the ten tribes that constituted the northern kingdom were taken captives to Assyria. The two tribes that constituted the southern kingdom of Judah also later faced the same fate and were taken captive to Babylon. However, because of God's covenant with Abraham, their captivity lasted for seventy years and after that they were restored to their land, though not with full authority. All the words of the Lord by Moses came true.

THOUGHT: God restores dignity to those who humbly repent.

PRAYER: Father, may the truth of Thy word lead me to repentance.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 6
DEUTERONOMY 28:56-60
2 TIMOTHY 2:21-26

“...that they may recover themselves
out of the snare of the devil, who
are taken captive by him at his will.”

THE CONSEQUENCES REMAIN AS SCARS

The lengthy detail of all the calamities that would befall Israel predicts a devastation that would not easily disappear. They would remain as scars in the nation. These calamities, as consequences of Israel's waywardness, disadvantaged them before their enemies.

Since they refused to serve God, they would be forced to serve foreign masters. The enemies that God would send against them would be swift in their attack and unmerciful. Their farming activities would cease and the nation destroyed for they would have no food. This would turn them into cannibals, eating even their own children. Note the description of this sad picture: “*And toward her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward her children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates*” (Deut 28:57). This would be a heart-breaking situation, all because they refused to follow the Lord. The rejection of the Lord their God would bring more curses. Plagues and sickness would befall and destroy them. Their number would decrease, and they would be plucked out of the Promised Land and scattered in foreign lands, with no peace and always living in fear. They would return to slavery. The Lord mentioned this because it was still fresh in their minds. Moses took time to describe all these calamities to put across a strong warning to Israel to obey and follow the Lord.

Moses sounded the warning that if they disobeyed all the words that were written in the book of law, their sufferings would be prolonged. Even the very plagues of Egypt would now be upon them. Moses employed this language in admonishing Israel because he knew first-hand how easily they could be turned away from following the Lord. The sin of the world today follows the same pattern and we are admonished to flee from all appearance of evil.

THOUGHT: “*The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it and is safe*” (Prov 18:10).

PRAYER: Father, may I find refuge in Thy precepts.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 7
DEUTERONOMY 28:61-68
EZEKIEL 3:17-22

“...I have made thee a watchman
unto the house of Israel...
and give them warning from me.”

GOD’S WARNING ALWAYS STANDS

Moses’ warning was not casual talk. He used a language that truly brought the message home, and his audiences would confirm that it was a serious warning. He said that every plague and sickness that was written in the book of the law would the Lord bring upon them until they were destroyed. Their number would be significantly reduced because they did not obey the voice of the Lord their God.

The punishment for those who rebelled in the wilderness as they left Egypt was a testimony to all who intended to disobey the Lord. Their condition would worsen as they adopted the foreign religion and served their idols. This would be a rejection of the true God who had chosen them. They would then have no peace. Moses added, “*And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind*” (Deut 28:65). They would continue to live in fear, not knowing what the future held for them, and with no assurance of life. There was a threat of them going back to Egypt to become slaves again.

Moses uttered these curses in prophetic language. Much of this came to pass in Israel in their long history even up to the present generation. The servant of the Lord knew that it was his obligation to deliver these words to the nation which he had led for forty years. He meant well in this warning.

The Lord is also faithful in His covenant and has not forsaken Israel entirely. There is hope for them in the Messiah who has come. Let us also trust in the Messiah so that we will not face such consequences, but rejoice always in the Lord for His salvation. The Son of God is the way, the truth and life. He has adopted believers into His chosen family. Let us seek Him and find salvation.

THOUGHT: He who ignores a red flag will die.

PRAYER: Father, may I heed Thy warning, and live.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 8

DEUTERONOMY 29:1-15

EXODUS 19:4-6

*“...if ye will obey my voice indeed,
and keep my covenant, then ye shall
be a peculiar treasure unto me...”*

ISRAEL GETS READY TO MAKE A COVENANT

A covenant is a solemn pledge made between two parties. It is a commitment with an oath. As such a covenant cannot be broken, every party has to remain committed to it. The Lord commanded Moses, and he had Israel to make such a covenant in Moab. This was before they crossed to the Promised Land, and before the death of Moses. It was needful for Israel to ensure that they remained in one accord as they moved forward. This is the background of the covenant that they made.

The need of a covenant came from God who commanded Moses to make that covenant. When Moses called all Israel, he told them to remember all that the Lord had done for them in the forty years that He led them in the wilderness. The Lord took them out of Egypt with a strong hand but that was only a brief encounter. However, forty years was a long time and they did not have a permanent home but were always on the move.

They could not provide for themselves food or clothing, but God provided substitutes to meet these needs. During that time, their clothes and shoes did not wax old. They entered Canaan with the same clothes and shoes that they had left Egypt in. This was in itself a great miracle. The Lord also provided them with food that fell on their camp every day. This food could not be identified and Israel called it “manna” which means “*what is it?*” It was not wheat, corn or grapefruit, but it had all the nutrients of different foods and it was sufficient for them all that time. Moses mentioned that they had not eaten bread or strong drink all that time. All those wonders that Israel witnessed were a manifestation of God’s greatness and ability to do all things. There was no other nation or people that the Lord had done great things as He did to His chosen people. The march of Israel into Canaan could not be restrained by any force, except the Lord alone. The command of the Lord was to sustain their commitment to Him. The experiences of the wilderness called for such a requirement.

THOUGHT: God’s covenants are designed for our protection.

PRAYER: Father, may I always be truthful.

