

George Philip Bible Readings

The Book of Deuteronomy

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1:1-8

The name of this book means the second giving of the Law. It contains three addresses given by Moses to the people of Israel in the plains of Moab in the closing months of his life as they prepared, in the will of God, to go forward into a new stage of their life and work as the people of God (1:1; 4:44; 29:1; 31:10). We need a brief lesson on both history and geography if we are to grasp the picture. Before Deuteronomy we have the exciting story of the Exodus from Egypt and the sad but instructive story of the forty years of wandering in the wilderness as recorded in Numbers. After Deuteronomy we have the story of Joshua leading the people over Jordan to take possession of the promised land. The possibilities before the people were immense as Joshua 1:1-9 makes plain. But the people had earlier been at a point of great possibility and had refused to go forward (Deut.1:6, 8, 21, 26). It was a time of crisis and decision and, as he addressed the people, preparing them for the forward move, Moses reviewed their past history and God's dealings with them, bringing them a second time to sit under the instruction of God's Law. In terms of geography we are dealing with the area between the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqabah, an area of wilderness. Coming up that V- shape and just south-west of the Dead Sea is Kadesh-barnea. The Israelites were to travel east of the Dead Sea through the territory of Edom and Moab and finally cross the Jordan, north of the Dead Sea, to capture Jericho. It is difficult to identify all the places but it is not difficult to grasp that what we read is the story of God's dealings with a real people whose temperaments and problems were very similar to our own.

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1:1-8

Moses took the people back in a survey of their past dealings with God, reminding them that they were no ordinary people. God had chosen them through no merit of their own and had redeemed them out of abject slavery in Egypt. What a picture of salvation! In His sovereign grace God had named them as His people and had made a covenant with them. By Moses, God had led them to liberty and to the start of a journey of destiny in company with and in obedience to the God who had pledged Himself to bless them and provide for them. They came to Horeb (Sinai) in the third month after their departure (Ex.19:1), and there the Law was given. Note that it was to a people already en-graced that the Law was given. It was given *not* as a way of salvation because they were already saved, but given as words of grace to guide them and to show them how to live in the world as God's chosen people. It was a call to a life of obedience. They journeyed from Horeb for eleven days, reaching Kadesh-Barnea (2) and from there they sent the spies to view the land of Canaan (1:19-23). Moses was about to remind them that they had refused to obey God and in consequence, forty years later, they were still in the same place (3). They had not remained static. They had been on the move. But they had not made any progress in spite of all their activity. What a picture of many Christian lives! God took the initiative and got them on the move from Sinai (6) where they had settled down for a whole year. But the impetus withered after a mere eleven days (approx. 165 miles). The possibilities were immense and glorious, going forward with God into what He had prepared and promised, but they refused. Can there ever be excuse for unbelief and the disobedience that comes with it?

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1:9-18

To prepare for the future Moses reviewed the past history of the people and their work so that the lessons might be learned. Note from v. 4-5 that the people have moved from Kadesh, up the west of the Dead Sea and are over against Jericho. The story is in Num. 20:21-26, 31-35; 22:1;33:50-56. Moses was indeed a faithful minister and he spoke very plainly. His "congregation" by their gracelessness, ingratitude and stubbornness had driven him to the end of his tether (Num. 11:10-16 ff.). This was in the context of rich and bountiful blessing (10-11), which Moses prayed would continue and increase (11). Difficulty, and the disaffection that lies behind it, do not need to curtail blessing. But they do mean that some must be found who are both willing and able to share the burden of the work. Moses did not mention here that the suggestion for such a pattern of help came from God through Jethro, a man full of grace and wisdom

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(Ex.18:8-26). By the time of the incident in Num.11:16 ff. it may have been that the shared pattern of work had fallen into disuse and Moses was again carrying the load alone. The seventy may still have held the official position of "partners" with Moses and may still have been honoured by the people for being set apart. But they were not in fact "burden-bearers" and consequently the work and its leader were hindered. In today's passage (14) Moses spoke of a unanimity in decision which indicated not only that God was in it but that the people were becoming aware of their spiritual responsibility. This is always a good sign and often a token that God is purposing to lead His work into a new phase.

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1:9-18

Following on yesterday's comment about shared responsibility we should recall how, in the New Testament, this same pattern is evident both in its necessity and its failure. Our Lord took three with Him to pray in Gethsemane, but in spite of all their earlier spiritual affirmations they fell asleep and Jesus had no help from them. Indeed He had to carry them (Mk.14: 32 ff.). In the life and work of Paul we find the same call for partnership in the Gospel, the same rejoicing in it, and the same protestation that he was left alone. Consider such passages as 2 Tim.4:16-17; Phil.4:15-16; 2 Cor.1:8; 2 Tim.1:15-18; Rom.16:3-4; 2 Cor. 8:1-5; Acts 28:15. Never forget the value of the ministry of personal encouragement. Remember how Jonathan strengthened David's hand in the Lord (1 Sam.23:16 AV). Moses was aware of how easily "position" can corrupt a man and he urged on them the need for integrity and impartiality. We can be gentle with someone we like and in respect of the very same error be hard on another whom we are not particularly attracted to. But this is no way to deal with situations entrusted to us by God (17). There must always be care and sympathy for the sinner but this must never become a sentimental concession to their wrongdoing. It is costly to rebuke and to hurt someone you love, and costly to bear the ensuing estrangement when the rebuke is resented. But we must minister to each other for our good and not for our ease. This is not a charter for harshness. Some find it too easy to dish out correction. Moses chose men who were spiritually minded (Ex.18:21) and the New Testament counterpart is the standard for elders (1 Pet. 5:1-5). It was indeed to be a shared work. But Moses' leadership under God was not to be laid aside (17b-18).

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1:19-25

As Moses continued to remind them of their journey, remember that this people had already seen the mighty power of God manifest in their deliverance from Egypt, in crossing the Red Sea and in their swift eleven day journey through the terrible wilderness. Then, right on the borders of the land, the will of God was made perfectly clear (20-21). They were to go right forward into a land already described as bountiful and desirable (Ex.3:8) and already given to them (20). This was the very thing for which they had come all this way and it was within their grasp. Why then, in spite of all assurances and encouragements, did they want to spend time seeking for guidance? In Num.13:1 it seems the plan originated with God but here in Deuteronomy, with hindsight, Moses gives another emphasis and the subsequent verses make plain the scheme was not a good one nor did it help the situation at all. Indeed, this doubting and investigation which stemmed from unbelief simply led to further doubt which soon became disobedience. Here we are told the people stopped, spent time in investigating through a "committee" who prepared a "survey" and who reported in v.25 that things were exactly as God had told them. Moses testifies now that the fatal plan had seemed good to him at the time (23) and we do not doubt his sincerity. No man is infallible and when earnest appeal is made by others of the people of God it is all too easy to be swayed away from what God has in fact made plain. This raises the whole issue of guidance which is too great to study in detail here. But consider Eph. 5:15-17 and Rom. 12:1-2. It has to do with obedience and trust.

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1:26-40

It is a terrible story but so true to life. Unbelief became disobedience and that gave rise to discontent, criticism and slander against God. Everything became distorted and the most hideous fears laid hold on the minds and hearts of the people. Even the reassurances of Moses in v.29 ff. reminding them of God's

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faithfulness and promises did nothing to check, let alone change, their attitude which had by now developed into the stubbornness of unbelief. Faith had given way to fear and this always happens when we get our eyes off God. The giants of the land and the problems they represented loomed so large in their vision that they just could not see God. He might as well not have existed. But this was not mere weakness. It was deliberate unbelief in the face of all the goodness and mercy of God. All their resolve had gone. The situation, in their assessment, was impossible and therefore their inaction was justified in their own eyes. At that point in the story, totally conditioned by their feelings and fears, the people made a radical wrong decision which set them on the wrong track for the next forty years. Here in Deuteronomy Moses was teaching the new generation the lessons of the obedience of faith, with the clear message that unbelief has consequences far more long term than may be realised at the time. God's full, long term strategy cannot ever be frustrated. He has plenty of time and patience. But His displeasure was made plain and even Moses forfeited his place in the future possession of the land. If you think this is harsh Old Testament doctrine read 1 Cor.9: 27 where Paul speaks of being disqualified, or laid aside as of no further use.

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1:41-46

The closing verses of the previous passage make plain that a whole generation had forfeited its future. The people were to live out their days in a spiritual and literal wilderness. There were the exceptions. Joshua and Caleb were to spearhead the future occupation of the land. But even they had a burden to carry because, instead of entering the land from the south and proceeding directly north, they had to go round the Dead Sea, confront Jericho, and then campaign in both directions. What a legacy is sometimes left by unbelief, whether in home congregations or on the mission field. How we must see to it that those who come after us take over a situation with as few complications as possible. When we hear of some ministers suffering fierce opposition for the gospel's sake and others grieving over the shallow spirit of believers, we cannot but ask what the earlier evangelical ministries had been doing. Israel had a great reputation and the people had a great opinion of themselves by the time they reached Kadesh-barnea. But their unbelief was exposed. Their obedience did not match their reputation (Rev.2:4-5;3:1-3). Now look what happened (41). In v.26 they would not go up. In v.40 they heard God's verdict. In v.41, with a surge of emotion and enthusiasm they resolved to go up. But this was not repentance. It was simple self-interest. They were full of remorse which is a deadening thing (2 Cor.7:8-11). They did not want to live with the consequences of their own actions. They resented being cast off and being told that the very children they used as an excuse not to go forward (39) would possess the land and its blessing. They were angry at being told that they were not spiritual. And they were determined to prove that God needed them.

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1:41-46

Consider these verses again to see the proud presumption of the people. When they should have gone forward they refused, and when they should have humbled themselves under God's mighty hand (1 Pet. 5:6) they refused. They were determined that God should change His mind and that they should prove their own spiritual validity. But easy repentance and spiritual bravado have no value. This is evident in the fact that they were still unwilling to listen to the counsel of Moses, and equally unwilling to accept the fact that the Lord would not be with them to bless them (42-43). They were a people who were always far too sure of their own integrity, over-confident about their own line of "direct guidance" from God. If any who read these words are contemplating a life in the ministry or the mission-field or any other full-time service or, for that matter, any major change of direction in life, including romance and marriage, go to tried and trusted men or women of faith and seek their counsel. Do this *before* decisions are made. No wise counsellor will make your decisions for you, but they will help you to think more clearly and more objectively. More than that, they will pray for you. There is no safer place for guidance than in being a real part of a living, praying congregation. What a thrill when God makes His will known to the church, the fellowship of believers. This is the biblical pattern. The individual, doing his own thing, very often gets it wrong. Here in our story the people were confounded and put to shame. They ended in demoralised

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misery, and the Lord did not hear their prayers nor answer their tears. There was no repentance, only remorse.

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2:1-8

Between the end of the previous chapter and the beginning of this one there lie the 38 or 39 years of Israel's wandering in the wilderness of which nothing is told here (7, 14). It is clear from v. 3 that it was God who took the initiative and set the people on their way, taking the route up the east side of the Dead Sea through the territories of Edom (Esau), Moab and Ammon. The people seem to have responded without reluctance and we must see in this the working of God's eternal Spirit, making His people ready and willing in the day of His power (Ps. 110:3 AV). There was to be nothing indiscriminate or wilful about the journey, nor was there to be any carnal show of strength. This warning was necessary because the pride of Israel might have been stung by Edom's refusal to cooperate (Num.20:14 ff.). Of course, if Edom was afraid of Israel, and the manifest numerical might of Israel, then all sorts of extreme reactions were possible. Fear is a mighty and corrupting thing and the fearful should be treated with gentle care by all who call themselves the people of God. So Israel is commanded to walk wisely, to give Edom all due deference, to pay the right price for food and water and in so doing to take higher moral ground. This is what we should always do because, after all, our fortunes are not at the mercy of unbelievers, nor are they in our own weak and wavering hands. Our hope and assurance are in the God who has blessed us and borne with us in all our wandering ways. Read v.7 and ponder it deeply. It will affect your whole attitude to life.

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2:9-23

Just as Israel had to pass through Edom, so they had to pass through Moab and the frontiers of Ammon. Whatever past historical reasons there may have been for this, there are no details given here. They had to take this non-confrontational attitude simply because God said so, and furthermore it was a reminder to them that they were in fact a pilgrim people who must neither be deflected nor deterred. What a lesson there is here! It is so easy to be side-tracked by secondary Christian issues and activities and so never really enter into God's full purpose for our lives. In like manner it is all too easy to spend our energy on the immediate moment, doing things that are good in themselves, things that are Christian and beneficial to others, but which actually keep us back from taking our place in the long-term plans and purposes of God. Israel was heading for Canaan, the land of promise and the land of service and nothing must interfere. Note how sovereignly God ordered His people and how clearly it is stated that God had made His clear dispositions in respect of unbelieving nations as well as Israel. How we need to grasp the truth of this and so be able to address ourselves to world affairs and to church affairs, with the clear sight of faith. Our God reigns. And He reigns in the kingdoms of men, causing His will to be done, sometimes through the basest of men (Dan.4:17, 25). Moab and Ammon were the incestuous sons of Lot but it seems (20-23) that they were used by God to bring judgment to the evil giants. There are many such days of judgment in the history of the nations and we do well not to judge anything before the time (1Cor.4:5). Remember, our God reigns.

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2:24-37

Sometimes the word of God's guidance in a specific situation is to yield, submit and take the alternative way, but sometimes it is to challenge and conquer. Here God commanded the people to go right through and take possession of the land of the Amorites who had earlier taken it from Moab. Now, a land can be conquered without bloodshed and Moses sent words of peace to the King of Heshbon who apparently had heard of the journeys of Israel and of their friendly dealings with other nations. As God had said (25), by the working of the Spirit, the nations were becoming aware of the fact that there existed among them a people whose God was mighty and glorious. This was also to be shown as true in the story of Jericho, as the testimony of Rahab would make plain (Josh. 2:8-11). We say that coming events cast their shadow before them and this is what Jesus said about the signs preceding His Second Coming (Lk.21:20-31). So it

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was with the coming of Israel to take possession of the promised land of Canaan. People became aware of the advance of the mighty purposes of God just as at times an office, school or factory becomes aware that there has joined the staff a person whose faith is not merely nominal "religion" but faith that is personal. Of course the advance of grace does not necessarily call out the response of faith. Here, the King of Heshbon reacted by hardness of heart and calculated opposition. No matter how graciously and peaceably he was approached he would have nothing to do with Israel or Israel's God. He hardened his heart and God confirmed him in his hardness and so sealed his judgment. It was final judgment as the total destruction signified and, since the Judge of all the earth does right, it was righteous and necessary judgment. A long time had passed since Genesis 15:12-16, but the day of judgment comes (2 Pet. 3:3ff; Prov.29:1).

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3:1-11

Keep in mind that the first three chapters of Deuteronomy are a review of the past history of the people of God from the glory of the Exodus, through the shame of the wilderness wanderings, to the start of a new generation and a new beginning as God determinedly led them forward in His will to take possession of the promised land. Everything that is happening is in relation to what God was about to do. The people have been reminded of the God who is faithful in spite of His people's faithlessness (1:29-33; cf. Rom.3:3-4). What comfort and hope there is in this for all who feel they have failed. If your heart condemns you, God is greater (1 John 3:20). In chap. 2 the people had been shown the determined, controlled and careful government of God as He led His people forward irresistibly to the realisation of their greater good. But now they are shown that the possibilities of the future are not won without conflict and cost, and *we* must see that in and through all we are reading of geography and history *we* must learn spiritual lessons. We too are involved in warfare, spiritual warfare, not merely against armed nations and radical human unbelief, but against spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places. We are confronted by the well-planned strategy of resistance generalised by the Devil himself. Our foes are not mere human agencies for they are only the tools of the evil one. They are responsible for what they do but, as in the case of wicked Judas, they do not always know the terribleness of what they have chosen to do. Read Eph. 6:10ff. and learn to be realistic, not sentimental, about evil in the world.