ALL WERE INCLUDED IN THE COVENANT

As Moses was speaking, they had defeated the kings of Moab: Sihon (king of Heshbon) and Og (king of Bashan). Both were very powerful and had strong armies, but the Lord delivered them into the hands of Israel. Their nations were destroyed, and Moses gave their land to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh. In the strategy of war, the first necessity was to have a strong army. In the early days, this depended on the number of soldiers that a king had. Second was to have good training and brave hearts. Israel did not have these qualities more than their enemies, but the Lord was their strength and victory. Moses stressed that it was the Lord who had given them victory over those kings. According to the Epistle to the Ephesians, believers are now engaged in a spiritual warfare. It thus exhorts us to put on the whole armour of God. Victory in this warfare as it was to Israel can only come from the Lord.

The solemnity of a covenant requires each party to keep their side of the bargain. Israel was commanded to keep the words of the covenant and to do them so that they might prosper in all that they did. They were to stand before the Lord from the smallest to the greatest. The captains of the tribes, elders, all officers and all men were to keep the covenant. Also, their little ones, their wives and strangers, all of them were to enter into the covenant with the Lord that day. The inclusion of everybody and the specification of their participation stressed the importance of personal responsibility. Everyone regardless of their status was responsible before God. In the days of Nehemiah, when he had completed the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, he asked Ezra the priest to bring the book of the Law of God to read to the people. Those who were invited to the meeting were men, women and all who could understand, meaning mature children were also included. Israel's covenant was all inclusive. The communication from Moses to Israel was received in the whole assembly of the nation. Everyone was responsible.

THOUGHT: God does not entertain covenant breakers.

PRAYER: Father, help me to be a covenant keeper.

THE PRECAUTIONS OF THE COVENANT

The covenant that the Lord made with Israel was all inclusive. He promised to establish them as a people unto Himself. This was in line with the covenant that He had earlier made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jacob went to Egypt as a family of less than a hundred people. Their sojourn in Egypt was for four hundred years and when they left Egypt they were a multitude that covered the face of the earth. In the original covenant, the Lord had told Abraham that He would bless them that blessed him. The promise to include those who favoured Israel in the covenant shows that all must show goodwill towards God's chosen people. As children of Abraham by faith today, we are also included in the eternal covenant which is fulfilled in Jesus.

The hearts of Israel should not be turned to the idols that they had seen. The religion of Egypt and that of the Canaanites was idolatry. When Moses was called to lead Israel out of Egypt, he introduced them to the true God and true worship. When the Law was given, the worship of idols was expressly forbidden. Those who would transgress with impunity would face the wrath of God. Moses saw and knew of the possibility of such turning away from the Lord to follow idols. In the wilderness, it was Aaron, his second-in-command that led Israel in making an idol. As such, none is immune to the temptation to follow the ways of the majority.

However, Israel as the chosen people of God was to be cautious to serve the Lord faithfully. All the curses that were written in the book of the Law would come upon them and their names would be blotted out from under heaven. This means that they would die and cease to exist on earth. Their punishment was compared with that of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim. This was a reference to the account in Genesis 19 in which the Lord sent rain of fire and brimstone that destroyed those cities into ashes. Every living thing in those cities was destroyed.

THOUGHT: There is need for extra caution to keep a covenant.

PRAYER: Father, grant me faith to keep Thy covenants.

THE PENALTY FOR TRANSGRESSION IS SURE

The punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah became a yardstick for the fate of all transgressors because their sins were so abominable. They deserved nothing less than annihilation. The location of those cities is on the shores of the Dead Sea. This is a lake that is nearly all salt and water, and nothing can live in it even though it receives fresh water from River Jordan. It illustrates the severity of God’s wrath upon all who go against His commands. The message is clear: keeping God’s covenant means total obedience.

If Israel would transgress the covenant, their sin would be known to all. All the curses written in the book would come upon them. In the previous chapter there is a long list of these curses that were predicted. They would be uprooted from their land and taken to another. Their enemies would enslave them and take them to a foreign land against their will. This prescribed punishment of captivity means that Israel would be subjected to the will of their enemies. Such a penalty would be devastating and inflict much pain to the victims. The highest punishment would be death and the Bible declares that this is the wages of sin. Moses closed Deuteronomy 29 declaring the sovereignty of God: *“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law”* (Deut 29:29). He was telling Israel to submit to the revealed will of God only.

Moses led Israel step by step and did his best to ensure that they fulfilled all that the Lord commanded them. The Lord was going to give them a land of their own where they would have all authority. The need for preparation for any eventualities and also to maintain law and order was critical. They also had to serve the Lord rightly and their sojourn would be meaningful.

As we look forward to our heavenly heritage, let us obey our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

THOUGHT: All who believe in Christ will not perish.

PRAYER: Father, may I truly look to the Rock of Ages to be my Refuge.

LORD'S DAY, DECEMBER 12
DEUTERONOMY 30:1-10
JEREMIAH 31:31-34

*“And they shall teach no more...
saying, Know the LORD:
for they shall all know me...”*

THE WORK OF GOD'S LAW EMPHASISED

Moses conveyed to Israel everything that the Lord told him to. Again, he emphasised the work of God's Law and reminded Israel that the Word of God is always true. All the promises of God will come to pass and God will bring His people to repentance. The Word of God will always be available to His people and it was delivered purposely to be within their reach. Moses admonished the people to choose life and satisfaction in the Lord.

The promises of God in the Law will come to pass. When blessings and curses are fulfilled, they will remember what the Lord told them. Israel had been warned of the punishment of captivity as part of the curse that would befall them when they disobeyed the voice of the Lord. This would be a painful experience. A captive is a person destitute of any freedom or rights. Israel had that indignity in Egypt. The captives are subjected to the will of their captors, they are usually compelled to render hard labour, tortured and offered little food. That kind of life is miserable and the means to freedom is obscure. Israel would be sentenced to this kind of life in the hands of foreigners. When they would return to the Lord in repentance and obey His voice again, God would bring them back from all nations where they were scattered. That would be a relief and a time of joy for them. Moses stressed that promise in Deuteronomy 30:4-5: *“If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers.”* This regathering would be far greater than the way the Lord brought them out of Egypt.

In repeating these words, Moses emphasised the point he was making. Listen and do what the Lord says, and avoid punishment!

THOUGHT: The Law given will judge the rebellious.

PRAYER: Father, may I live with expectation of blessings, not cursing.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 13
DEUTERONOMY 30:1-10
JEREMIAH 32:36-44

*“And they shall be my people,
and I will be their God.”*

THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

The Lord is always true to His Word. In the subsequent history of Israel, we read of the fulfilment of God’s prophecies. As much as every transgression has consequences, repentance also brings relief. However, the damage that comes with God’s vengeance leaves scars that last for ever. Israel reached the highest point of her glory as a nation in Solomon’s days. The land was peaceful and prosperous, and yielded much fruit. While they saw the hand of the Lord in that blessing, they at the same time became careless. They did not fully obey the Law and allowed personal ambitions to overtake them.

The nation was divided during the reign of Solomon’s son. Led by their kings, they forsook the Lord, and followed after idols. Prophets were sent to warn them and to restore them to the ways of the Lord. But few listened. Consequently, the nation was taken captive, in batches, to foreign lands. Only Judah returned to the Promised Land after seventy years in captivity, but the former glory was never restored. Even the second temple that they built was seen as inferior to the one that Solomon had built.

Modern Israel was restored after spending centuries in the diaspora. Though Israel is prosperous in many ways, they are in a state of war constantly. Their main transgression is the rejection of the Messiah. Since He came, the Jewish nation as a whole has never recognised Him. Only a handful of Jews have acknowledged the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. The offer of repentance still remains today, and they can still be saved.

Moses told Israel then that God will circumcise their hearts and cause them to love Him. This expression means that God will change them and bring them into fellowship with Him. All the curses will be turned to their enemies.

Today, our personal relationship with God is important in seeking His blessings and eternal rest.

THOUGHT: God has given the offer of salvation to all who repent.

PRAYER: Father, may I always hope in Thy promised eternal rest.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 14
DEUTERONOMY 30:11-20
JOHN 5:39-47

*“For had ye believed Moses,
ye would have believed me:
for he wrote of me.”*

SAVING GRACE WAS PREACHED BY MOSES

Israel will turn to the Lord and obey His commandments. The grace of the Lord is shown in the expressions that Moses used as he spoke to Israel. Their repentance would lead to God forgiving them. He would freely forgive them and accept them as His children.

Grace is the offer that runs through this narrative of God’s redemption. The gospel stands on this principle. The Lord saves us not for the good that we have done, but only by His grace and mercy.

Moses was preaching the same not only in this instance but also through the prescribed offerings. The offer of the Passover lamb, for example, was not that the blood of the lamb could take away sins per se but it is the grace of God that saves. The offering is a picture of the offer of the Son of God as a substitute for our sins. The Lord promised to bless and prosper the nation Israel in every aspect of their life and labour. In this, their repentance must be clear. They will turn to the Lord and keep all the words written in the Law. This is always the expectation because repentance must be supported by fruits meet for repentance. It was expected of Israel and it is expected of us also today: our profession of repentance must be supported by our actions.

The words of the Lord are within reach of His people. The Lord made it possible for all Israel to hear His voice when He pronounced the commandments in Mt Sinai. He delivered the written tables of stone to Moses. The priests and the Levites were appointed to be teachers of these commands. God’s commands were not beyond their reach, but were available to them. The Lord had ensured that they all could hear the words that He delivered to Moses. God’s Word was near to their heart, and they could obey it. Moses, as a prophet of God, faithfully conveyed to them everything that the Lord wanted them to hear.

THOUGHT: Salvation is by grace from the beginning to the end.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for saving me through my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 15
DEUTERONOMY 30:11-20
MATTHEW 7:28-29

*“For he taught them
as one having authority,
and not as the scribes.”*

THE AUTHORITY OF MOSES

The authority to speak for the Lord was bestowed on Moses as he was a prophet. All his messages in the book of Deuteronomy were given with the expressed approval of the Lord. Jesus spoke of Moses and bestowed on him that power. The Apostle Peter in the New Testament affirmed this also when he said, *“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”* (2 Pet 1:19-21). The content of the commandments represented an offer of life and good and, in the negative, death and evil. It was presented to Israel so that they could learn and discern what was good for them.

The repeated lesson is to listen and obey all of God’s commandments. Despite that emphasis, the disposition to disobey is always there because of our sinful flesh which always wants to choose evil over God’s way. Idolatry was then the greatest temptation because it was the religion of Egypt as well as the nations around Israel. Moses warned that if they turned away from God to follow idols, they would be cut short and would surely perish. Idolatry is the denial of the true God. Moses repeated his warning and called upon the Lord Himself to bear witness. He had set before them life and death, blessing and cursing. He earnestly pleaded with them to choose life so that they and their children might live.

The words of Moses have been represented in all ages through the preaching of the gospel. It is presented to all who are needy. Preachers do not use any forceful means to get their hearers to obey. Nevertheless, what the hearers choose will determine their destiny.