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3:1-11

We are faced here with the horrors of war and with what seems to be terrible extremism (6). Most of the commentaries point out that "utterly destroyed" signifies "utterly devoted", that is, devoted or handed over to God for judgment. Now, we will never understand history or Scripture if we do not face the fact that this fallen world is a world under judgment and it is God who brings individuals and nations to their day of reckoning. It is His prerogative and He exercises it (Deut.32:35), choosing both the time and the method. Some of God's great judgments have been without human instrumentality, as in the time of the Flood and also the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. In each case the hideous sin of man and his defiance of God were investigated and made plain (Gen. 6:1-7; 18:20-21. The Judge of all the earth does right (Gen.18:25). This is our shelter and comfort when faced with the sore mysteries of experience. Some of God's judgments are carried out through the clash of human powers and they are often partial. The amazing thing is not the judgments of God but His longsuffering and His apparent slowness to bring evil to its reckoning. There is reason for this as 2 Pet. 3:9 makes plain. Therefore when judgment does come we must not pronounce it unjust nor sweep away the idea as something God would never do. Nor must we forget the final Day of Judgment which is appointed for all men (Acts 17:31; Heb. 9:27). Note last of all that we are dealing with giants and this may signify a gross distortion of man made in the image of God or a magnifying of man in his defiance of God. When we look at our own society do we not long that someone should bring the reign of evil to an end? How will it be done? God's ways are past finding out.

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3:12-20

When the section of territory on the east bank of Jordan was conquered it was allocated to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh. Of course, if we look at Numbers 32:1-9, 16-27 we learn that these tribes asked for the territory because they saw its potential prosperity. Their motives were self-centred and materialistic, but who are we to pass judgment since we so often allow purely personal preferences to dictate our availability for God's service. The tribes agreed to Moses' requirement that they should cross over and take their rightful share of the battle. Whether the separation from wives and children would be an inspiration to get on with the battle or a distraction from it through worrying about the homesteads we cannot say. A divided heart and divided interests are complications we can well do without and we need to remember Jesus' words about loving others before Him (Lk.14:26). It seems the two and a half tribes were determined to settle for an early and easy peace. They kept their bargain to fight but soon their separation from the main life of Israel became apparent and they themselves began to be worried about the spiritual health of their children for whom they had provided a "copy" of real religion (Josh. 22, especially v.28). What a warning to parents and families who choose to sit on the outside edge of the work and the fellowship, carving out their own little kingdom. It may prove to have been spiritual surgery and in the long run it may prove painful and costly. In due time, when enemies came against Israel from the great empires further east and north, the first to be assailed were Reuben, Gad and half Manasseh. It had been their own choice to be in that position.

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3:21-29

The first two verses here focus attention on Joshua who was to lead the people into the land. He was a man who had been prepared for his task under the instruction of Moses. He knew what it was to lead an army in battle, knowing that in the secret place of prayer the issue was being settled (Ex.17:8-11). Then he learned with Moses in matters of deepest spiritual import for he was taken up the Mount as Moses' servant, aide or minister. It is good indeed for any young man destined for service that he should seek and have the counsel and trust of a man with whom God speaks face to face (Ex. 33:7-11). Joshua was not perfect but he had a great capacity for love and loyalty even though he was over-protective of Moses' name and reputation (Num. 11:26-30). He was God's man for the future, ordained indeed (Num.27:18-23) and when the time came, he was ready. This is a remarkable testimony to God's grace, for Joshua was a young man who had stood firm and grew in grace and truth in a generation that was bitter and backslidden. Now he stood with his future service about to begin. He was not a novice, but he needed the counsel that we all need. Moses urged him to get his eyes firmly fixed on God, the God who is able to do all things well and to make all grace abound (2 Cor. 9:8). Moses urged him to set his faith over against all incursions of fear, because fear is the great debilitating weapon of the Devil. What ground is there for fear if the Lord our God fights for us? Again and again in the Bible the command comes, Fear not. Fear God, and you will have nothing else to fear. Read Joshua 1:1-9 and face the future in faith married to obedience.

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3:21-29

Moses had been a great man, a true servant of the Lord, humble above all men (Num. 12:3) and one of the great intercessors in Israel (Jer. 15:1). Now he pleads earnestly with God, saying that he is only now beginning to see the glorious majesty of God's person and the extensive greatness of His working, and he asks to be allowed to enter the land. That was not to be, for reasons God considered serious. Read Deut. 32:48-52 and Num.20:1.-12. So far on in his life there was in Moses a flare up of the old sin of angry impatience and presumption that had caused such problems away back in Egypt when he murdered the slave-master. Moses speaks very plainly and says his sin and failure were brought about when he was under sore pressure because of the perversity and criticism of the people (Ps.106:32-33). This is a solemn lesson. It makes plain that a congregation can break a minister, even one long established and greatly used. (That is a thought that gives pleasure to some.) It also makes plain that a minister is not excused his failures. Inasmuch as he is the leader so he must be the example, and the standard is high. God's man must

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do right, no matter the provocation, always remembering God's great kindness and forbearance. When Moses had sinned God spoke clearly of the consequences and of the limitation of his future service and that pronouncement could not be withdrawn. In v.26b God said to Moses, "Accept what I have said." Then Moses was allowed to view the expanse of the land and perhaps he thought of Joseph who, by faith shared in the future of his people (Heb.11:22). Moses was to hand over the work to his successor, for after all, it was God's work not Moses'. But never forget, in Luke 9: 30 we see Moses and Elijah still involved in the heart of the work and standing in the Promised Land.

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4:1-8

There is constant emphasis in both O.T. and N.T. that it is not enough to hear God's Word and agree with it. It must be obeyed (Rom.2:13; Jas.1:22), and it is the obedience of faith that is Moses' theme as the people advance into new service. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb.11:6) and activity, however much it may take a Christian and spiritual form, if it does not stem from the obedience of faith it is barren and abortive. The Bible is radical about this. Whatever is not of faith is sin (Rom.14:23) and whoever knows what is right, and fails to do it, that failure is sin (Jas.4:17). This is what Moses is emphasising here. The life and work of the people are to be summed up in hearing and doing the Word of God. This does not in any sense mean that salvation (the land) is dependent on their works of obedience. It has already been made clear that the land had been given, and because they believe this, they must go forward and take possession of it. In this life of faith the Word of God stands inviolate: it must not be tampered with. As Jesus said, God's Word stands for ever (Matt. 5:17-19) and it stands over against the presumptuous words of men, even religious teachers, who set up a code of opinions and traditions which obscure and supplant God's law (Matt. 15:1-9; cf.Gal.1:6-9,11-12). The Word of God is not to be manipulated nor handled with deceit or corrupt motives (2 Cor. 4:1-2; 1 Thess. 2:3-12). This is solemn business indeed.

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4:1-8

The Word of God is the very essence and dynamic of the life of faith. It is by the Word we are born again (1 Pet.1:23) and by the Word that we grow in grace (1 Pet. 2:2 A.V.). We need every word that comes from the mouth of God that we might live (Deut. 8:3) and therefore we must deal with the whole counsel of God (Acts 20: 20, 27) for it is only thus that we deal with a whole Christ and a true salvation. This Word does not change to suit the fashions of changing culture and social customs, and in v.3 Moses refers to the time when men in Israel flew in the face of God's clear Word and indulged in adultery and idolatry with the women of Moab (Num. 25:1-9). They paid the price, because God means what He says. Those who held fast to the Lord lived and continued, and their manner of life in obedience to God became their witness and testimony (6-8). But note how in this earnest charge concerning obedience Moses really emphasises the immense privilege granted to this people that they should be known among the nations as the people of God. This was to be the testimony of Israel. They had a God gloriously near; a God who listened when they called; a God whose righteous laws are so wise and sure and full of grace; and a God who is pledged in covenant to do His people good. If we all were more conscious of our privileges and blessings and more set to love and serve this glorious God of salvation, not only would our lives be sweeter, our testimony would not be able to be hidden and people would begin to want to come with us because it would be so manifest that God was with us (Zech. 8: 20-23). Do we have a witness, or do our long faces and complaining voices suggest our God is as dead as the idols of the heathen?

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4:9-14

The repeated emphasis on the need to take heed signifies just how easy it is to forget, to lose our sense of spiritual truth and principle, and so to lose our way. This alone is one good reason for studying our Bibles every day. The gracious words of the mighty Shepherd call us back and lead us on. Note the emphasis of the effect of the Word of God on family life so that our children will grow up with the knowledge of God and in the atmosphere of His truth. Moses recalls here the experience of the people at Mount Horeb

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(Sinai) as told in Exodus 19:16-19. God made known His words to His people and, of course, if God had not spoken man would never have had knowledge of God. But man is not left to live by his own ideas of God. That would be total confusion because people would never agree about what God was like. God spoke, and in speaking made plain what man was to believe concerning God and also what duty God required of man (Shorter Catechism). In like manner if God had not acted (in the Exodus, by the Passover Lamb) there would have been no salvation. Everything in the life of the people of God depends on God's sovereign activity. But in recalling the great event of Sinai Moses reminds the people that they heard but did not see. Two lessons are here: we live by the spoken Word of God and not by feelings, impressions, visions or experiences. This is very important in a generation whose Christianity is becoming more and more subjective and less and less biblical. The second lesson is that there must be no attempt to make visible representation of God. This always distorts and reduces God and leads men astray as Rom.1:18-25ff makes plain.

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4:15-31

We anticipated in yesterday's note the detailed warning about, and dangers in, the making of images or representations of God and need only emphasise that psychologically and spiritually this is a process of degeneration. What we failed to emphasise yesterday is that we must see how God is teaching Israel both history and theology, and these we must teach to our children. They and we must learn the lessons of history, seeing clearly how and on what principles God has dealt in the past with men and nations. We must also learn theology, learning what God is like, and grasping ever more firmly the doctrines of grace and salvation. This kind of learning is not just for enthusiasts. It is for every Christian believer, and if evangelicalism does not so teach the people then they will be an open prey to every heretical sect that comes along. Warnings of this are found right through the Bible and the scripture references are too many to quote. People always have itching ears and will always find teachers who will say what they want to hear (2 Tim. 4:1-4). When we come to v.19 there seems to be a warning against all trafficking with the powers of the heavens and all we mean by the stars, astrology and the occult. That is the way of the heathen and God's people must have no part in it. What do we need with these things when we have a God who speaks so plainly? God has chosen us to be His very own possession so that through His blessing of us we might show forth the wonders of His grace and love (1 Pet. 2:9-12). Privilege brings responsibility, and position calls for purity of life.

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4:15-31

In the last part of this passage God speaks very plainly to His people. After all, He is the God who is a jealous God and a consuming fire. He loves His people and love cannot and will not stand idly by while the loved one is stolen away to spoil and destroy itself. Love will act, apparently with desperate extremity if necessary, leading the loved one into deep and tearful valleys in order to open a door of hope (Hosea. 2:15). Love will also chastise, severely if necessary, just as a father rebukes his children, refusing to let them go their own way if that way is folly (Heb.12:5-11). Of course love will also pour out its blessings in rich and extravagant measure. God, who spared not even His own Son, will freely give us all things with Him in the life of salvation. But such is the treachery of our shallow hearts, played upon by the seductions of the Devil, that in the very enjoyment of love's blessings we can forget the One who loves us. If that should happen, then there will be consequences. The people will be reduced, scattered, shamed and will fall back into many bondages, even being removed from the land so that their name becomes a reproach. Think, when you read v. 28, of the seventy years of captivity in Babylon. But then go on to v. 29 and you see the objective of love's stern discipline. What a glorious word for backsliders.

"Come every soul, by sin oppressed, there's mercy with the Lord." This is what it means to be bound to the Lord in His covenant of grace and love. His love is love that will not let us go. He will hurt us rather than lose us. What a God! How we should trust Him.

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4:32-40

This glorious passage needs scarcely any exposition and the powerful words "keep" and "so that" in v.40 sum up the impact of the appeal. Once again Israel is called upon to scan the past ages of history and to consider the Person of God, His words and His actions. It reminds us of the call in Isaiah 40:9-31, "Behold your God," or the humbling yet exalting words in Job Chapters 38-41. How we need to think great thoughts about God. We all tend to reduce Him in size and the first thing to suffer is our sense of worship and adoration, and in no time our obedience is qualified. How much we need to recall and evaluate all God's many dealings with us in discipline and rebuke as well as in blessing and encouragement. Little wonder we sing, "Praise my soul, the king of heaven ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like me His praise should sing Father like He tends and spares us in His hands He gently bears us, rescues us from all our foes widely as His mercy flows." (H.F.Lyte). When we add to all that, as the passage makes plain, the glorious faithfulness of God to His people; the wonder of His abiding love to our fathers and to us after them; and when that covenant love is pledged to our children after us; and when we recall, what we forget so easily, how God by His own gracious power has delivered us again and again from snares and disasters of our own making; should we not be a people determined to walk in obedience? There is a time for clear and specific re-dedication and this is such a time. To the God who has chosen us for Himself and who has pledged His unconditional love, we give ourselves this day in unqualified commitment.

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4:41-49

The first three verses record the setting apart of three cities of refuge to which men could flee in order to escape sudden wrath from vengeful families and to wait for due judicial investigation. There were to be six such cities in all, three on either side of Jordan (Num. 35:9-13), and this plan was carried out by Joshua (Josh. 20). We cannot but marvel at the way God supervised every part of the life of His people in the land He promised them. It will become evident as we go on that God was also well aware of the biased tendencies of the human heart and its great propensity for evil and for degeneration. This is one reason why the law, testimonies, statutes and ordinances are set before the people in such detail. The last verses of this chapter (44-49) are really the introductory words to the second and main section of Deuteronomy which stretches right down to 28:68. The instruction is prefaced by a brief summary of the immediate historical situation. Israel is left in no doubt that it was only by God's grace that they were a people at all. Only by God's grace had they got thus far. Only by God's grace would they cope with the future. The language of these verses signifies that they were indeed a people in the midst of foes. If ever a people needed to watch and pray and to grasp eagerly in faith every word from God, they did. So do we. When will we be realistic and recognise that the world in which we live is not neutral? Everything about it militates against true faith and discipleship (1 John 2:15-17; 5:19). When will we grasp that human nature is not neutral, but inspired by the spirit of disobedience (Eph. 2:1-3)? When we do, we will realise that God's strong and stern Law is full of grace, for our good.

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5:1-5

What a gathering this must have been and what a sense of destiny must have gripped the people! A new generation, taught over many years by God's strong discipline, stood at the gate of new opportunity. There were possibilities and there were dangers, but there was also provision. This is why Moses summoned the people. This was not a time or a situation in which people could agree to differ. This was the people of God standing together in the presence of the God who had redeemed them and made them a people (6).

What they needed above all else at this time was to hear the Word of God, and in hearing the Word they had to learn it, receiving and digesting it so that it became the basic formulating and directing factor in their lives in terms of practical obedience. Of course, we can hear the Word, be interested in it, examine it and even enjoy it, without ever receiving it in faith (Heb. 4:2). We recall a loved elder, after a particularly powerful preaching of the Word, saying to his colleagues, "I had to remind myself it was just a sermon." That is not the way to come to God's Word. It is not man who is speaking but God. We are not

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dealing with something God said and something God purposed to do with our fathers a long time ago. He is speaking to us in our generation, and He has the right to speak, for He is the God who made us and redeemed us (6). He is the God who has made us His own. He is the God who has sovereignly pledged Himself to His people in love. He is the God who is determined in grace to bless us and do us good. Therefore He is the God to be listened to so that we might go with Him into His, and our, future.

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5:6-7

The statement of fact in v.6 stands as the introduction to *each* of the Ten Commandments. God introduces Himself as the speaking, acting, personal God who has made Himself known to mankind. We know Him as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, not as a mere "first cause" or the "ground of being" or the "principle of righteousness". These phrases are but man's puny attempts to speak about the God he does not really know and at best they tend to make God merely a projection of man's own aspirations, and at worst to make God a legacy of man's primeval fears and inhibitions. In this way man's fears replace God, and his ideas and imaginations become terror powers dominating his life and bringing him into bondage. Think of how powerful superstitions are even among church people! This is what happens when people turn away from the Bible God to gods of their own making. Paul reminds us of spirit powers behind evil things (1 Cor. 8:5; 10: 20) and how these "beings" get a hold of you when you get involved with them. But they are not and cannot ever be "gods" in the way that God is God, because they are all creatures, fallen and rebellious creatures in opposition to God, but only creatures. And in the death of Christ they, in their total kingdom were thrown from power and defeated (Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:15; 1 John 3:8b). Now, God declares Himself to be the great Redeemer God who delivers from bondage, unlike these evil and false "gods" who bring men into bondage and restlessness. It is as if He called to His people and said, "Have nothing to do with other gods. You do not need them and they have nothing to give you. Have Me as your God. Come unto Me." That has a glorious New Testament ring about it. It makes you think of Jesus. That is what the Law is supposed to do.

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5:6-7

Keep clearly in mind that the God who spoke His Law with such solemn authority is the God who has already worked salvation for His people. In that sense God is already known to them. Why then the Law? It is given first of all to make God known in His character of perfect righteousness in whose presence no evil can stand (Hab. 1:13). It is given also to awaken a sense of need because of the fact that sin had entered in and intruded upon the human situation. Read Rom. 4:15; 5:20; 7:7-13; Gal. 3:19,23-24. The function of the Law is to make us so conscious of our sin and need that we fly to Christ who writes the Law in our inmost hearts, not only with a desire to be good but with dynamic to be good (Rom. 8:1-4). This is indeed "gospel" because the lawgiver and the law-keeper, who is Christ, dwells in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. This first commandment then is indeed a word of grace that keeps us from straying from the path of salvation, life and hope. God not only calls us to have Him as our God, He warns us of the danger of having other gods on an equal footing or on an associated basis, because this always leads to a process of displacement. Think of Israel's history of involvement with Baal! At first false gods seem to demand less and offer more by way of fulfilment. That was the temptation in Eden. But in the long run the accounts come in and have to be paid! There is a price for sin. And false gods soon begin to take more and more, and the process is one of degeneration and the end of it is death (Jas.1:13-15). It is God alone who has the words of eternal life (John 6:68).

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5:8-10

The degenerative process in false religion, spoken of yesterday, leads to the need for the second commandment. False gods call forth false ritual, which becomes ever more appealing to the senses and this gravitates to the sensual, which has less and less of the intellectual and spiritual, and more and more of the carnal in it. The false gods of the nations around Israel were worshipped in ways of gross physical indulgence and, while we may recoil from even thinking about these things, we must recognise that some

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modern cults, claiming to be very Biblical, when they speak of "winning" converts by "love" they mean sex. Such people have obviously an "image" of God which is false to Scripture. An image need not be a material figure or even a picture. It can be an idea, or an ideology, or an experience, or an activity.

A man's god is the thing, person or activity to which he gives the priority of his time, thought and energy and to which he looks for hope, help and fulfilment. This means the "state" is god for some, and they call for people to give absolute obedience. For others sport, sex, career or family have been exalted to "godlike" status and they are given an extremity of devotion that shames the cold reluctance of many Christians. An image then is something you focus on for motivation and for service and it assumes a religious significance. The trouble with images is that the thing they represent, they misrepresent, and eventually replace. The image becomes a blind instead of a window and people cannot see past it. Some are like that with their church building and even with their minister or priest. They cannot worship and feel right unless they are in their own church with their own minister. Some are like that with the sacraments. All sorts of things can come between us and God.

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5:8-10

Note how this prohibition about images has to do with making them, bowing to them and serving them. There is a progressive involvement and if you start with a distorted image there is no saying where you will end. This is the theme of Rom. 1:21ff. to which we have made regular reference. The real problem with an image is that it has the effect of externalising religion, making it something outside ourselves to be "handled" in a way that leaves our selves in charge. We can go to it at the times we choose and do certain "acts of worship" and then go away until the next time. It can prove very convenient, unless of course we really want an answer to prayer. A dumb, blind "god" which we have made cannot do anything (Isa. 40:18-20). An image also has the effect of materialising God, making Him less than spirit and so restricting and confining Him. Now, if externalising God leads to a concern with ritual rather than theology, then materialising God leads to appealing to the "flesh" rather than to the spirit of man. In this way worship becomes more and more a thing of creating atmosphere, inculcating a feeling of God and awakening feelings of response to God. It is really the way of sentiment, sadly lacking in mental activity, moral integrity or practical service. A third effect of images of God made according to our insights and imaginations is that we qualify and reduce God, who is no longer thought of in terms of His majesty, glory and power. When we turn aside from God's word about Himself to our ideas of Him in images we are astray indeed and can only do ourselves harm. We are warned of this in v.9 and we must look at the warnings tomorrow.

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5:8-10

The stern and solemn warning in the second commandment we have seen to be for our own good, and for protection from false ideas that would harm us. This emphasises again that the commandments are indeed words of grace as much as they are words of law. The reasons for the warning are threefold. First, God is a jealous God. Love is essentially jealous in that it values the bond of commitment so highly that it will not share the loved one with another. A divided heart is a terrible concept. God says to His people, "I have loved you; you are mine" (Isa. 43:1-4). The second element in the warning is that God is a God of righteous wrath who visits iniquity in terms of natural consequences and divine retribution upon those who choose the way of disobedience. Why are we so unwilling to think of God as actively working His righteous rule in the context of history? It is not arbitrary intervention, but comes after careful scrutiny and long patience as Gen. 6:5-8; 15:16; 18:20-21 make plain. When we say "God knows" we are speaking accurate truth. And when we speak of God repaying and of men and nations reaping what they have sown we also speak truth (Gal. 6:7; Hos. 8:7). One generation creates the situation and atmosphere which the next generation inherits. Let us grasp this clearly. Sin has consequences, and that is why we must not trifle with it. The final reason for the warning is a declaration of God's magnificent mercy to thousands, or to the thousandth generation of those who love Him, and who, because they love Him, keep His commandments. You can love a personal God whom you see in Jesus Christ (John 14:8-9) and Jesus said, "If you love Me, you *will* keep my commandments" (John 14:15)

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5:11

One of the difficulties in receiving and submitting to the commandments is simply that, true to our fallen human nature, we are a generation of rebellion and lawlessness. We resent being told what to do and we resent any attempt to curb our self expression. What we do not see is that this is the way of self-destruction. To refuse God's guidelines can lead only to lostness and negation (Hos. 13:9 AV). One area of life in which the anti-God spirit is very manifest is the realm of language. Speech gives us away (Matt. 26:73). What we say and how we say it are accurate indications of our inner attitudes. How we speak about people and the tone of our voice reveal the valuation we place on these people. So it is with the use of God's name. When it is taken in vain, as an empty thing, as a casual expression of annoyance or contempt, or as a mere stop-gap until someone thinks of something else to say, God holds the speaker guilty. This commandment is a warning against profanity which, on the lips of politicians, educationalists or comedians, debases man more than God. But profanity can also be on the lips of religious and Christian people who bandy the name "Lord" as if it was a common thing. There can be a too easy speaking about the Lord; Jesus Himself said, "Why call Me Lord and do not the things I command you?"

Jesus also spoke of those who use the name of the Lord mightily but who are no part of Him or His work (Matt. 7:21-23; Lk. 6:46). This commandment also speaks of the terrible lack of reverence in speaking about God and the things pertaining to God. It speaks also of a certain kind of high-handedness in the realm of prayer and faith-healing when people "claim" and "command" as if God was only a servant to be used to serve man's needs.

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5:11

A name is not an empty nor a powerless thing. People identify with a name and can be united in the using of a name, as is evident in the chanting of football crowds. As the name is used, people can be caught up out of themselves and led into all manner of activity they would not normally engage in. The same powerful involvement is found in the use of the name of Satan, to the point that people are taken over by the power behind that name. To use a name is to invoke the person represented by the name, and this means that we must not lightly call on the name of the Lord. Think of the marvellous story in Acts 19:13-16 where a bad man tried to make use of the name of Jesus. He got more than he bargained for. When we use the name of God, (and there are many names for God, each of them signifying some truth about His person and His saving power), we are referring to and calling upon the person named and all the fullness of His character and power, recognising that He is present and active in the situation involving us. If we take God's name in vain, we are deliberately and specifically devaluing all God is, denying Him His place, and declaring that we choose not to be part with Him in His plans and purposes. To misuse God's name like this is to disown God and to stand apart from Him. It is a solemn thought, and it leads to guilt. On the other hand, when we use- the Name rightly then we are freely and gladly choosing to identify with God in all His works, and declaring that we will gladly be His people and His servants. To use the name without that element of self-giving is simply to tell lies to God and to man, and God will not hold us guiltless.

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5:12-15

Right from the Garden of Eden man has believed the lie of the Devil and the suggestion that God's laws are unfair and designed to frustrate man in his life and development. The technique of the Devil is always to whittle down the authority and sanctions of God's Law (Gen. 3:1-7). The success of the Devil is seen, for example, in how the sanctity of the Lord's Day or Sabbath has been diminished even by evangelical Christians who seem to have failed to see that in the keeping of this day different from all other days we have a glorious opportunity for Christian witness. It is also a means of grace to ourselves whereby we can quite deliberately and systematically, week after week, affirm that we are by choice, as well as by eternal election, the people of God. In standing aside from the ever more hideous rat race of life we give ourselves, especially in the context of worship, the means whereby we get things into true focus and perspective with regard to God and His purpose for our lives. Only the most foolish person would dare to

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say he does not need such a Sabbath. Only the blind can fail to see how in the secularising of the Sabbath everything in life is gradually being reduced to the ordinary, the material and the immediate, so that people are losing all sense of destiny and are becoming more and more creatures of circumstances and appetites. It comes from God like a clarion call of gospel grace: Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Read God's promise in Isaiah 58:13-14 and think more about this commandment.

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5:12-15

Honesty requires us to recognise that some have made the Sabbath a harsh legalistic day with more emphasis on what is forbidden than on what has to be enjoyed. Jesus clearly denounced this kind of sabbatarianism which has more to do with what people expect than with what pleases God. But man's misuse of the Sabbath does not cancel the commandment nor does it allow us to speak glibly about the "spirit" of the commandment rather than its letter and its literal application. We cannot talk like that about adultery, stealing and lying. The commandments mean what they say. In v.15 (and v.6) it is made plain that the Sabbath is a redemption ordinance not to be separated from God's great work of salvation. Because God has brought us out of the land of bondage we must stop one day in seven so that we can recall, remember and reaffirm that we stand in and live by God's salvation. Israel had to remember that in Egypt there was no sabbath, only slavery. But in the land of promise and the life of salvation labour is no longer slavery. Since God is our God and has appointed us for destiny then we must work, but we must also stop and remember, else we will end up working in our own strength and start thinking that everything depends on us. Let this be a word to all Christians, especially ministers, who are far too busy, with diaries that are almost becoming idols, and with every day mortgaged long before it comes. Where does God come in? When does God get our undivided attention, time and energy? Thank God for the Sabbath, and ask His grace so that we will see to it that we enable others also to have and to use this day of rest and blessing.

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5:12-15

People raise the question as to whether this commandment applies only to Christians or to everyone. In Exodus 20:8-11 the Sabbath is spoken of as a creation ordinance, built into the basic system of the world's life. Before the Fall we are told of the resting of God when His work was complete (Gen. 2:1-3) and this is taken up in Heb. 4:1-11 to point to eternal rest, in the sense of completeness and fulfilment rather than inactivity. After the Fall, when sin had entered in, man had to live in the sweat of his brow because of what he had become, a sinner. This explains the essential struggle of life. But one day in seven was set apart to be without labour. It was a weekly lifting of the sentence of the curse and a reaffirmation of God's promise of grace. This means the Sabbath is meant to quicken our desire and to focus the longing of our hearts for salvation. It is a day that should be full of hope, because it reminds us of a God whose work is complete, who enjoys His completed work, and who calls us to share it now and to look forward to the day of its final perfection. It is a day that calls people, saying, "O taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the man who trusts in Him" (Ps.34:8). And, of course, it is a day that reminds us of our relationship with and responsibility for others, emphasising that unless we are right with God there is little hope that we will be right with or a help to others. The Sabbath was indeed made for man. The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath, and when we delight in Him we will keep and enjoy His day.

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5:16

The Fourth Commandment has already led us into the realm of maintaining right relationships, first with God and then with others. This commandment brings us into the vital realm of the family. It would be easy to use this law to launch an assault on irresponsible modern youth (although the commandment is not a modern invention) with their spirit of rebellion and their disturbance of society. That would be quite legitimate since disobedience to parents is a sin listed in Scripture among the terrible things that scar human life and experience and which are an offence to God (Rom.1:28-32;2 Tim.3:1-5). But at the same time honesty requires us to recognise how a generation of parents, with their obsessive idolatry of the

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material and their lust for more and more spending power (which is not the same as higher living standards) has created a society and an atmosphere which have made family life scarcely possible. It is escapist simply to hark back to old days and to agree that parental discipline was a good thing. By and large in the past, the policemen on the beat and fathers were in agreement about children's wrongdoing and the schoolteacher was something of a "final" authority. But in these days children, "seen and not heard" were often de-personalised, and used to compensate for parents' frustrations and unfulfilled ambitions. How many would confess that certain areas of their personalities are scarred if not crippled by things that crushed them in youth. We must study this commandment, keeping within the extremes of parental neglect and children's parasitic dependence. There can be a home and family "in Christ" where relationships are true and this commandment becomes a natural and happy choice.

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5:16

There is always conflict between rights and duties, freedom and responsibility, and human nature gets vexed, wanting to change things for the better. This commandment tells us our first social duty, the first place where we can work to better society is in the family, where we are not entitled to claim our privileges and still retain the right to contract out whenever we choose. Read Lk.2:41-52; Eph.6:1-9; and Col. 3:20-21, and see how this commandment impinges on the whole of Christian life, not least challenging parents to create a situation in which children know who they are, who their parents are, and know that they are wanted and valued. If parents never talk to children about anything important or personal how can there be honour? Children need parents because of their age, experience and authority. But that must create the conditions in which the children can grow to adulthood responsibly. The commandment to honour is unconditional, but it does not require us to say a bad parent is a good one. Nor does it require a child to obey a parent who is requiring it to do something wrong morally or spiritually. There can be disagreement without there being any breach of honour, and sometimes we honour parents most by not yielding to their pressures. Think of how some Christian parents can try to keep their children from the prayer meeting or from missionary service. But none of this need cancel out youthful obedience; respect in the home and in public; and tender care, especially in old age and need. It may not be easy at times because old people can be expert at manipulating a situation. So can young people. Honour and respect are mutual.

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5:17

This verse brings us to the list of negative prohibitions, but they are by no means detached or different from the earlier commands. The whole Decalogue hangs together and is concerned with right relationships, first with God and then with others. The bridge between the two is the commandment just studied, concerning family relationships. If we cannot be Christians at home it is unlikely that we will be of much benefit to society at large. If we live in breach of the fifth commandment, which carries with it promise of blessing and warnings of consequences, then we are destroying something of value and significance in God's scheme of things for the world. It is only a step from that kind of destroying to the sixth commandment about killing. The following commandments likewise speak about the destroying process. Thinking this way leads us to recognise the grotesque situation in which you have adulterers (who are really killers) campaigning with great self-righteousness and moral indignation against the death penalty and against war. In all the commandments we are dealing with fallen man's instinctive inclination towards and capacity for destruction. We will see this in further study of the commandment on killing, but add this last comment on the family commandment. "The stability of a nation is the stability of its families. The disruption of the family is the surest way to national decadence We have in the ministry of Jesus both an insistence that the obligations to parents must be loyally kept (Matt.15:3-6), the recognition of a greater loyalty to a wife (Matt. 19:5) and the insistence that the Kingdom of God takes precedence over family loyalties (Lk. 14:26). Even the honouring of parents can be misused if it is not brought under the over-riding claims of God, and if it is treated as an opportunity of tyranny." (Torch Commentary)

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5:17

"Killing is the ultimate act of breach of fellowship with a brother man". The sixth commandment has to do with respect for life and guards a man's person, however far from perfect he may be. The N.I.V. replaces the word "kill"(AV) with "murder" and this seems to take us away from the subject of judicial execution which is dealt with fully in other places, notably Rom.13:1-5; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; and 1 Pet. 2:13-14. Indeed, right through the law of Moses there is repeated emphasis on the necessity and justice of the death penalty even for crimes which we would no longer regard as warranting such severity. The Law recognised the capacity for progressive destruction inherent in human nature and legislated to restrain and punish it. What we must always remember is that we live in a world that is disordered, degenerate (Jer. 17:9; Gen. 6:1-8) and rebellious (Rom. 1:18ff). It is a world already under judgment. And it is a world in which human nature is indeed "red in tooth and claw", ruthless and immediate in its reaction and vengeance, and for that reason the word of law is needed to set restraint on human action. However just we may feel our case is, however deeply we may feel offended and wronged, we may not take the law into our own hands. If we do, we simply make the situation worse, adding confusion to unrighteousness and setting in motion a further sequence of evil. In this light we see yet again that the laws of God are in fact words of grace set to stand over against, to challenge and to check the innate lawlessness of human nature. Grace always precedes law. Gal. 3:17 declares that the promise of the gospel came 430 years before law. The law has more to do with Gospel than with legalism.