THOUGHT: Israel needed to adopt God’s Law as their standard.

PRAYER: Father, may my salvation be proven by my obedience to Thee.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16

DEUTERONOMY 31:1-8

1 KINGS 2:1-4

*“...be thou strong therefore,
and shew thyself a man...”*

MOSES HANDED OVER THE LEADERSHIP

The Lord had revealed to Moses that he would soon die, and not cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land. He was set to hand over the office to Joshua. He announced his soon departure and introduced Joshua to Israel. The Lord directed him to write a song for Israel, a song of joy and declaration of who God was to the nation. He completed writing the book of the Law and had it put in the Ark of the Covenant.

When Moses spoke his last words to Israel, he announced that he could not go across Jordan with them. He was 120 years old. The Lord had told him that his time was coming to an end. Moses reminded the people that in the course of the possession of the land, the Lord was going to be with them. God would destroy the nations before them and Joshua would lead them in the acquisition of the land. Moses told them that God would deliver the Canaanites the same way He delivered the kings of the Amorites to them. Moses encouraged them not to fear as God was with them: *“Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee”* (Deut 31:6). Israel needed to trust the Lord that He would fulfil His promise to their fathers. If they were to measure themselves by the physical might of the Canaanites, they would not attempt to occupy that land.

Moses then prepared Joshua for the role of leadership. He called Joshua before all Israel and spoke to him words of encouragement. At that point in time, the leaders and the people needed to have unity of mind. Moses told Joshua that he must go with the people and inherit the land that the Lord has sworn that He would give to them. He assured them again and again that the Lord was going to be with them and would enable them to inherit the land.

THOUGHT: God’s wonder-working power is manifested when the impossible happens.

PRAYER: Father, may I run my course with Thy assurance.

MOSES DELIVERED THE BOOK OF THE LAW

Moses wrote the book of the Law and delivered it to the priests and the elders of Israel. He commanded them that in the seventh year when they kept the feast of the tabernacles, the book of the law must be read. It was at this time that Moses completed the writing of the first five books of the Bible commonly known as the Pentateuch.

It has now been about 3,500 years since that time and the same words of Moses are still read today. Nothing is lost because it is the Word of God. Even Moses himself probably did not imagine how long these words would last and how far these words would go, but these words are read today in every part of the world. It was the Lord's command that Moses had to write them and deliver them. The immediate audience was the children of Israel. The command that God gave for these words to be read at every appointed occasion meant that the nation of Israel could not be separated from the Law of God. As much as the promises of God are eternal, His words also are eternal. Such an argument does not appeal to the modern mind that is overwhelmed by human philosophy. This has led to the rejection of God Himself, let alone His words. The Bible is regarded by modern man as any other human book and the supernatural elements are taken as mythology. This philosophy entered the church through liberalism. The clergy that have imbibed this mindset are no longer preachers of the Word of God but are humanists. Some outrightly oppose all doctrines of the Bible.

Moses had commanded that the book be read in the hearing of all Israel. It was to be read clearly and distinctly to all: men, women, children and strangers. They were all required to hear and obey. In this, they would learn all the words of the law and observe to do them. Children were included as they came of age and could understand. The words of God were to be read as long as Israel was living in the land. The Law of God was the constitution of the nation of Israel and a moral guide. It was also a directory of worship so that God's people could know how to approach Him.

THOUGHT: The Law of God is Israel's heritage, and is preserved.

PRAYER: (Use Psalm 119:18.)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 18
DEUTERONOMY 31:14-18
HEBREWS 6:9-12

*“And we desire that every one of you
do shew the same diligence to the full
assurance of hope unto the end.”*

THE DEPARTURE OF MOSES ANNOUNCED

Every aspect of the life of Israel was directed by the precepts of God’s Law. It was for this reason that Moses stressed the necessity of teaching it to everyone in the nation. God told Moses that he would soon die, and that he was to call Joshua and to present themselves in the tabernacle of the congregation so that He may charge Joshua. He then appeared in a pillar of cloud over the door of the tabernacle. The Lord predicted that Israel would *“rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land”* (Deut 31:16). They would break God’s covenant and disown Him. That would be a tragic moment for the nation as the anger of the Lord would be kindled against them.

The Lord would forsake them and hide His face from them and all the evils written in the book would befall them. The root of sin was inherent in all of them and, except for the grace of God, they would be no different from the people of other nations. All through the Exodus Moses had known the heart of Israel. Many times they rebelled against the Lord and Moses bore the responsibility of mending the damage. He pleaded with the Lord severally that He would be lenient to forgive the sin of His people. Moses understood the Lord’s prediction at this time.

The time of transition of leadership from one generation to another is very important. Standards must be maintained by the incoming leadership. The Lord guided Moses as he handed over the leadership of Israel to Joshua. He did his part and Joshua was prepared to carry on from there. The people also must obey and cooperate in following the Lord.

There is a need to pray for future church leaders to be faithful. Let us be united in following the Lord and our children will live. The words of the Lord continue to speak to us at all times.

THOUGHT: The path of successful leadership is the Lord’s path.

PRAYER: Father, may Thou raise a new generation of leaders who are committed to the truth of Thy Word.

GOD DIRECTED MOSES TO WRITE A SONG

It was a song of joy and an expression of what the Lord was to Israel. The song would testify against them when Israel transgressed. A song is an effective means of communicating a message because it can be sung repeatedly. As Moses was a gifted poet, he composed those lyrics to convey God's message. As Israel sang those songs, they would be reminded of their duty to God.