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5:17

Since the purpose of these notes is to help us understand God's Word and so be able to manage life better and to be better witnesses, we continue with this commandment which raises many difficult questions with which contemporary society is deeply concerned. It is difficult to discuss war, pacifism, capital punishment or nuclear weapons calmly. Every normal person (but who is normal since human nature is fallen?) shrinks from the thought of nuclear destruction, famine and food dumping. But what of the slaughter on the roads by careless or drunk driving, the massacre of the innocents by abortion, the corruption of society by fornication, or the destruction of life and home by drink, drugs, gambling and the like? These are facts of experience and, while man resents the grimness of his circumstances, he does not repent. He simply gets angry and rebellious that things should be so and demands of God, as one of the dying thief did, that He should get man "off the hook" (Lk. 23:39). It is when you see the grim motivation of self, that demands its rights without qualification (abortion rather than have our freedom restricted) that you see the need for the restrictive legislation of this law, "Thou shalt not kill." Such is the cruelty of human nature that it will sacrifice even someone loved in order to get its own way. Of course Jesus makes it plain that to refrain from evil is not enough. You can kill someone by neglect. We are to love, even our enemies (Matt. 5:43ff). But that can be done only in Christ. We are to defend life, our enemy's as well as our own.

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5:18

The commandments are not merely precepts of righteousness and prohibitions of evil, but words of grace standing over against men to keep them from destroying themselves and others, because of the natural tendencies of fallen human nature. From every negative prohibition there stems a positive challenge. We take adultery here to refer to all breaches of chastity and purity, inside or outside marriage. But mere abstention is not enough. It is a call to purity of life, motive and thought. Read 1 Cor. 6:9-20 and Eph. 5:1-16. The whole realm of human relationships is involved and what is forbidden is the attitude leading to action, whereby a person is made use of in order to satisfy desire. Often when someone says, "I love you" they really mean, "I love me, and want you." People tend to excuse or justify their adultery by saying, "But we are in love." But they are not entitled to be in love because one party is not free, being already committed in the bonds of marriage. The terribleness of this sin is seen in the use of the concept of adultery to denote spiritual unfaithfulness (Jer. 3:6-10; Ezek. 16:30-35; Hosea 2:1-3,16-20). This commandment sets a very high value on the sanctity of the marriage bond, which is something God has

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ordained. In marriage two are made one by God (Gen. 2:24; Matt.19:3-9), and adultery is the tearing apart of one living thing. This means the so-called permissive society is not just a philosophy of self-indulgence but one of cruelty because it deprives children of the right to be born into and to grow up in the security of love. God makes His position clear beyond doubt. You shall not commit adultery.

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5:18

The whole atmosphere of contemporary society encourages, promotes and glorifies sexual promiscuity. Sad to say, the thinking and attitudes of Christians are being affected, with the result that behaviour, dress and reading habits tend to become more and more the same as those of worldly people who make no profession of commitment to Jesus Christ. Pre-marital sex has become accepted and is not counted wrong if the couple intend eventually to get married. But the "marriage celebration" (if and when it comes) is in fact a lie because the relationship is already established and consummated. How then can a religious service be held using the words "to join together this man and woman in holy wedlock" and how can God's blessing be asked on vows about to be made when, in fact, consent and commitment have already taken place? But it happens, and deceit is added when the minister in question knows nothing of the true facts. Sexual impurity leads into the realm of lying to man and to God, and it becomes flagrant when those involved insist on all the "frills" of public celebration in church. Without doubt there is here a costly area of witness to Christ, not least among young people. Let it be known that we stand for purity, chastity and faithfulness. In that way, by unshadowed relationships and happy marriages we can show to a broken-down generation the way of life and joy and peace. Statistics can be misleading but they make grim reading. We are told that in the case of 30% of all mothers and 70% of teenage mothers the child was conceived before marriage. We are also told that in Scotland one in every nine marriages ends in divorce. And these figures are nearly ten years out of date (in 1982). The seventh commandment is not out of date.

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5:19

Stealing has been made respectable and people are proud of their capacity. You can steal by actively taking possession of what belongs to another or by passively withholding what should go to another, whether it be goods or gratitude. We say about difficult people, "My friendship is there for the taking" but our attitude erects an insurmountable barrier so that the hesitant person cannot face making the first move. If we say "they only have to ask and I'll gladly help" we may again be keeping back what should be given by our taking the initiative. After all, as Christians we follow the God who took the initiative and loved us first. We steal when we sell a car, keeping quiet about its defects; when we fill in tax forms without declaring all our income; when we keep quiet when the honour of man or God is being slandered. This commandment is very plain and practical. You shall not steal anything from anyone at any time on any pretext. You shall not steal from God the life, the time, the loyalty, the portion of your worldly goods that rightly belong to Him (Mal.3:8). When you are absent selfishly from the place of duty and another has to carry your share of responsibility in spiritual or material things, you steal from God and man. You can steal a man's character by gossip. You can steal a man's ministry by criticism and contempt. The employer steals from the worker in lower wages than are right. The worker steals from employer in bad timekeeping, shoddy work and pilfering of materials. In whatever way you look at it the command stands. You shall not steal, and no form of words such as "Everybody does it," or "It is the accepted business practice," can ever justify it. Whether or not you are found out, God knows.

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5:19

The commandment about stealing goes right to the heart of man's carelessness, indifference and cruelty. Read for example, Exod. 22:1,5-6,23,26; 23:2-5; Lev.19:13; Deut. 22:1-4, and see the various ways in which we steal by action or by failure to act, simply because we are in a strong position and cannot be challenged. Now stealing, which involves taking what belongs to another, assumes the right of a man to own things, to regard them as his "property", and to expect that law will guard his rights. Of course, a Christian, in the pattern of Jesus, must be prepared to yield his rights at times (Phil. 2:3-5; 1 Cor. 8:13;

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9:3-12). This does not necessarily mean that "common ownership" is the way to a just society. Even in the apostolic church where they had all things in common it was no time before there arose carelessness and corruption (Acts 6:1-4). We may "own" things, having acquired them by free gift, or by our labours, but not by theft. But all that we have is ours only under God and by His grace, and that means we must recognise that we are not outright owners but only stewards who are required to be faithful. We may have possessions, position and personality, and all three are hard to live rightly with, and can create difficulties in respect of entering the kingdom of God (Mk. 10:23-25). It is when we feel strong that we tend to steal, and to keep for ourselves what is really God's, and to use our opportunities to glorify self instead of God. That is when we need to say, "Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee" (Havergal). Likewise when we are or feel weak and poor we are tempted to steal in various ways to make ourselves feel important. Then we need God's gracious Word to remind us that even the weakest is necessary (1 Cor. 12:22). When our hearts are set on God, we do not need to steal.

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5:20

These commandments were obviously given by the God who knows human nature, its tendency and potential for evil and destruction. God's law speaks to protect man's person (17), his family (18), his property (19) and now his honour. It is difficult to over emphasise the danger and destruction inherent in false witness. Once a lie is set in motion it is very difficult to stop it. Even when the substance of the lie is publicly contradicted the damage is done, impressions have been created, suspicions aroused and feelings hurt. The Bible speaks truly when it describes the tongue as set on fire by hell (Jas. 3:6). How necessary it is that perjury and slander are both punishable by the law of the land. But the tittle-tattle of gossip, the sly and evil innuendo calculated to create a false impression, and the scarcely veiled accusation in phrases like, "If you knew what I know...." are likewise deserving of judgment. Of course, Jesus made it plain that we will be judged in respect of our speech (Matt. 12:36-37; Lk. 12:2-3) and none of it is hidden from God. We need to set a guard on ourselves because it is all too easy to be taken by surprise in a time of crisis or strain and to react by speaking with exaggeration or by speaking only part of the truth. Once that starts there is no saying where it will end. We do indeed spin a very tangled web when once we begin to deceive. But one word of caution is necessary here. We can pride ourselves on our honesty in a way that is nothing short of brutality when, for example, we say, "I just told him straight." People like that do not react well when others speak to them with equal directness.

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5:20

Shakespeare spoke wisely and well when he said, "He who steals my purse steals trash. But he who filches from me my good name, Robs me of that which not enriches him, Yet leaves me poor indeed." How careful we must be not to sin against love by false witness. In 1 Cor. 13:6 we are told that "Love is always eager to believe the best." (Moffat) But is it not amazing just how instinctively we tend to believe the worst? Is it because we find perverse pleasure in hearing about evil? We need to remember that receiving a false report is condemned as much as starting one. The Septuagint and the Vulgate translate Exod. 23:1 - "Thou shalt not receive a false report," and there is the safeguard in God's Law that stipulates the need for witnesses (Deut. 17:6; 2 Cor. 13:1). In practical terms we can stifle rumour at birth and we can, by plain, public speaking contradict lies as Peter did in Acts 2: 14-15. In our own speaking we must be plain and trustworthy (Matt. 5:33-37; Jas. 5:12) and yet we must always speak with grace (Col. 4:6). Remember that if we break this ninth commandment the Spirit of truth within our hearts will be grieved and will protest and as a result our fellowship with God will be shadowed. In the realm of Christian witness this commandment is very important in a generation of lies. Think of how the mass media appeal to the basest of human appetites to sell their goods. Think of the lies with which the advertising industry bombards the minds of all, especially the young, for profit. Think of how risky it is to believe a politician whose main concern often is simply gaining votes. Think of how easy it is in religious life to play a part in order to be thought spiritual. God's comment is in Isaiah 29:13. Lips and hearts must agree, otherwise it is false witness.

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5:21

At first sight this last commandment seems a repetition of those on adultery and stealing but this is not so. It highlights the power and perversity of human nature in all its craving because even if a man *does* none of these earlier forbidden things, the inner disposition of his mind and heart has to be challenged and cautioned. The theme of coveting is taken up by Paul in Rom. 7:7-8 and the word seems to include all we mean by jealousy, wrong desire and lustful desire. It is an attitude that asserts itself when we forget that the whole of life is in fact in the hand of God who gives and withholds in accordance with His good and perfect will. What He gives to one, for good reason, He may keep from another for equally good reasons. But the lie of the Devil, right from the Garden of Eden, is that God is unfair, unjust, unreasonable and therefore not to be trusted (Gen. 3:1-5). We see in that story not only the inclination towards the forbidden but a fixation on it. The woman looked, thought, imagined the possibilities, desired, desired wrongly, desired strongly and then took what was coveted. Up till now in the commandments it seems that the will of man has been challenged but now it is desire that is challenged so that sin might be strangled at birth. One thing we all must do is to be aware of the avenues along which we are most likely to be tempted and assailed and particularly in these areas to watch and pray and to take no chances. Temptation is not sin. Never forget that! But at the same time recognise the spontaneous movement of the soul towards that which is contrary to the will of God so that evil desires can be dealt with before they can become purposeful actions.

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5:21

The corrective to coveting is contentment with God and with His handling of our life. Consider Prov. 30:8-9; Rom. 8:28-39; Psalm 31:14-15; 1 Tim. 6: 6-10; Phil. 4:11-13; Heb. 13:5; and finally Luke 12:13-20. If we know that God is love and that our lives are hid securely in God through Christ Jesus (Col. 3:1-3) we have no need to covet. After all, when you consider it carefully, coveting is impelled by lust, which is greed centred on self and resentful of others. It is full of fear and uncertainty and therefore it will never yield on anything. It is essentially unbelief because it refuses to trust or to yield to the God who has pledged Himself to do us good. The New Testament declares in Eph. 5:5 and Col.3:5 that covetousness is idolatry. It makes "self" god, and no amount of praise, congratulation, reward or fame can ever satisfy. Coveting is a devouring and destroying spirit and it must be slain. Where it operates there cannot ever be real fellowship. Even when fear, cowardice or weakness restrains the actions inspired by coveting, the evil disposition operates, spreading its poison, and in the end destroying the one who covets. The Shorter Catechism expresses it well when it says that the tenth commandment requires full contentment with our own condition, along with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbour and all that is his. It also forbids "all discontentment with our own estate, envying or grieving at the good of our neighbour and all inordinate motions and affections to any thing that is his. The covetous person always wants his own way.

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5:22-27

Note how emphatically it is stated that the ten principles of the Law were given completely, conclusively and exclusively, and were written on stone to emphasise their permanence. Although the Law has to be expounded in detail, interpreted and applied, no one has the right to add to it or subtract from it. No plea of scholarship, modern insights (often mere unbelief) or intellectual honesty allows mere man to change, re-write or cancel out what God Himself has spoken. We have the warning in Rev. 22:18-19, and also the stark rebuke from Jesus in Mk. 7:13 dealing with those who were setting man's traditions over, above and before God's Word. While we must accept that the strict letter of the law can be a killing thing (2 Cor. 3:6), and can make men cold and ruthless in dealing with sinners, nevertheless we must hold to God's given Word without qualification. God has spoken: people must listen, submit and obey. His Word stands as John 10:31-39 and Matt. 5:17-19 make very plain. We may not understand it all and, with our present knowledge, we may not be able to explain *apparent* inaccuracies and contradictions. But we dare not exalt our intellectual capacity or our emotional reaction to a place of supremacy over God's Word. We are

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dealing with the mighty and holy God, as Israel well knew, and what Moses was doing here was reminding the people of the spirit of awe that came upon them. We do well to ask ourselves what reaction we have when God draws near and speaks with such clarity concerning the way we must live and worship. We tend to forget that God is the One with whom we have to do (Heb. 4:13).

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5:22-27

If we compare this account with Exod. 20:18-21 we see that the reaction of the people was to withdraw from the presence of God and stand at a distance. Why was this so? Was it a sense of guilt or was it a misunderstanding of God and His intentions? It may have been both but the reaction was quite irrational and it constituted a slander on the character of God. Why would God take all the trouble to redeem them and bring them thus far; why should He give them such detailed instruction and exhortation regarding their life in the future if His intention was to wipe them out? A bit of plain thinking would have helped. Think of the story in Judges 13:15-24 and of the sane comment of the wife when Manoah reacted emotionally and drew very foolish conclusions. God does not chop and change as if He were fickle and unsure of Himself. Of course, the people of Israel were by no means free from sin and Moses was rehearsing the story to remind them how easy it is to give way to the insinuations of the Devil. If the Enemy cannot keep us back from obedience to God he will certainly try to steal from us our blessing and our peace. This he does by causing us to draw back from God's presence rather than to draw near in the assurance of faith (Heb. 10:22). Think of how in Eden man hid from the voice of the seeking Father (Gen. 3:8-10). This is what sin does to us. It clouds from our view the destiny God plans for us and makes us essentially earth-bound and conditioned by circumstances. The words in v.27 almost suggest the choosing of a second-hand religion, leaving it to Moses to be the spiritual man. We must not despise God's appointed servants but neither must we use them as an escape from first-hand dealings with God.