Moses taught the people to sing the song and charged Joshua to be strong and courageous because he was taking over the leadership and would bring Israel into the Promised Land. He assured Joshua that his mission would be successful. That task involved determination on the part of Joshua and complete trust in the Lord. He also needed wisdom in convincing the people to cooperate in the conquering of the land. God would be with them as they settled in the land. The song that Moses taught inspired patriotism and they would take possession of the land as a united people.

The book of the Law was made a witness as Moses commanded that it be put in the Ark of the Covenant. The presence of that book in the holy place was not simply to make it a monument. The priests and the Levites were to teach the people the words of that book. It was thus logical when subsequently copies of the book were made so that it could be read to a wider audience. Moses knew that Israel was rebellious and he feared that their rebellion would increase after his departure. He therefore gave a warning that the nation must guard against rebellion. He charged the elders and officers to be witnesses as he spoke. He warned that evil would befall them in the future when they did evil. Moses spoke in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song until they were ended. He ended his last speech capped with that joyful sound of praise of Jehovah.

THOUGHT: The weight of the last words of a dying saint is heavy. One would be wise to take heed.

PRAYER: Father, may my songs of praise testify of Thy greatness.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 20

DEUTERONOMY 32:1-10

PSALM 67

*“That thy way may be
known upon earth...”*

MOSES' SONG OF JOY

Deuteronomy 32:1-10 is a song of joy that the Lord had commanded Moses to write. Moses spoke for the Lord and ascribed to Him worthy attributes. He described the superiority of the Lord and that His anger was justified when Israel provoked Him. The enemies of Israel did not know the true God and their conduct manifested a base character. However, God would act justly for His people.

Moses spoke for God as commanded. He addressed heaven and earth in calling Israel to listen to him. The tone of his speech made it clear that Israel must take heed of everything he was telling them. He said that his doctrine came as rain and he ascribed greatness to God. He described the Lord and what He meant to him and all Israel as follows: *“He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he”* (Deut 32:4). The term *“Rock”* stresses the protective ability of God. In ancient warfare, the rock was used as a refuge and no power of the enemy could overcome it. As *“the Rock,”* everything concerning God is powerful and unchangeable, and thus perfect.

The attributes of God are in contrast to man's depraved and corrupt state. When Jesus came, the term *“Rock”* took a greater significance. In writing to the Corinthian Christians, Apostle Paul said, *“And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ”* (1 Cor 10:4).

In Deuteronomy 32:6, Moses referred to God's establishing the nation of Israel. *“When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel”* (Deut 32:8). The Lord became the portion of Israel and their inheritance. These remarks were to assure Israel that God had not forsaken them even up to that time.

THOUGHT: The greatness of God is always the same to all who trust in Him in every generation.

PRAYER: Father, may I always be assured of Thy protection and provision.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 21
DEUTERONOMY 32:11-14
ISAIAH 45:21-23

*“Look unto me, and be ye saved,
all the ends of the earth...”*

GOD’S CARE IS SUPERIOR

The character of an eagle illustrates God’s superior care. This bird of prey is highly protective of her little ones. Anyone who tries to touch her nest faces the wrath of this queen of the skies. This is a picture of what God is to His people. God also provides nourishment for His people. In the case of Israel, He provided ready-made bread in the form of manna during their forty-year sojourn in the wilderness. This was an extraordinary means of provision. Note that His ordinary means is also from His gracious hand.

God provided the animal produce and also the crops of the field. The increase of the field came mainly from sufficient rain and good soil. Honey and oil represented the best of the foods that God provided for His people. Refined animal products were also the best foods. The nation was sustained in good health and remained strong physically because God was with them. Moses referred to the Lord again as the Rock of their salvation. Israel had literally witnessed the salvation of the Lord when He brought them out of Egypt through His mighty hand. He defeated their enemies and allowed Israel to live in comfort and satisfaction.

The greatest salvation is the blotting away of their sins and their admission to eternal life. This came through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It was not clear to them at that time, but the Lord had revealed to them in pictures which were later confirmed at the first advent of the Lord. Man always remains sinful, with idol worship as the greatest transgression of Israel and all nations. This was mentioned repeatedly because Israel in their depraved state was vulnerable to turning to idolatry. At the same time, idolatry was also the worst abomination as it amounted to the denial of God. This highlights the importance of remaining faithful to the Lord under all circumstances. It was needful for Israel, and it is equally needful for His people today.

THOUGHT: Salvation is made possible in Christ and gives hope to a sinner.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy saving grace offered to me.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 22

DEUTERONOMY 32:15-43

2 PETER 2:4-9

*“The Lord knoweth how to deliver
the godly out of temptations...”*

GOD’S ANGER WAS JUSTIFIED

Man provokes God in his vanities as he becomes rebellious and is unceasing in his sin against his Creator. God referred to Israel in such a condition as a foolish nation. God responded to their continued sin with endless punishment. The earth would burn with fire and He would fight them with the power of an arrow. Hunger and devouring heat would come upon them with bitter destruction. The teeth of the beasts and poison of serpents (Deut 32:24) would be part of their punishment. They would fall in war by the sword without and there would be terror within. Young men, virgins, sucklings and old men would be scattered and ceased from being remembered (Deut 32:25-26).

The Lord, however, would not allow the enemies of Israel to behave strangely and say that their hand was higher than the Lord’s and that it was not the Lord who had done this to Israel (Deut 32:27). He asserted that Israel was a nation void of counsel and had no understanding (Deut 32:28). The Lord asserted His power through this rhetorical question: *“How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut them up?”* (Deut 32:30). These expressions were to inform Israel that their defeat was because God had delivered them to their enemies. They had no alternative but to follow the Lord as they had been commanded. If they sought their own ways and rebelled against the Lord, they would face His wrath.