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5:28-33

There is a different application of v.27 from what we suggested yesterday. It may well have been that the people recognised that what they needed most of all was a "mediator", one of themselves, who knew, understood and sympathised with their nature, to stand in for them in the presence of God and to plead their cause. This directs our thoughts at once to the New Testament and to Christ. Read Heb. 2:17-18; 4: 14-16; 9:24; Rom. 8:31-34 and 1 John 2:1. Being what they were, and having been made to feel and know their sinnerhood by the voice, the presence and the law of God, they asked for and committed themselves to a mediator. The New Testament seems to read this interpretation into the incident before us (Acts 3:22) and today's verses indicate that God accepted the people on this basis (28). We must never forget that God comes to us and we come to Him only through the one Mediator, Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5). There is no other way (John 14:6). When we read v.29 we are reminded that vows of obedience made at times of great spiritual excitement are not necessarily the most dynamic or the most permanent of religious experiences. It is one thing to be *moved* but another to *continue* in obedience. The next verses (30-31) seem again to hint at the choice Israel had made to "keep their distance" and not to be drawn too near or to be too much involved in the new stage of the work which was about to begin. "By withdrawing from God and standing Moses in as intermediary, they were making it easier for themselves to withdraw further, and to backslide more easily. We are either pressing on or backing out." (W. Still)

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6:1-3

These verses, together with the final two verses of the previous chapter, seem in measure to sum up the recollection of the past. Moses is now more specifically instructing the people of God concerning how they should walk in obedience to God in days to come as they enter the land of promise. It is clear that God's commands are coming to them by and through Moses and the people had already pledged themselves to accept Moses' Ministry of the Word. Of course, as many a minister knows to his cost, a congregation can pledge publicly their acceptance of a minister, and then when he begins to preach God's Word they resent the truth and persecute the messenger. They forget that the substance of the message and

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its authority stem from God and not from the mere "minister". He also is under authority (6:1) and he may not tamper with or hold back any of the message (2 Cor.4:1-2; Acts 20:20,27). Note the assurance regarding the future that is declared in v.1. There is neither doubt nor hesitation with God. He is going to lead His people forward and in blessing them He will make them the instruments of blessing to the whole world. They, then, must be a holy people, if not for their own sakes then for the sake of others. There is a great challenge here as well as promise. We must do right by God if for no other reason than that our children after us should be blessed. What kind of parents are we if we deal so shallowly with God that we create for our children and grandchildren a heritage that virtually guarantees their apostasy? Why are we so concerned to leave our children material prosperity? Is it because we do not value their souls?

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6:1-3

Take good note of the solemnity and seriousness as well as the glorious promise of blessing. See how in v.3 Moses reminds the people of who and what they are. They are Israel. They are not their own in any sense (1 Cor. 6:19-20). They are the people whom God has chosen, whom God has redeemed, whom God has named, whom God has blessed, whom God has called to service and destiny, and to whom God has pledged Himself in covenant grace and love. We had the same call in 5:1 and we have this note emphasised again and again through out this book (6:4; 7:6-7; 9:1 etc.). We, likewise in Christ, are a people for God's own possession (1 Pet. 2:9-10) and if we forget this and refuse to be true to our calling then it is sin. Whatever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). We may ask what *is* the life of faith? It is the life of obedience in answer to what God has said and done. We must fear the Lord, with "deepest, tenderest fear" for this is the beginning and the continuance of wisdom (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). It is also the way of blessing. "Trust and obey, for there is no other way". Obedience is not an imposition. It is blessing and life and peace. Think of Jesus' words to the effect that if we love Him we will keep His commandments and if we keep His commandments we abide in His love (John 14: 15; 15:9-10). This was the pattern of fellowship between the Father and the Son and it is the obedience of love, not merely duty or service. The hymn writer says, "Love will make obedience sweet" (Swain) and Paul speaks of the will of God being altogether good and acceptable (Rom. 12:1-2). Saviour and saints alike testify to the delight of doing God's will (Heb. 10:5-7; Ps. 40:8). Why then do we backslide so much? Why deprive ourselves of God's milk and honey?

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6:4-9

These few verses, known to the Jews as the Shema (Hebrew = Hear!) have been recited twice daily over the years as a prayer along with Dent. 11:13-21 and Num. 15: 37-41. The exhortation of v.5-9 is prefaced by and grounded in the affirmation in v.4. The God of Israel is not one God among many. He stands alone. There is no God like Him (Ex. 15:11; Isa. 40:12ff). When He speaks no one can contradict Him. When He acts no one can countermand. When He promises His promise is true. When He acts in judgment there is no shelter save in Himself. God is one, and in Him there is the peace of perfect harmony, free from confusion, and therefore He is the God of peace. He is the one and only living and true God, and He has made Himself known not merely in word but in action for He has redeemed His people and has brought them out of the house of bondage. God is love, and He has declared His love for His people and He has committed Himself to His people in love, marking out for them a future life and destiny of blessing. Because this is so the people are called to love the Lord (before they are called to obey Him) and to do so with all the range of their capacity (heart and soul), and with might and strength. In Matt. 23:37 the word "mind" is included as if to signify the need for understanding and for effort. This loving obedience that is being called for is not something that can be left to mere feelings, although a cold unresponsive heart will never inspire the kind of obedience that is pleasing to God. Why should we love God like this? Because He has first loved us (1 John 4:10, 19). He is for us, not against us (Rom. 8:31). We have every cause to love Him.

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6:4-9

There is in v.6-9 a beautiful sense of spontaneous worship and of delight in God and in the things of God. We see the Word of God to be the very essence of personal and family life, and at the same time an obvious sign that would mark out this people publicly as being God's people. Of course, it is easy to let signs and symbols of any kind become mere formalities and indeed become substitutes for real worship and fellowship with God. This was the error and the sin of the Pharisees in Jesus' day (Matt. 6:1-5; 23:1-7). They had the "marks" of dedicated men, they wore the "stickers" declaring they were God's people but their hearts were self-centred and their motives self-glorifying. Note in today's passage that before the reference to outward signs in v.8-9 there is the emphasis on the Word of God dwelling richly in their hearts (Col. 3:16) and being not only the formal instruction of the family but the subject of happy conversation at the meal table and at times of recreation and travelling. It is in this way that God Himself (and all that pertains to Him and His kingdom) becomes an almost instinctive part of the whole of life. It is indeed a happy home where God is loved and where speaking to God (we call it prayer) is as natural an exercise as conversing with one another. But even more, in an evil world the Word of God resting so sweetly yet dynamically in heart and home becomes a mighty protection from the insidious infiltration of evil. The spirit of the world is always seeking to mould us. Only the living truth of God, loved and responded to, can preserve us.

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6:10-15

There is an example of the need for this warning in 2 Chronicles 12:1 and similar instances throughout Scripture, for example in Hebrews 2:1-3; 3:12-14; 4:1-2. In today's passage note how v.10 begins. It speaks of God's assured future for His people. There is no doubt. It is *when not if* God brings you into the land. And that future is grounded in the past promises and continuing faithfulness of God. There is no shadow of change with Him (Jas. 1:17). Note also the sheer abundance of the measure of God's blessing. The people are to have great cities, full houses, deep water cisterns and rich vineyards. Everything God does for His people is according to or on the scale of the riches of His grace (Eph.1:7). Little wonder Paul in Eph. 2:14-21 prayed that believers might grasp the sheer dimension of the good love of God in all its provision. What a privileged people the people of God are. But do they and do we realise it? And do we realise just how totally all we have and enjoy is the gift of sheer grace? Note the emphasis in v.10-11 on all the things which were a blessing but which they themselves had not done. What a corrective to spiritual pride! Think of how Paul challenged the Corinthians saying, "What have you that you did not receive?" (1 Cor.4:7) The only things we can rightly claim as our own are our sins and failures. Even the faintest stirrings after God and the desire to be good are the work of God's grace in us by His Spirit. We must never forget it. The hymn writer expressed it well.

"And every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are His alone."

(Auber)

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6:10-15

Following on yesterday's comment we see the potency of v.12. When we forget the Lord who redeemed us and when we forget just how much we need Him, we begin to drift. Then the sins and temptations of the past that we thought we were clear of for good begin to assert themselves. They may not have quite the same carnal appearance but with the same power they steal the heart away from God. Think how the one-time missionary Demas forsook the cause for love of the world (2 Tim. 4:10). Think of how Samson, mightily used at one time, became a man forsaken (Judges 16:20). Think of how earnestly Paul disciplined himself lest, having preached to others, he himself should be disqualified from further service. (1 Cor. 9:27). Remember how our Lord Jesus answered the subtle temptation of the Devil by quoting v.13

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(Lk.4:5-8). The temptation to Jesus was the offer of bountiful and painless success but the Saviour refused and in the obedience of faith and love He chose to be God's man and do God's work in God's appointed way. Here in our passage Israel is reminded that once they had served a slave-master but now they serve the God of love and grace. They are reminded of the danger of serving other gods and they may well have been surprised by such a warning at such a high point of success and future possibility. But high times of blessing are dangerous. There is a Devil who waits for our unguarded hour. Watch and pray. That was Moses' warning to the people. Be on guard in respect of your soul. There is too much to lose.

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6:16-19

There is a tremendous realism in the way Moses counsels the people, not least in his recognition of the repetitive nature of sin. In given circumstances it is almost inevitable that certain people will react in a certain way. They are true to their natures and temperaments but, of course, in Christ we have the victory and can mortify our natural inclinations and bring our whole being into subjection to God. Moses reminded the people of the incident at Massah (Ex. 17:1-7) in which the people tried to compel God to prove His presence by miraculous signs. They did this in a spirit of discontent with and criticism of their leader and the work. "To *test* God is to impose conditions on Him and to make His response to the people's demand in the hour of crisis the condition of their continuing to follow Him." (Thomson) This is blackmail and must always be resisted. It is the attempt by man to get the upper hand and to be "in control" of God. It is the opposite of faith and submission. Think of how often the Pharisees and Scribes demanded (and there is arrogance in the very word) signs from Jesus, and how He refused resolutely to give them (Matt. 12:38-39; John 6:30). We must also recall that v.16 was used by Jesus to refute the temptation by Satan in the wilderness (Lk. 4:9-13). It was not the way of the kingdom to overcome people's senses by a display of miraculous power. That may impress and thrill but it does not bring people to faith and submission, and Jesus refused the temptation. But note that Luke records how the Devil did not concede defeat but simply departed until the next opportunity came. Moses said to the people to learn from their past mistakes and to set a guard.

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6:16-19

We stay with these few verses because they teach so clearly that the way of blessing and the way of victory for the work consisted in and depended on diligent obedience. The land they would possess is described as good, and this signifies that it was full of rich potential. It is also made plain that the land was presently occupied by powers that were contrary to God and they would have to be driven out. This being so, it is astonishing how we react with surprise and dismay whenever we find ourselves in situations of conflict. Granted some battles are caused by our own sins which open the door of entrance to Satan. Our Lord Jesus gave no such footholds to the enemy (John 14:30). But other battles come because we are in fact going forward in obedience to God and the territory of the Devil is being assailed and taken in the name of Christ. We wrestle, not against flesh and blood ... (Eph. 6:10ff) and Moses reminded the people that the enemy would resist and would have to be thrust out. This is the kind of language Paul uses in 2 Cor.10:3-6. But we must be sure who and what the enemies are so that we will not go blundering on creating conflict where no conflict is necessary. At times, a soft answer turns away wrath (Prov.15:1). At times righteousness seems to hand over the initiative to evil (Lk. 22:52-53). But there is a time when truth and righteousness must stand and take the initiative (John 13: 27; Acts 16:35-39). All of this demands that we should take heed to ourselves and our own lives and see to it that we are right with God and thus ready for what comes.(Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 4:16).

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6:20-25

There are two aspects to this passage. It gives us a brief but basic statement of the faith of the people of God. The whole of their life and experience is explained and interpreted by the fact of God's great work of salvation on their behalf. It was a salvation that they themselves were powerless to effect because they were slaves. God did it for them, and therefore all their life and their very existence flowed from God's

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mercy, and in that mercy they had a glorious future. God brought them out of bondage *so that* He might bring them into life and blessing. This great saving work of God for His people involved His work of judgment on the worldly and evil power of Egypt. The second aspect of the passage is set in the context of a family among the people of God growing up within the faith of God's covenant. The young ask the older ones for an explanation of why the family lives in a certain way, why they believe certain things, and why they maintain their separation from and difference from those around them. The fathers are to have their answers ready and are to speak them plainly and clearly. They are God's people, therefore they must live as such. Their God is the One who has made Himself known not only in mighty works of redemption but in speaking His word. He has made plain the way of faith and obedience and it will be "righteousness" for them if they so respond. "Righteousness in this context describes a true and personal relationship with the covenant God (see also Gen. 15:6), which not only would be a spiritual reality, but would be seen in the lives of the people of God." (Craigie) It is not hard to imagine the father of the household saying, and saying with holy pride and deep sincerity, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:14-18).

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7:1-5

When we studied Deuteronomy on Sunday mornings this chapter was dealt with at a parade service of youth organisations. It was the chapter due to be studied that day and we saw no reason to break the sequence since the four sections of it teach us all how to live a real and happy life in this world, and the sooner young people learn the true facts of life the better. This first section taught us that the world we live in is neither neutral nor empty. The territory into which the people were moving was occupied by the various and identified powers of evil which were humanly stronger than Israel. Here was a situation that could not be met and handled by mere human power and if we go out into the world in our own strength, hoping that our own goodness or decency or effort will be sufficient, we will be confounded. But the powers of evil are not stronger than God and He had covenanted to drive them out. These powers could not be improved or changed or merely held in control. The powers of the world had to be overthrown.

Read 1 John 2:15-17; 5:19; John 16:33; Col. 2:15. The victory is not ours automatically. It is ours by faith (1 Cor.15:57; Rom. 8:37-39; 1 John 5:4). But part of the victory of faith is a clear determination to have nothing at all to do with these evil powers and people in terms of committing yourself to them. If you do they will only turn your hearts and then your lives away from God. As it was in the Garden of Eden, these evil powers may well offer you what seems to be magnificent fulfilment and they may seem shiningly attractive at first, but they will take you away from God, and that is the way of death not life. Read Jesus' words in Matt. 7:13-14 and Paul's words in 2 Cor.6:14-18. The life of faith is very practical.

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7:6-11

The second lesson that young and old must learn from this chapter concerns the church. The people of God are a chosen and therefore distinct people. They are different from the people of the world who are essentially unbelieving. They are not to think of themselves as being better than other people because in actual fact they are in themselves nothing at all (7). They were not chosen because of any merit, quality or capacity they had in themselves. The choosing of them was an act of God's sheer undeserved grace. *He* chose them. *He* redeemed them. *He* called them and *He* made them all that they were. They were God's personally chosen people and between them and all other peoples there is a great divide. The basic difference is faith, and saving faith manifests itself in the fact that the believing person comes to God through Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself made this plain. All who are of God and all whose religion is of God will in fact come in faith, trust and commitment to Jesus, owning Him as Saviour and Lord (John 6:45). This cannot be over-emphasised. There is only one way to God and only one name whereby sinners can be saved (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5). The point Moses is making to the people is simply this. If you belong to God by right of redemption; if you are named by His name; if you are marked out for His possession and His service; then you are not your own any more. You may not live as you please. You must live to please Him. All you are and all you have and all the possibilities of hope for the future are from God, and apart from God you will simply degenerate and become what you are by fallen human

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nature. But God has loved you; He claims you; He pledges Himself to you in unchanging and unfailing promises. He holds out a future of blessing to you and to your children after you, but He will have no part with sin and evil. Here is the call. Be what you are - God's people. Be true to what God has made you in Christ. This is life.

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7:12-16

The third lesson of this chapter concerns life with God in His good and perfect will. Israel is a separated people chosen by and called into covenant with God. The initiative and action are God's and He promises to bless His people. This brings obligations and responsibilities as v. 11 made plain. But here the emphasis is not so much on responsibility as on the sheer scale of the blessings God is determined to bestow on His people. There is nothing mean minded or miserly about God. He wants His people to have the best and to have it in fullest measure.

These verses speak of the things God has prepared for them that love Him (1 Cor. 2:9). The truth of such blessing is echoed in Eph. 1:7-8 which speaks of forgiveness on the scale of the riches of God's grace; and in Eph. 3:14-21 the same extravagant dimension of blessing is spoken of. In Rom. 8:31-32 and 1 Cor. 3:21-23 there is the same emphasis on the wealth of the believer, as there is in Eph. 1:3 and 2 Pet. 1:3-4 ff. The possibilities are limitless but they are not without cost. They come and are realised in the life of obedience, walking with God. Nothing can change God's love for His people, but our enjoyment of that love is a different thing, for it comes within the happy family discipline of God whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30). It is as if God is saying to His people to trust and to obey and so to prove the delights of His love. These verses speak of both provision and protection, and it is good when we are complaining about our lot to remember just how much we have been spared. There is promise here, in life and fellowship, of an antidote to all the sore loneliness, hurt and hunger of human experience. We may not be given fulfilment quite in the way we want and long for. God knows there are human blessings we could not cope with and are not in His plan for us. But God is pledged to do us good (Gen. 32:12 AV).