Israel did not know God. Their pattern was as that of Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut 32:32). This comparison brought to mind the narrative in Genesis 19 of the wickedness of those cities. Their sin was so great that they deserved nothing less than complete extinction. The Lord caused fire to rain upon them and every living thing died in that place. The location of those cities has been identified as the Dead Sea and, to this day, nothing can grow in that place. It is contaminated with substances that cannot sustain life.

THOUGHT: Where God’s name is honoured, there is joy and blessing; and where He is blasphemed, there are curses and misery.

PRAYER: Father, may Thy name be honoured within my dwelling.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 23

DEUTERONOMY 32:44-52

1 JOHN 3:18-24

“...God is greater than our heart,
and knoweth all things.”

THE LAST WORDS OF THE SONG

Moses continued with the lesson of wine, a cherished drink and served to guests in feasts. But Israel's wine was corrupted and poisonous, signifying the people's wicked and deadly works. God will punish Israel.

God lives forever and He has the power of the sword. This assertion and other attributes of God are meant to reaffirm the greatness of God above all nations and all their idols. God will always be just. Moses wished to make this known to all Israel and the composition of this song was a reminder to them of God's superiority and the need for Israel to submit to Him.

Moses told it to the people and to Joshua. He told them to set their hearts upon these words and to obey them. When Moses had finished composing this song and teaching Israel, the Lord told him that it was time for him to die. He was to go up to Mt Nebo and die there, as Aaron also died in Mt Hor. The Lord also repeated his reasons for denying Moses entry into the land of Canaan. Moses could view the whole land, but could not enter. As it is said, the curtain fell on the life of that great servant of the Lord at 120 years. He had lived forty years in the royal Egyptian palace as a prince and son of Pharaoh's daughter. The second forty years he lived as a shepherd in the land of Midian, this was where he gained the experience of desert life. His last forty years were spent with the Lord as a leader of the children of Israel. His experience with God all those years were thus expressed in the words of this last poem that he wrote for them.

The experiences of Moses with the Lord were manifold. He could write many books about them, his song highlighted the most important aspects. It was a happy ending for Moses as he was full of days and had served well in his years.

THOUGHT: What can I say of the Lord when I look to my time to exit this world?

PRAYER: Father, make me ready for my heavenly home when the time comes.

MOSES' BLESSING OF THE TRIBES OF ISRAEL

Prior to his departure, Moses said something concerning the future of the children of Israel. These were the blessings that he left for them, similar to those of Jacob in Genesis 49. He named each of the twelve tribes and said a word for each one, except for Simeon. He began with a few remarks to praise the Lord and then blessings for each. He closed with more remarks. These were the blessings of Moses.

In these parting words, this man of God blessed the children of Israel, and then he died. This was the expected farewell after leading the nation all those years. Moses recalled those days that the Lord led them in the wilderness to Sinai, Seir and Paran. The Lord came with ten thousand saints, and from His right hand He gave the Law. God loved the people and they submitted to receive His words. The Law that Moses commanded was their inheritance. The Lord was king in Jeshurun as heads of the tribes gathered together. It was a poetic name for Israel. In this, Moses was recalling how the Lord had been with the nation and the great works He had done. As he was now departing, the Lord would continue to lead them and he spoke of the specific destiny of each tribe in these blessings.

The blessings of Moses for each of the twelve tribes of Israel are brief and are not the same as those of Jacob in their detail. Reuben is the eldest of all the children of Jacob and his name comes first although Moses did not follow that order after this.

He said that Reuben would live and not die and his men would not be few. The blessings he cited were based on experiences and circumstances of each of the tribes. When Jacob blessed them earlier, they were only families, but now after more than 400 years they were part of a big nation. The number given for them when a census was taken showed that they were great in number. These figures were recorded in the book of Numbers. The predictions of Moses were based on the immediate circumstances and this explained the reason for the omission of one tribe which had just rebelled.

THOUGHT: The prophetic words of Moses came from the Lord.

PRAYER: Father, may I be counted worthy of Thy blessings.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 25

DEUTERONOMY 33:7-11

MATTHEW 1:1-21

“...Jacob begat Judas and his brethren.”

JUDAH AND LEVI APPOINTED TO PROMINENCE

In the later part of Israel's history, the offices of a king and the priests were very important. In Moses' blessings, Judah and Levi were destined to occupy these offices respectively as Simeon got nothing.

Judah was the fourth son of Jacob. Moses prayed that the Lord would hear the voice of Judah, bring him to his people and his hands be sufficient to him. He asked the Lord to be a help to him from his enemies. Moses was aware of what Jacob had said concerning Judah and that royalty was given to this tribe. This tribe deserved God's protection as the family was tasked with great responsibility. Moses uttered these words without having to add to what their father had said and also without contradicting Jacob. Judah was destined for great things. The crowning glory was the birth of the Messiah in that family line. He was the high priest after the order of Melchisedec, and not after the order of Aaron.

Levi was put together with Simeon. In Jacob's blessings, the patriarch did not have kind words for them because of an event in their lives. They had used deception and slew the household of Shechem against the wishes of their father (Gen 34). They felt justified because Shechem had defiled their sister Dinah, but they used unlawful means in their revenge. The house of Levi had the time to recover from the curse of that incident. It began with the Lord's election of Moses as the leader of all Israel and the appointment of Aaron as the priest. This gave the house of Levi the duty of the priesthood. When the majority of Israel rebelled against the Lord in the wilderness, the tribe of Levi stood for the Lord.