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7:17-26

The final section of this chapter speaks of discipleship and service. Neither is easy. It is a natural instinct to fear when faced with strong powers of opposition. But so often in Scripture we are commanded not to fear, and the reason is that there is no need to fear. God commands His people to remember what He did to the mighty powers of Pharaoh and how He commanded the powers of nature to give Israel a safe passage over the Red Sea. God is greater than all. Are we not told in the New Testament that Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33) and that the whole kingdom of principalities and powers has been overcome in the victory of the Cross (Col. 2:15)? We must learn to view all situations through the lens of the Cross, because only then are the powers of the world seen in true dimension and perspective. When we see things in this light we see that there is no need to surrender to them or even to fear them but, of course, there is the temptation to compromise with them. At times we get weary of the warfare and long for peace, and this is a particular temptation when the work has gone on for a long time. Moses urged the people to have a mind to see the work through to its full end, namely the possession, the subjection and the development of the land. He reminded the people of God's promise of His presence with them mighty to save (21); His deliberate pattern of gradual progress little by little rather than by a sweeping victory, and this for their good (22); and God's sovereign, irresistible determination to complete His purpose (23-24). Is it not strange that so often we fail to look for signs of God's intervention in human situations of difficulty, danger and apparent set-back in the work of the Gospel? We need to keep our eyes and hearts fixed on God.

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7:17-26

There is a deep practical lesson for spiritual life and service in this passage, particularly v. 22 and although we touched on it yesterday we do well to consider it again. The land was given to Israel. That

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was an accomplished fact stated by God. The victory was already theirs, but in practical terms they had to take possession of it. In New Testament terms we grasp the fact that perfect salvation is given to us once for all in Christ. We do not struggle towards victory: we start with victory. It is ours, but it takes a life-time to make it a practical reality in life and service. It calls for faith: faith to grasp the truth, and faith to live by the truth. It is the fight of faith, and it is in every sense spiritual warfare. But we must see from Moses' words to Israel that we are never alone in the battle. God is there, always active and always ahead of us. "One aspect of the Holy War was that terror sent by Yahweh would come upon the enemy. A numinous panic would spread among the foes of Israel, who would act blindly and accomplish their own destruction (v. 23; Josh. 10:10; Judg. 4:15; 1 Sam. 5: 9; 7:10 etc.). This is why the numbers engaged in the Holy War were irrelevant, for God could save by many or by few (Judg. 7:2 ff.; 1 Sam. 13:15ff; 14:6 etc.). Yahweh was a great God and one to be feared (v. 21)." (Thompson). The commentator went on to point out that disobedience would slow down the conquest (Judg. 2:20-23) and that Israel's enemies would at times act as a test whether or not Israel would really walk in the way of obedience to God. It is God who gives the victory and if His way is little by little we must trust Him.

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8:1-10

The disciples spoke truly in John 6:68 when they declared that Jesus had the words of eternal life. Moses likewise spoke truly when he emphasised that the objective of all God's words of law was to give His people life to the full. Of course, eternal life and all we mean by salvation is not gained by keeping the law. Salvation and life come by faith alone. But faith is evidenced and authenticated by obedience. Faith without works is not saving faith but merely beliefism (Jas. 2:14, 26). The obedience of faith leads us into life that is indeed abundant (John 10:10). Now, one great help in living the life of obedience is the use of the faculty of remembrance, and Moses urged the people to remember who and what they were as the people of God and where they were going in the ongoing will and work of God. They were to remember also the methods and providences of God by which they had reached the present stage of their journey and by which they would reach their goal. The Lord had indeed provided for them (Gen. 22:14) and had kept their going out and coming in (Ps. 121:8). The past mercies of God, including those times when He had humbled them by discipline, had been glorious, but they were nothing compared to the treasures of grace and blessing stored up for them in the future. This is something we must learn to grasp. God plans to give us a future and He is determined we shall have it in spite of all our sins, failures and complications (Prov. 23:17-18; Jer. 29:11; Acts 20:32; 1 Thess. 5:23-24). We must never lose sight of this sure hope which is indeed an anchor and inspiration. Because God is for us and because He has made it manifest that He sets value on us, we must hold to our hope in Christ. The best is yet to be. God says it, and He is more to be trusted than all our fluctuating feelings.

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8:1-10

All of God's dealings with His people are designed to keep them consciously dependent on Himself and on His gracious, faithful provision (3). It is to this end that the people are urged to remember past mercies and to look to future mercies. But we must not forget the Devil. It is His technique, since he is the accuser and the disturber of peace, to make us remember all the failures, tormenting us with guilt, and desolating us with a sense that the legacies and scars of the past will never be forgotten, let alone overcome. This is a lie! God is far greater in His grace than all our sins and brokenness. Think of how God made the worm Jacob into a prince of faith. Blessed indeed is the man who has the God of Jacob for his help (Ps. 146:5). Think of how Jesus took the uncertain, over-confident, complicated Peter and made him a rock-like man of God. Many of us remember the sermon on Peter preached so powerfully many years ago in Sandyford by James Philip - "Thou art thou shalt be". So often it is only in looking back that we are able to recognise the good hand of God guiding and holding us. His mercy will not fail us now, nor will His love weary of us. That is why we must read and believe v.7-10 and go forward, tremblingly perhaps, into God's future. Remember that God leads like a shepherd, He does not drive. He cares. We have not begun to know just how much He cares. If there are fires and waters to pass through He will be with us in them (Isa. 43:2). If there are dark valleys, He is there (Ps. 23:4). Underneath are the

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everlasting arms (Deut. 33:27). Some commentators say that Jer.31:3 could read that the everlasting love is gently leading us home. All the men and women of faith down through the ages make the same testimony:- "My God shall supply all your need" (Phil. 4:19). That is why we can be content. It is also why we can live in hope.

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8:11-20

The call to remember (1-10) is now followed by a warning about forgetfulness but this is not mere repetition. It is a fact of experience that we can begin the life of faith and obedience with great dedication and determination, and we can continue to make progress for a considerable time. Walking in obedience we are blessed by God and the whole of life and experience is enriched. This can happen to the individual and to the congregation. But then comes the danger. We become rich (12-13). We develop a taste for luxury and ease. We see ourselves no longer as novices battling for establishment but "successes" who have proved their worth and we become proud, and forget God. Think of the church in Laodicea that considered itself to be spiritually rich but was pathetically poor (Rev.3:14-22). In today's passage we are shown the danger of forgetting the realities of the spiritual warfare in which we learned to be men and women of faith and prayer (14-16). Note how in v.17 this process of declension leads to a spirit of self-satisfaction, with no awareness of having backslidden. It creeps up on one so gradually it is not noticed, just like the gradual appearance of grey hairs (Hosea 7:9). Note that the passage does not say anything about abandoning sound doctrine, or denying spiritual principles, or forsaking church attendance, or even stopping the use of evangelical and spiritual language. We can hold to all these and still forget God because self has taken God's place, and success is made a protection against criticism (17). Be very careful in case you forget God (11) because there are serious consequences (19-20). When we are not right with God it is all too easy to bow to other gods and to go with their people.

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9:1-6

In many different walks of life and at different stages of development it is good and necessary to remember to be humble. We need to have a true assessment of ourselves (Rom.12:3) because only then will we know how to behave and to act without regret. In these chapters Israel is being told again and again that all they are and have and are capable of and are being led into is totally from the grace of God from beginning to end. They have nothing to boast about at all (Rom. 3:27; 1 Cor. 4:6-7). There was no reason or ground in them that influenced God to choose them rather than others. It was all God's grace, because they, in themselves, were a stubborn, wilful people motivated by the spirit of disobedience (Eph. 2:2). Martin Luther puts it well in the hymn "From depths of woe":

"No man can glory in Thy sight,
All must alike confess Thy might
And live alone by mercy."

Our place by nature is that of the empty-handed sinner. But by grace we are chosen, called, and trusted to be servants of God and stewards of His affairs (1 Cor. 4:1) This is privilege and honour and stands gloriously over against all our natural unworthiness and incompetence. But we must hold the two together to guard against both pride and demoralisation. We are nothing and have nothing and yet we possess all things in Christ (1 Cor.3:21-23; 2 Cor. 6:10). But note in today's passage that the emphasis is more on judgment than on salvation. Yes, Israel has been chosen for salvation and that has been made so clear in the earlier chapters. Israel's God is the God who has redeemed them out of the land of bondage for a new land and life of blessing and destiny. But they live still in an alien world which God is dealing with.

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9:1-6

We do well for our study and for daily living to consider the strategy of God. There are two strands: the possessing of the land of promise and the expulsion of the nations. Note well in v.1 that the territory is

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already in the hands of the mighty and powerful forces of evil, well fortified and not likely to be well disposed to the idea of being dispossessed. It is emphasised that these powers were greater than Israel (2) and that only God was able to gain and grant the victory. What is spoken of here territorially can be applied spiritually to personal Christian experience and to the establishing of a work of God in any given locality. It will be warfare. The situation is not neutral and the spirit of the world is the spirit of antichrist (1 John 4:3-4), but God is greater. How we need to remember that the powers of evil are deeply entrenched; that our fight is against the well-laid stratagems of a determined enemy; and that we must through many tribulations enter God's kingdom (Eph. 6: 10ff; Acts 14:22). We need also to remember (and this is a practical lesson for all engaged in the work of the gospel) that while God is working salvation and victory for His people He is also bringing to judgment wicked men and nations. It is not an arbitrary judgment but one based on the fact of wickedness (5). It is not premature or precipitate as Gen.15: 16 makes plain. The amazing thing is not God's judgment but His long forbearance (1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 3:8-9). But God's judgment comes. Read Gen. 6:5-7. God declared Himself staggered by mans wickedness. Read Gen.18:20-21 where God declares He comes down to investigate and to act. See clearly from this passage in Deuteronomy that God is not hard pressed to conquer evil and bring it to judgment. He is the holy victor.

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9:7-24

Here we have the example from Israel's past history of her stubbornness of heart (6). It was persistent and consistent disobedience rather than just occasional outbursts (7; cf. Acts 7:35-41,51-53). Some people simply refuse to have God and some places doggedly refuse to change. But, as God was forbearing with Israel, so must we be with those who oppose the Gospel (2 Tim. 2:25). And as Jesus wept over Jerusalem so must we grieve over the blindness of religious unbelief. We tend to be too quick to write people off. But we may also be too slow and unwilling to recognise and to expose their deliberate turning away from God. Referring to Exodus chapters 24 and 32 Moses challenged the people. Even at Horeb (8) at a time of mighty spiritual significance, when their God-appointed leader was engaged in costly and sacrificial service, the people were possessed of a wrong spirit. They held the man of God and his ministry and his leadership in contempt, which they were prepared to express (Ex. 32:1). At a high and holy stage of the work their inclination and appetites were well and truly focused on worldly gratification. But God saw and knew. He always does! He is never taken in by spiritual insincerity and hypocrisy. In v.12 God declares their spiritual insensitivity and stupidity. How could a redeemed people react and regress so quickly? Why do some people move away from a biblical and spiritual congregation and lapse so swiftly and totally into a worldly and godless way of life? Were they never truly converted (Heb. 10:26-29, 39)? Was there no life, no root, or was there life choked by weeds (Matt. 13:18-23)? Certainly we are seeing in Israel's perversity a work of the Devil, but that does not excuse it.

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9:7-24

Take up the passage at v.13 and see the terrible risk of rejection that faced Israel. They had not been aware of it and they needed to be told. They had to see and to feel in a dramatic way the breach of fellowship and covenant that resulted from their proud sinning. We are all slow to face this possibility but the great missionary apostle was much more realistic in 1 Cor. 9:27. He is not speaking of losing his salvation, for he was a redeemed man as Israel was a redeemed people. But he was speaking of the possibility of fruitful service coming to a premature end. We need to take heed. When Moses came down from the mountain he saw the reality of the people's defection, confirmed it to them by the breaking of the tables of the law, and so brought home to them the judgment and the curse that lay upon them. But the situation was not left in the power of evil, for Moses immediately turned to intercession for the people and for Aaron, the deputy leader who had been too weak to stand against the people's demand for a golden calf (Ex. 32:21-26 ff.). We can only speculate on Aaron's attitude. Had he been jealous of Joshua going up the mountain with Moses (Ex. 24:12-14) while he and his fellow prayer warrior Hur had been left with the people? How we need to watch and pray! It would be an interesting exercise to trace the references to the intercessory prayers of Moses and to learn from the story that the first thing to do in a crisis is to hurry to God in

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prayer. We tend too often to make prayer a last resort, but Moses did the work of intercession before he took a dealing with the golden calf. Some times God Himself removes the evil distractions but sometimes His servants have to do it.

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9:25-29

Let no-one think that prayer is a spiritual exercise for spare moments when we have nothing else to do. Nor let us think it is without cost and discipline, for Moses seems to have laid aside all other considerations for forty days. There was persistence, continuance, earnestness and a real sense of the immensity of the issues involved. This does not mean Moses was gripped with a wrong kind of fear. Panic is no part of prayer. But what would happen if this crisis of evil won the day? When we find ourselves in a spiritual work that is threatened by stubborn unbelief, spiritual shallowness, and by people who are determined to change the direction of the work; and when we sense that they are winning the day, having sown the seeds of discord; we comfort ourselves with the thought that if need be we will "leave the church" and go to another place near at hand and find our spiritual niche there. But there was nowhere else for Moses and other faithful souls to go! They, and they alone were the congregation of God and they were in the midst of foes, and had a major spiritual work ahead of them waiting to be done. Little wonder Moses prayed. There must have been a remnant of faith among the people. We cannot believe that every single one had been spiritually seduced away from God even though they had been grievously influenced by the dominant spirits of worldly characters. But we are not told of any sharing the intercession with Moses, not even Joshua is mentioned. It must have been a lonely road for Moses to be the spiritual leader of such a people. Perhaps he felt that he was alone, and no man of God should ever be in that position. If he is, he is being denied the fellowship, support and encouragement that are his due.

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9:25-29

Take time to meditate on these verses, introduced by the reference in v.22-24 to the persistent stubbornness of Israel. The incidents referred to are recorded in Num.11:1-3; Exod.17:1-7; Num. 11:31-35; Deut.1:19-40. Why do we at times dig in our heels and refuse to go with God? Is it pride, or sentiment, or worldliness, or psychological inhibition (for which limitation the Lord has tender compassion and understanding) or is it, as Heb. 2:7-19 says, the result of an evil heart of unbelief? It is clear from Moses' prayer that he had a far deeper and wider concept of the work of God than the people who seemed so often to be totally preoccupied with their immediate circumstances and enjoyment. In his prayer Moses' faith viewed the course of history and recognised that the work of God is one work, past, present and future. This is, or should be, a great encouragement in both work and prayer. Others have laboured and we enter their labours as Jesus taught His disciples in John 4:37-38. It is almost as if Moses was challenging God and saying that He is not the kind of God to start a work and not finish it. Nor is He the kind of God to make great promises to the patriarchs and then to go back on them. Nor is He the kind of God to allow the stupid wickedness of puny men, who owe everything to His grace, to triumph over His purposes. Nor could God allow the failures of His people to lead to a situation in which godless Egypt would be able to slander the name, honour and power of Israel's God. Nothing must be allowed to shadow the saving ability of God. But Moses' final plea was to God's own love for the people He had redeemed. They were His people. Now, if we would learn to pray, we must learn what God is like.

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10:1-11

As we study details, keep in mind that we are reading an on-going story which is concerned with the preparation of the people of God for the next and great stage in their life and work. They were on the border of the new land, and they had been urged and compelled to think back to their origins in God's redemption, their experiences under God's grace, their repeated failures for which there was no excuse, and the fact that they were a people living under the judgment of the broken Law. Amongst other things, they had learned how vulnerable they were and how swiftly they could lapse into terrible backsliding. But they were God's people, and it was God who in His grace mended the broken covenant and re-wrote the

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Law. This re-writing was to Israel a token of hope and restoration. It is the story of amazing grace, illustrated wonderfully in the story of the potter and the clay in Jer. 18:1-6. Just how amazing this grace is can be seen in the promise through Joel that the devastated years would be so restored that it would seem as if they had never happened (Joel 2:23-27 cf. AV). With God there is always hope, no matter how great or how repeated the failure. The remaining verses are a summary of various historical details, the setting apart of the Levites and the death of Aaron. The story urges us on (11) and we must not linger. The future calls and it is God's future. That is why it can be His people's future also. But this important lesson we must grasp. When we are set to go forward with God; when God has laid His hand on individuals and congregations; when God has future work for His chosen people to do, then without doubt there will be the Devil to cope with. We forget that there is an angry Devil (Rev. 12:12) with well laid plans (Eph. 6:10-11) who seeks with frightening technique of bravado whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8) and who sets his sights specifically on those being prepared for service (Lk. 22:31). We are to watch, pray, stand and resist, and remember that God is greater.

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10:12-22

What a glorious passage this is, making us reluctant to expound it. It speaks in a way that inspires worship and calls for obedience of life. It emphasises, as the Catechism puts it, "What man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man." The passage calls us to draw near to God in reverence and godly fear and to trust the God who in Himself is so glorious and who has done such marvellous things for His people. It calls us to walk in obedience; to love Him out of a true heart; and to serve Him by bringing the whole of life into willing submission. What a God this is! Read v.14 and 17-18 and think of the greatness, majesty, righteousness, justice and power of the God of our salvation. Then read v.15 which speaks of the personal and particular tenderness of His heart of love; a love that stays faithful not only to us but to our children after us, and whose unfailing mercy is as great to us now as it was to all the mighty men of the past. Nothing but heart response is worthy to give to this God (16) whose special care is the fatherless, the widow, and the alien (asylum seeker?) who may feel deeply that he or she does not really belong (18). Because this God has been so good to you, and worked so many mighty blessings and deliverances for you, see to it that you deal with others in like manner. Cleave to this God, and be proud of His name (20). To stray from Him is a contradiction of life and hope. Let us worship God. We should hear this call every time we are in church. See that we attend to it.

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11:1-7

This passage again urges on Israel both love and obedience and, of course, it is love that makes obedience sweet and not burdensome. And it is obedience that testifies to love and shows it to be real as Jesus made so very plain in John 14:15, 21, and as 1 John 2:3-5; 5:2-3 confirms. If the people were to go forward with God then they had to learn the lessons of history, not just from their own experience but from the recorded stories of God's dealings with both individuals and nations. All God's people in every age need to remember the mighty and significant ways by which God has in the past brought men and movements of evil to their judgment. This helps us not to fear when evil looms large and seems to threaten our very existence. Israel had feared when they assessed the situation to be totally impossible when they were trapped between Pharaoh and the Red Sea. Their fear paralysed them and they had to be urged into action (Exod. 14:10-15). They began to learn that no weapon formed against them would prosper (Isa. 54:17) but it is an awesome lesson, for the judgments of God in history are solemn to behold. Another lesson here urged on Israel concerned the danger of refusing the authority and guidance of God's appointed leader because that was tantamount to rejecting God Himself (Num.16:1-14,25-35). It seems that Dathan and Abiram, under the guise of being very spiritual, were in fact distorting the truth and idolising the life of Egypt (the world) as being full of milk and honey. Perhaps it is a warning against being taken in by spurious spirituality, and there is plenty of that around in our own generation.

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11:8-17

The life of obedience is progressive, positive and fulfilling (8). It is also long-term and therefore stable with blessings that are rich and satisfying (9). It is a life that is very different from the hard slog of life in Egypt (10), for it is life lived under the smile and the active blessing and provision of God Himself (11-12). It is "the difference between eking out a man-made life, and enjoying the luxury of a God-cared-for life under His watchful, benevolent eye." (W, Still) The life of blessing in the land of promise is life on which there is being poured out unceasingly from heaven itself the life-giving blessing of the Spirit of God. Of course, it does not always rain in Palestine! There are seasons of rain which water the earth and replenish the deep hidden springs which provide long term for the sustenance of life. So in the life of the Spirit. We are not always conscious of His down-coming, nor should we be. Nor do we always thrill to the fresh green shoots of spring or to the rich satisfactions of harvest. Nor should we. There are seasons in God's working, and while floods on dry ground are good and necessary at times (Isa. 44:3) more important is the steady, rhythmic pattern of rain, dew, sun, cold, summer and winter. Extremes of experience are difficult to handle and after all Jesus did speak of a spring of water within the soul doing its continuing work in life-refreshing grace (John 4:14). It is only disobedience that causes us to dry up and wither spiritually. Personal battles and costly service cannot dry us up. If we walk in the light and keep in fellowship with God (1 John 4:5-7) and so keep our souls at the fountain of life, we will never run dry.

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11:18-25

The lessons of past history, a reminder of the cost of worldly life in Egypt (cf. Rom. 6:20-21), the promise of God's blessing and the repeated call to obedience come together to give the people a deep sense of responsibility, not only for themselves personally, but for the work they represent. The instruction of v.18-21 has already been given in 6:6-9. But how easy it is to conform to the required signs and actions and to do all the outward things pertaining to godliness without the heart being involved. We can have texts on the walls of our homes, testifying to visitors that we are Christians, but we may not be obeying God. We can bow heads in church and maintain reverent posture while our thoughts are far away, busily engaged in other things. We can go to all the right meetings, know all the right people, quote Scripture at the right times, and be invited to sit on prestigious committees, and still be out of God's will. The Pharisees sat in Moses' seat, and their lectures and sermons were "sound" but they only spoke truth, they did not do it (Matt. 23:1-3). But there is no limit to what God can do. The possibilities of the life of faith are immense. Things that seem impossible will come to pass. Mighty powers will crumble. There will be a sureness of step, word and action in all sorts of situations. And, far beyond our conscious awareness, there will be a restraint laid upon the very powers of evil so that they will draw back from harming us or our work. We will see again and again that our fears were not necessary. But these are the blessings of the way of obedience. The way of the transgressor is hard (Prov. 13:15 A.V.). The way of the godly shall prosper as Psalm 1 says so beautifully.

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11:26-32

We emphasised yesterday the promise of God and the possibilities for the people within that promise. But we must not fail to mark also the clear call to and need for moral and spiritual effort as indicated in v.24. The people had to get on with it. Spiritual victories are not won by admiring them, but by fighting for them. We are not saved by "works", but within salvation there is the effort to work out what God has given (Phil.2:12). God made it plain that advance and victory would not necessarily be easy. There was a choice to be made and that choice, together with its inevitable issue of blessing or cursing, was to be kept before the eyes of the people. The two mountains Gerizim and Ebal lay to the south and the north of the valley through which Israel would travel. The peaks are both around 3000 feet high and would be visible from a considerable distance. Every time the Israelites looked up they would see these mountains as great sentries, standing guard over their way and reminding them of the choice they must make to walk either in obedience and blessing, or in disobedience and cursing. Further reference is made to this symbolism in

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Deut. 27:11-14, and to the actual carrying out of the ceremony in Joshua 8:30-35. For us there are many such occasions and opportunities to renew our vows and to reaffirm our commitment. Think of the vows we hear being taken every time someone is set apart for the ministry or inducted to a charge; think of the vows made at a baptism; or at a missionary valedictory service; or the words from Psalm 116:12-14 often spoken at the Lord's Table. Remember whose we are and whom we are called to serve in obedience.

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12:1-14

When we studied this book of the Bible in our Sunday morning services we reached this chapter on a day set apart for a Youth Parade service. In order to emphasise to children, young people and adults alike that the work of God is an on-going work, not tailored to specific age groups, we simply continued the sequence of studies. Having set ourselves to cover a whole chapter each week we tried to show the young that this chapter, like all the Bible, was relevant to the present day and very practical. It deals with the ordered life of the people of God. Taking it in summary form and using simple language we showed that six times in one chapter God says we should go to church, and He speaks of a special place where He has put His name, a place He has chosen as His house, a place where He speaks His word (v.5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26). Four times God's Word says that we are to bring to God in His house the service of our lives, the offerings of our hands and the love of our hearts, because all of these belong to God by right (v.6, 11, 14, 26). Three times God says we are to rejoice and be glad, because when we come to Him in His house we begin to realise how much He loves us, how much He is purposing to bless our lives, and how much He wants to be with us. It is because God is indeed with us that we rejoice (v. 7, 12, 18). Right through the chapter, which we will now look at section by section, the emphasis is on the importance of being right with God and doing right by God. Nothing in this life is worth having if the getting and holding of it is not pleasing to God. What indeed does it profit if we gain the world and lose God?

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12:1-14

Chapters 12-26 contain the detailed regulations and requirements of God's Law for the life of His people so that they may be *seen* to be His people. "The great central demands of Deuteronomy still come to the reader with divine authority, although the immediate setting has changed and some of the details are no longer relevant" (Thompson). In the life and worship of the people of God the first thing warned against is compromise, which carries with it the danger of contamination. There is a system and practice of "religion" which is essentially of the world and has nothing to do with God. Its inspiration and effect are evil and, no matter how attractive it is, it must be avoided, opposed and put away from the land that is God's land. Note that the language indicates how well-established these evil institutions are. No "kid-glove" methods will suffice to deal with them. It is best to apply this to our dealing with our own lives and the casting out of all that is contrary to God. There must be no trifling with evil. If it is not of God, God cannot bless it, and if God cannot bless it we have no right to have it and should not want it. In New Testament terms it is a putting to death of the old nature and the putting on of the new (Col. 3:5-14; Rom. 8:12-13). It is radical but necessary. If we make this our priority we will be less likely to go barging into programmes of "cleansing the Temple" which have more of a carnal appeal. Note the emphasis on everything being done God's way (5-8). What may be permissible in a time of transition must not be allowed to prevent the establishing of the central sanctuary at the heart of which was God's Word. There is no place for "free-lancing" or "free-thinking". All must be in subjection to God and to His Word.

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12:15-19

Keep in mind that all these instructions are given to regulate the life of God's people when they are settled in the land and are no longer pilgrims on the move. During their journeys wherever they camped, their sanctuary was established for worship and therefore the "right" place for the killing of the animals was obvious. But in the land they would see many former pagan shrines and nothing of the worship of the Lord had to be associated with them (13-14). Holy "exercises" are not to be carried out in unholy places, for that would confuse the godless outsider. They would assume that the worship of the Lord was the

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same as the worship of idols. Places and activities have more influence on us than we think and can make us insensitive to God. How much we need to emphasise that Jesus is the only way to God, the only truth about God and the only life from God (John 14:6). Today's verses seem to make a distinction between the ordinary activities of life, spoken of in terms of the slaughter of animals for food, and the spiritual activities of life particularly in relation to coming to God, the worship of God, and obedience to God. But even in the day-to-day eating and drinking in which rules about ceremonial cleanliness and uncleanness were laid aside, there remained the strict law about the blood (16). It must not be eaten, but always poured out on the ground. The blood symbolised life, and that belongs to God alone. It comes from Him alone and must be given back to Him alone. But does not the shedding of blood also speak of death, life poured out in sacrifice for others? It is shed blood that makes atonement for sin (Heb. 9:6-14, 19-26). This is God's work, and no one can take it as his own. This seems to be the emphasis of v.17-18. What belongs to God must never be taken for man's own use. There is a right place, time and attitude for handling holy things.

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12:20-28

These verses seem almost a repetition of the previous ones but there are things to emphasise. Note in v.20 how emphatic is the statement that the Lord is going to enlarge His people's experience. The future is going to be greater than the past, because God has promised it will be so. But the Lord also recognises that the basic and indeed inordinate appetites of His people remain with them. During the wilderness journeys there were those within Israel who were always reminding others of the "good old days" of meats and spices in Egypt (Num. 11:4-6) in a way that stirred discontent with spiritual food. But here in Deuteronomy, whatever v.20b means, it cannot even suggest that God is prepared to make allowance and provision for hungers that in themselves are wrong. It may simply mean that one of the new elements in life will be a richer and fuller diet (apply it spiritually), and indeed some provision being made for those whose geographical situation means that they can seldom get to God's Holy House (21). God does make provision for His hungry people (and Daily Notes like these are eagerly devoured by many who have no ministry in their own locality). But the passage makes plain that at times people have to make the effort to go to God's place at certain seasons not only because it is necessary for blessing but because it is right to do so. We may not neglect our soul's health. But those within easy reach of "the means of grace" likewise must be careful to see to it that the mark of their lives is obedience (28). It is vital, not only for ourselves but for our children after us. Again and again it is made plain that obedience is the way of blessing. How we need to remember it.

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12:29-32

There is a tremendous realism in the way the Lord instructs His people. He recognises how easily they forget that the spirit of the world in which they live is constantly and totally militating against holy living and spiritual obedience. How much we need the exhortation, which we sing but do not take all that seriously, "Thou art in the midst of foes, Watch and pray" (Elliott). Note that the context of this warning is that of spiritual victory, success and advance. It is then that "spiritual speculation" becomes a danger and the temptation comes to "investigate" and to "sample" the religious convictions and practices of those nations who have been cast out of the land. Right from the Garden of Eden there has been a fascination in the forbidden and, without doubt, evil appeals to the "self" in us which wants to assert itself and express itself. Israel was always aware of the pull of the old life and conscious of the down-drag of natural temperament and propensity. But, in the victory of God given to Israel and in the victory of Christ given to us, there is no need to be led astray by fear or by attraction. But we must be careful. The atmosphere of the world is indeed polluted (1 John 2:15-17) and it seeks to mould our thought patterns and to kindle our appetites so that we will be ensnared to go the way of the world and so go away from God. It is not just a case of yielding to ugly things but of losing sight of God and His high and holy calling. Of course, false religion leads to false living, and a departure from God leads to a degradation of society, as this passage and our daily newspapers testify. You can understand why God is set against such a way of life. It invites and will receive His judgment (Eph. 5:6).

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13:1-5

Religion and morals can never be separated and false religion, however attractive at first, always leads to a debasing of man in his own person and in his dealings with others. Moses here teaches that the only safe way is to hold to the Word of God which is the supreme rule of faith and life. It teaches us what we are to believe about God and how we are to live to please Him. This guards us first of all from the dangers arising from influences outside the church (12:29-32) and also from even greater dangers arising from within the church. In today's verses "Moses warns against the dangers of religious seduction by false prophets, confused visionaries and base men," (New Bible Commentary) the last being least dangerous because obviously not of God. Now, it is one thing to discern and withstand evil teachers who attack the church from outside, but another to see quickly and oppose strongly the evil that rises inside the church and has a religious, spiritual and even miraculous aura and appearance. When we get into the realm of "signs and wonders" and "visions and dreams" we are in an area very susceptible to counterfeit and deception. There is a tendency to assume that the supernatural must of necessity be "spiritual". This is by no means so, because in today's verses the signs and wonders actually come to pass but the people are warned against following these men. The reason is plain. The influence and effect of their "spirituality" was in fact leading them away from God. The real test of spirituality is holding to God's Word, living in loving obedience to it, and continuing in faithfulness of life and fellowship in the work God has called us to. Too many visionaries take the way of setting up a group of their own in which, of course, they are the undisputed leaders.

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13:1-5

Dreams, signs and wonders abound from time to time in the experience of the church and the constant danger is that these subjective experiences become the touchstone of Christian truth and life and, in practice, they displace the Word of God. We must be cautious. Jesus spoke of how an evil generation sought for signs and wonders as a necessary confirmation of truth and faith, and He refused to give them (Matt. 12: 38ff). In Matt 24:24 Jesus spoke of false signs and wonders leading people away from God and made plain that this was a work of the Devil. He also made plain in Matt. 7:21-23 that there can be miracles and signs without salvation and without God. Moses makes plain here that signs and wonders which come to pass do not necessarily authenticate a prophet or dreamer, and in like manner signs and wonders do not authenticate conversion or sanctification. Indeed it is necessary to ask when we are granted extraordinary experiences whether they are in fact concessions to weakness rather than tokens of strength, spirituality and maturity. All signs and wonders in experience are to be tested by Scripture. It is not enough to say "it worked", or "I was helped by it". Anything that takes us away from trust in and obedience to the Word God has spoken is suspect. And our trust in God and His Word will be expressed in the terms of v.4. Note carefully the words used: follow, revere, keep, obey, serve and hold fast. Consistency, continuance, a desire for the Word and a life increasingly grounded in God are the real marks of grace. There is no need to dazzle. Just be dependable.