As Levi was destined to occupy the priesthood, Moses had more to say of this tribe. They were given the custody of the Thummin and Urim (Deut 33:8), the stones used to determine the will of the Lord. They were also bestowed the duty of teaching Israel the judgments and laws of the Lord. They offered incense and burnt offerings upon the altar. These important duties overshadowed the shortcomings of Levi.

THOUGHT: God's choice is by grace, and not personal merit.

PRAYER: Father, help me to find comfort in Thy saving grace.

LORD'S DAY, DECEMBER 26

DEUTERONOMY 33:12-17

GENESIS 45:1-8

*“And God sent me before you to
preserve you a posterity in the earth...”*

BLESSINGS FOR BENJAMIN AND JOSEPH

Benjamin was the last-born son of Jacob. No longer that lad beloved of his father, he was now a whole tribe. He had his say among his brethren. Moses referred to him as the beloved of the Lord who would dwell safely by Him. The Lord would cover him all the day long and shall dwell between His shoulders (Deut 33:12). This was an assurance of the Lord's protection and prosperity in their dwelling in the land of Canaan.

Joseph was a beloved son of Jacob. Jacob adopted Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh; and they were given recognition as bona fide sons of Jacob. In the division of the land in Canaan, they were given land in three locations. Ephraim was given a worthy portion in Canaan, while Manasseh was given land in both east and west of River Jordan. As Moses spoke to them, they carried the bones of Joseph, as Joseph had given a commandment regarding his bones that they should be buried in Canaan (Exod 13:19).

The role of Joseph in the settlement of Israel in Egypt is well known. Moses had a lengthy blessing for him: *“And of Joseph he said, Blessed of the LORD be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, And for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon, And for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills, And for the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof, and for the good will of him that dwelt in the bush: let the blessing come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him that was separated from his brethren. His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh”* (Deut 33:13-17). Joseph was destined to have good days as Moses showed here.

THOUGHT: God chose Joseph to manifest His glory through him.

PRAYER: Father, may Thy blessings fall on me.

BLESSINGS FOR SIX TRIBES OF ISRAEL

The last blessings of Moses were brief remarks about each of the remaining six tribes of Israel.

Zebulun and Issachar were put together as rejoicing in their tents. Their heritage would be in the mountains and they would offer sacrifices of righteousness. Their wealth would come from the abundance of the seas and of treasures hid in the sand (Deut 33:19). That described the kind of land the Lord would give to them and their prosperity. Gad would be blessed and dwell as a lion and tear the arm with the crown of the head (Deut 33:20). He provided the first part for himself. He was also bestowed the duty of a judge (Deut 33:21). Dan was described as a lion's whelp that would leap from Bashan. This well represented the character of this tribe (as they settled in the land) as well as its relationship with its neighbours. Naphtali was given satisfaction and favour full of the blessings of the Lord; he would possess the west and the south (Deut 33:23). Asher was blessed with children and would be acceptable to his brethren. He was blessed also with oil. His shoes would be iron and brass, possibly signifying the defeat of its enemies (Deut 33:24-25).

In the epilogue, Moses compared the God of Jeshurun to one who rode upon the heavens and His excellency was in the skies (Deut 33:26). He is the eternal God and destroys the enemies. Israel would dwell safely and be provided for. The happiness of Israel is because of what God does for them.

The mention of the names of the tribes of Israel by Moses at his departure was all important. It declared a positive note of recognition for all of them. There is a reason why one of them was omitted. God alone determines what is to be conveyed to His people. God has blessings for all who love Him; and the promises of Scripture have assurance for us. We must stand on the promises of God.

THOUGHT: God's sovereign will gives attention to my individual needs.
PRAYER: Father, may my faith look up to Thee for Thy planned blessings.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 28

DEUTERONOMY 34:1-4

PSALM 103:1-10

*“He made known his ways unto Moses,
his acts unto the children of Israel.”*

MOSES' FINAL COMMUNICATION

In Deuteronomy 33:29, Moses put a full-stop to the writing of the Book of the Law. Deuteronomy 34, possibly penned by Joshua, is a logical conclusion of the Pentateuch. Here, Joshua spoke of the death of Moses after Moses viewed the land from Mt Nebo. He died at an advanced age although he was still physically fit. It was the end of a great era and a new era, under the leadership of Joshua, was ushered in. This is the narrative of that transition.

Moses went to Mt Nebo and stood upon Pisgah, the highest point of the mount, and the Lord showed him the whole land of Canaan. Gilead was the southern border and Dan was the northern border. These places were named after the tribes that occupied those localities. In the first zone, there were the tribes of Naphtali, Ephraim, Manasseh and Judah. This zone ended *“unto the utmost sea”* (Deut 34:2). The eastern zone was the plain of the valley of Jericho (the city of palm trees) to Zoar (Deut 34:3). This was the land that the Lord swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Lord specifically told them that He would give that land to their seed. Now it was the time to fulfil that promise. Moses had no doubt that Israel would occupy that land, but he himself would not be allowed to set foot there.

The mysteries of the Lord are beyond human comprehension. The subsequent settlement of Israel in the land of Canaan was largely due to the work of Moses, but the Lord overrules man's wishes. The key factor is stated in this verse which Moses wrote: *“That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them”* (Deut 30:20). Moses would have wished to see that land, and also Israel had expected him to lead them all the way to their settlement in the Promised Land, but the Lord overruled all these expectations.

THOUGHT: It is delightful to start, and it is profitable to finish.

PRAYER: Father, may I finish my race as Thy servant Moses finished his.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 29
DEUTERONOMY 34:5-10
HEBREWS 11:23-29

*“Choosing rather to suffer
affliction with the people of God,
than to enjoy the pleasures of sin...”*

THE DEATH OF MOSES

The Lord caused Moses to see the land but not to enter it. This was to assure Moses that the Lord would fulfil what He had promised him. He was given that peace at his departure that all his labour had not been in vain. In his early life, Moses faced great dangers and his parents had to hide him in the river. He was subsequently rescued and brought up by Pharaoh's daughter. The life of that infant was now coming to an end, 120 years later. His end came, and he died in the land of Moab.

Deuteronomy 34:5-10 records Moses' death, and that he was buried in the valley in the land of Moab over against Bethpeor, but no man knows the exact place of his burial. The site of his burial is not known for the Lord buried him. The Lord did not allow the people to bury him for reasons known to Him only. It can only be speculated that the people were not allowed to see his body or take part in his funeral because they might make his burial place an object of worship. Thus, Israel was kept in the dark. Israel did, however, declare thirty days of mourning for Moses. This was a natural thing to do in such circumstances. If a person of that stature had died today, he would be given a state funeral and large crowds would attend. All media outlets would report the event widely and many would know of it. In the place of burial, they would perhaps build a magnificent tomb and it would be a location for annual pilgrimages.

The Bible mentioned the death of Moses with a little extra detail in the New Testament. Jude 9 recorded that Michael, the archangel, contended with the devil when they disputed over the body of Moses. Nothing more is added, thus one cannot speculate beyond what is said. The psalmist said that the death of His saints is precious in the sight of the Lord. Moses died with dignity and the Lord had done great things through his life. What can we do today that will please the Lord?

THOUGHT: It is worth all the trouble to serve the Lord, as Moses did.

PRAYER: Father, may I find satisfaction in my service for Thee.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 30

DEUTERONOMY 34:5-8

HEBREWS 6:9-11

*“For God is not unrighteous to
forget your work and labour of love...”*

THE AFTERMATH OF THE DEATH OF MOSES

Moses is a well-known Bible character. He died at 120 years of age, when he was still physically fit. His eyes were not dim and his natural force was not abated (Deut 34:7). This was a blessing he received in his life as he served the Lord. His life became a pattern for subsequent leaders. The people mourned for his death. They had the assurance that the Lord who had led them through the hand of Moses would continue to lead them. There had arisen no leader like him nor prophet with whom the Lord spoke face to face.

However, it was asserted earlier in Deuteronomy 18:15 that the Lord would raise another Prophet like unto Moses. This was not referring to Joshua, but a greater Prophet, i.e. the Lord Jesus Christ. Canaan was a type of heaven, and Moses in his prophetic ministry was a type of the Saviour Jesus Christ. It is this Christ who promised that He was going to prepare a place for all who believe. He said that in His Father's house there are many mansions. That eternal abode is the ultimate hope of all the children of God (John 14:1ff). The children of Israel would have felt a great gap in the absence of Moses despite the appointment of another able leader for them. Only in the realisation that the Lord was leading them, and not merely human leaders, could they find comfort.

The familiar voice of that great leader had gone silent. Israel had to get used to the new leader and a new era. The task before them was also no mean feat. The Lord had assured them that He was going to give them the land of Canaan. However, there were people living in that land and they were superior to Israel in terms of their physical stature and they had fortified cities. They would defend their land, and would fight back to retain their land. Moses had told them that the Lord would bring them to that land. They had that promise and were confident that God would bring it to pass under the new leader. All true leadership is chosen by the Lord and given the ability to lead. This is the case in the appointment of Moses who became a great leader and had to cease his duties at a very advanced age when he died. But, the Lord leads on.

THOUGHT: Leaders are stewards of God. They must be faithful.

PRAYER: Father, may I always render to Thee my labour of love.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 31
DEUTERONOMY 34:9-12
NUMBERS 27:18-23

*“And he laid his hands upon him,
and gave him a charge, as the
LORD commanded...”*

JOSHUA ASSUMED THE LEADERSHIP OF ISRAEL

Joshua is described as a man full of spirit and wisdom. He is commonly referred to as the son of Nun to differentiate him from other biblical characters with the same name. He belonged to the tribe of Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph who was given the birthright by Jacob when he adopted them. Joshua's appointment to leadership did not happen overnight. He had stood the test of time. In Exodus 17, he was a commander in fighting the Amalekites. In Numbers 13-14, he was one of the spies that brought a good report about occupying the land of Canaan. Also, in Numbers he was named the successor of Moses.

In Numbers 27:18-19, we read: *“And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; And set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight.”* The Lord led and everything was fitted into its place when that time arrived. Joshua's abilities came into effect as he took over the reins of leadership from Moses. Israel was also ready to obey Joshua as they had obeyed Moses. This is a very important element for any leadership. Submission is enshrined in the fifth commandment. God's prior choice of Joshua to take over Moses' position made the transition smooth. Moses laid his hands on Joshua again as he handed over the leadership to him. His leadership ushered in a new era. The baton had been passed to a new generation. The nation was not destitute of any guidance as they marched into the Promised Land. They entered a new era.

The transition that was witnessed was an assurance of stability, and the nation had to achieve its goal. The Lord raised a worthy leader. All civil and spiritual leadership comes from the Lord. Due honour is to be given to all leaders. Beyond this is the leadership of our eternal Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Whosoever believes in Him shall have everlasting life. Do you believe?

THOUGHT: The stability of a nation rests on God who sets it up.

PRAYER: Father, give a meek spirit to our leaders that we may have peace.

Notes

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