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13:6-11

There is a serious and radical practicality about the spiritual advice being given to the people of God as they go forward into new life in the land of Canaan. No doubt there was a spirit of enthusiasm among them, but enthusiasm is a fickle thing, easily worked on, quickly influenced, tending to fade and open to enticement or seduction. A superficial spiritual commitment will not stand the test in the realm of human relationships, affection, love and loyalty. These are dangerous areas because they involve powerful feelings. But we may not follow someone we love simply because we love them and they love us. We should follow them only if they follow Christ. Jesus said our foes may well come from our own families (Matt. 10:34-39), and it is a great temptation to turn a blind eye to moral wrong, to spiritual reluctance and to clear drawing back from commitment to God and to spiritual discipleship simply because we are very fond of the person concerned. We tend to say, 'I just couldn't hurt him'. But which is the greater hurt:

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to speak the costly word of rebuke and perhaps separation that brings the loved one back to God, or to keep silent and let him go on into deeper backsliding, spiritual barren-ness of life and service, and loss of eternal reward? We must not allow anyone to take us away from God nor must we have on our conscience the thought that we took another away from God. We must be right and do right and if the radical action spoken of in Old Testament terms (5, 8-10) seems too much, remember Jesus' words in Matt. 5:29-30 where the hand may speak of activities and the eye of imaginations. Whatever these verses teach they certainly emphasise the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the fundamental need to be right with God in all areas of life.

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13:12-18

It helps us to understand these passages if we can begin to grasp the dimension of the spiritual issues involved. We are a people for God's own possession, highly priced and precious (1 Pet. 1:18-19; 2:9-10). We are part of and are instruments in the elemental struggle between good and evil, light and dark, Christ and Anti-Christ, and in that warfare there can be no compromise and there is no truce. The conflict and the choice spoken of earlier in terms of the life of the church and the life of human relationships is now spoken of in social, national and international terms. In v.12-14 it is made clear that we are not allowed to contract out of responsibility and to concentrate on our own small corner. The work of God is one work and we are stewards of it and guardians of it and must take action when the work is threatened, even if those who threaten it are friends. There is a suggestion that the "wicked men" (base fellows RSV) are "urban revolutionaries" who have taken it upon themselves to lead a whole community in a direction that is away from God. They must not be thought of as "base" in a cultural sense. They are "wicked" men, and the word is almost literally "sons of Belial". They may have claimed some spiritual motivation but their attitudes and actions involved the overthrow of duly constituted society and in this they must be seen as contrary to God. After all we are dealing with Israel, the people of God. The lesson applies equally to those who disturb the life of the church and the life of society. What we must do is to be aware of movements emerging that seek to carry the church in a radically new direction, and to subject these movements to balanced scrutiny so that the spirit motivating them might be made clear.

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13:12-18

We continue with this passage to emphasise three important lessons. The first is that we must see clearly and grasp firmly the true nature of the difficulties and dangers that beset Christian life and work. It is spiritual warfare, as we mentioned in passing yesterday. The obvious passage to quote is Eph. 6:10ff. but we should also consider 2 Thess. 2:7-12; Acts 26:18; 1 John 2:16; 5:19; and Rev.12:1-12, 17. If we do not grasp the truth of spiritual warfare we will neither understand nor cope with the rigours of Christian life and service, nor will we have the courage to confront, resist and deal with evil and its human agencies. The second lesson concerns the need to be separate from all involvement with evil in its persons and agencies on both moral and spiritual levels. Read 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; and Eph. 5:8-11. We do not hear many sermons these days about separation from the world and its ways, and the church is poorer as a result. The third lesson, very clear in this passage, is the warning not to jump to conclusions lest our actions turn out to be prejudice or even blindness rather than righteousness. Read v.14 and recall how exact God Himself was in His investigation before the judgment of Sodom (Gen.18:20-21). We are to judge nothing before the time (1 Cor. 4:5). We are not to judge by mere appearances (1 Sam.16:7) nor are we to act on the basis of unsubstantiated rumour (1 Tim. 5:19; 2 Cor.13:1; Deut.17:6). But when it is clear that serious spiritual wrong has been done then the penalty is radical. Many moderns cringe at the thought of punishment, let alone the death penalty, and declare these passages "sub-Christian". But many of these people have no qualms about abortion, euthanasia and the massacre of feelings and the scarring of children for life by the tearing of marriages by easy divorce. God judges evil in the world and in the church. He is no respecter of persons. Read Acts 5:1-11, where God by His Spirit acted to preserve the church from corruption at a significant stage.

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14:1-2

At first sight this chapter deals with appearance (1-2), diet (3-21) and money (22-29) but there is more here than meets the eye. The reason for the whole chapter is given in v.1. It is because we are God's people and God's representatives in the world that we are called upon to live and behave in a certain way (2 Cor. 5:20; Matt. 5:16; Acts 4:13). Our lives must have a distinctive mark to them, something far more significant than the mere wearing of a badge. The first distinguishing mark mentioned is the believer's attitude to death (1-2), and we take time to study this very practical issue. The pagan reaction to death was the gruesome cutting of the body and the less repulsive but very obvious shaving of the head. No doubt they did other extravagant things, all designed to express their horror at the ugly thing we call death. Nowadays, our "civilised" habits make us try to make death "nice". Unbelievers tend to indulge in a conspiracy of silence about death, ignoring it if at all possible, and then when it forces itself into conscious experience trying to make it a "big" occasion. People who live without thought of God react to death by blaming God and charging Him with unfeeling injustice, especially if tragic circumstances are involved. They forget that it was by man that death came into the world (1 Cor.15:21; Rom.5:12). Unbelief reacts to death with a mixture of despair, hopelessness, fear and resentment. Some, with excessive grief withdraw from reality, as Queen Victoria did after the death of Prince Albert. Some escape from reality by insisting there is nothing after death. Some say that all go to heaven even after a life of total unbelief and rejection of God. Some face death without God and without hope of anything. Little wonder unbelief reacts with extremity. Death without the hope of the Gospel is dark indeed.

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14:1-2

The Christian attitude to death is totally different from that of an unbeliever, because of the sure hope of the Gospel. Death is swallowed up in victory (1 Cor.15:51-57). In our humanity we sorrow at the loss of loved ones but we do not sorrow as those do who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13ff). Nor do we fear when the time comes for us to die, whether after long years, or long illness, or suddenly. We do not fear because the Saviour is with us in the darkness of the valley (Ps. 23:4) and we are simply departing this life to be with Him which is far better (Phil. 1:23). In saying goodbye to this world we do not go into nothingness, uncertainty, or life far less than that we have known here. We will be clothed upon with a life far richer, fuller, and truer than ever has been our experience here on earth (2 Cor. 5:1-6). For the Christian, death does not in any sense have the last word because Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light in the Gospel (2 Tim. 1:10). There is a realism about faith. We do not have to run away or hide from the facts of life. We can face them, holding in balance the questions of health and sickness, faith-healing, accidents and disasters whether natural or man-made. Whatever our experience, death comes in the end, unless Christ comes again to gather His people to Himself. Read again the passage in 1 Thess. 4 referred to earlier and see how full of hope the Christian should be. Death has been conquered. We do not need to fear. In the sore process of dying the God who gave us grace to live will give us grace to die. One of our congregation, knowing the end was near, said, "I want to die like a Christian." God will also give grace in sorrow. He will not fail.

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14:3-21

What can there be to feed the soul in a passage like this that seems so detached from modern experience? Look first at the last two sections of v.21. The whole scheme of regulations about clean and unclean food is designed to mark out a people as being distinct and belonging to God. In the first half of v.21 we are told that certain forbidden things may be given to the stranger because there is nothing harmful in these things in themselves. However, right from the time of the flood (Gen. 6-7) there had been regulations about clean and unclean food. This could be studied in terms of health and hygiene (for example the birds that feed on carrion are unclean) or in terms of the significance of some of these animals in the pagan practices of Moses' time. But we should look rather for the typical or symbolic meaning. Take the matter of the animal that had died a natural death. If there was any real issue of contamination it would have been immoral and deceitful to give or sell it to a non-Jew. The question then must be in respect of the

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command in 12:16 and the ceremonial shedding of the blood. In all the regulations the issue at stake is the obedience of God's people and their willingness to walk in conformity to His will. Andrew Bonar comments, "The Israelite seeing the unclean thing is reminded to flee from every stain of sin; and seeing the things that are approved by God he is reminded to seek after what is holy." Think too of the opportunity to witness when people asked the Israelites why they did certain things and why they refrained from others. The pattern of our lives should likewise raise questions among our unbelieving neighbours and workmates. Perhaps our lives are so like theirs that questions are never asked.

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14:3-21

The symbolic significance of this passage and also the danger of these rules becoming prejudice and mere legalism is shown in Acts 10:12-16 and Col. 2:12-16. We must be careful not to set up a modern list of "do's and don'ts" whereby we test who is spiritual and who is not. But at the same time our lives should be marked both positively and negatively in what we do and what we refuse to do so that all will know we belong to God. Diet is important on more levels than the body, although we must remember we are to glorify God in our bodies as well as our souls (Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Cor.6:19-20). We must be careful what we feed to the mind, the eye and the emotions, because what is unclean will pollute the whole personality. Read the exhortation in Phil. 4:8. We need to, because we are so susceptible to other things and because they insinuate themselves so persistently. But what are we to say of the last part of v.21 which is repeated in Exod. 23:19 and 34:26? It may have reference to a prevailing practice in the evil fertility cults of that day, but we cannot be sure. It may have reference to the cruelty and insensitivity of first taking the mother's kid and then milking the mother to provide liquid for cooking. We can be sentimental about little animals but it is a bad sign when cruelty and indifference to animals becomes an accepted part of society. Is it not ominous when children tear out birds' nests, especially when there are eggs or young? When the "beast" in human nature prevails society goes on a downward trail. Have we not lived to see "mugging" for robbery gradually becoming mugging "for fun"? Are we not becoming a nation accustomed to cruelty? When you see this, you see a nation that has moved far away from God's way. Those who name God's name must be different, and be seen to be different.

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14:22-29

Money is a subject people tend to be very secretive about and the question of giving to Christian work is an area full of dangerous pitfalls as Matt. 6:1-4 makes plain. When Paul dealt with the subject of Christian liberality in searching detail in 2 Cor. 8:1- 9:15 he did not actually mention money, nor did he speak of the Old Testament tithe. Some say there are three separate tithes, and that offerings are different from tithes. In today's passage it is difficult to be clear as to the details of when and to what place the tithes were brought. The history of tithing goes back as far as Gen.14:20; 28:22, and these instructions now given to the people would not have come as a surprise, whereas to many congregations and some individual Christians the idea of giving to God a tenth of everything would produce shock and a. feeling of religious tyranny. But in Israel the "first-fruits" were given to the Lord and this was an affirmation by the people that they gladly recognised that they were the Lord's people and that all they had was from Him, the gift of His grace. The principle is quite clear: God first. We must not take the attitude that the tithe is the Lord's and the rest is ours (but see tomorrow's note). The tithe is a testimony that all belongs to the Lord and is His by right. This applies to time and energy, and to love and affection as well as to money. To love the Lord and to do His will in glad and holy service is the heart of the matter, and Jesus warned constantly against a spirit of formal, religious rectitude that could so easily become a substitute for true spiritual worship and service (Matt. 23:23; Lk. 11:42; 18:9-14; 20:45-21:4).

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14:22-29

The principle of tithing is stated simply in v.22. But then the details get complicated, at least for us in our limited understanding. The next verse says the tithe is to be eaten, but surely not all of it? The object of the exercise is made clear in v.23b. It was a means of grace to encourage faith and trust in God in all

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circumstances and to remind the people that their life and prosperity did not come from their own capacities and activities but from God. The next verses (24-27) emphasise that there is no cruel imposition, for it is as the Lord prospers that they are to give. The picture is of a happy family feast in which the Levites, who are the Lord's ministers in holy things, are included. Those who minister in holy things are not to be neglected or taken for granted, and that is a word in season to many congregations who fail in this, not least in the matter of encouragement. The feast described in v.26 is a lavish one and while we would not use such a verse to justify gluttony or drunkenness we must recognise that there is nothing mean or falsely ascetic about the God who gives all things richly to be enjoyed (1 Tim. 6:17). In the last two verses of the passage provision is made through the third year tithe to care for the poor and needy, whether or not they belonged to Israel. An application of this in both material and spiritual terms is found in Neh. 8:10; Acts 6:1ff; and Eph.4:28. Read also 2 Cor. 9:6-15 and consider to what extent we ever really act in a generous way in order to show our response to the magnificent generosity of God to us. It is so easy to adopt an attitude to things and people, and even to the Lord's work, in which we give and do the minimum. What a shabby response that is to "love so amazing so divine.

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15:1-11

We must try not to get lost in the details of these chapters and we must also guard against making study notes into a comprehensive thesis on every theme mentioned. Keep in mind that we are gradually building up a picture of what the life of the people of God should be. They are to be marked out by behaviour and attitude, which is much more than just keeping a set of rules. Those who name the name of God are taught how to think of themselves and others. In this chapter the emphasis seems to be on regarding others as people to be valued, respected, loved and dealt with in a way that accords them the dignity of humanity. We sin against God when we treat people wrongly and begin to use them for our own self-interest. We must abhor spiritual pride, and if God has blessed us humanly and spiritually, then it is in order that we might be a blessing to others. The theme of generosity we mentioned yesterday runs right through this passage, and the people are warned in v.9 about having base or mean thoughts. As a man thinks, so will he act (Matt.15:18-20). It does not come easily to human nature to think first of others but that is the example of Christ (Phil.2:3-4) and it means there is a death to die to self again and again so that we might live, act and speak like Jesus whose kindly, gracious, generous Spirit dwells in our hearts. The law is stated simply in v.1. On the seventh or sabbatical year debts are to be cancelled. The meaning of this is then elaborated in v.2ff. Some say the reference is to the cancelling of interest, or the extending of the time of repayment, but others seem nearer the mark when they refer this to the full cancelling of the debt.

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15:1-11

Note from v.4-5 that the effective operation of this gracious law is really dependent on the spiritual health of the people of God. When we are living in a right relationship with God, walking in careful obedience to His will, it is amazing how smooth administration can be and with what freedom from tension and complication the work can develop. The strange and sad hardness of heart that makes us cold and calculating, and causes us to stand back from the needy rather than go forward to help and bless them, begins to afflict us when we forget just how immense a debt we ourselves have been forgiven by God. Think of Jesus' story in Matt. 18: 23-35 and His words in Matt. 6:14-15. Contrast this with the picture in v.9 where the man who has the power to help calculates that as the year of release is very near there is little hope of repayment and he refuses to help his brother. Why is it that we are so reluctant to suffer personal loss (1 Cor. 6:7)? The One we follow did not claim His rights (Phil. 2:6). We say that people will take advantage. This is true and we are not to encourage others, especially Christians, in their wrong. Paul is very strong on this point (2. Thess. 3:10). John (1 John 4:11, 19-21) is equally strong but from a different viewpoint. Here in Deuteronomy we are shown the way of personal blessing (10b), the way that pleases God. It is the way of Christ-like service. The poor and needy, often more hungry for care and for a few minutes of genuine friendship and interest than simply money and material help, are always there. But need it be so, and should it be so (4)? All the more reason for us to have wide open hearts. At the end of a Sunday do some go home hurt and hungry while others have been over-fed with attention and care?

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15:12-23

It seems that at times a Hebrew was sold into slavery to another Hebrew because of default in payment of a debt. The slave had to serve his time for six years if necessary but then he had to be set free. And at the time of his liberation he had to be provided for on a generous scale so that he would not begin his new free life in a state of poverty. This regulation would undoubtedly remind the Israelites of their own deliverance from slavery in Egypt and of the rich provision made for them. Now, if God has loved us like that, we are under obligation to love others in the same manner (1 John 4:11). We can apply all this to the Gospel situation. Our salvation is a deliverance from the jurisdiction of sin and evil (Col.1:13) and in this God commanded His love to us while we were still undeserving sinners (Rom.5:8). In that deliverance and freedom God has blessed and provided for us on the lavish scale of His grace (Eph.1:3-8; 2 Pet. 1:3-4.). This being so, we are under debt and obligation to pour out our love in Christ to others (Rom. 1:14-15). How much we need to be reminded of this over and over again if only to counteract our natural selfishness. In v.16-18 we have the instance of a slave who has found a loving Master who has given him, in bondage, a life that is richer, fuller and more free than he ever knew before. In service he has found bonds of love and loyalty that are of the very essence of his life and he wants nothing to change it (cf.Exod.21:1-6). It is not hard to apply this in New Testament gospel terms. Think of Jesus giving His disciples the option to go away and receiving from them a glorious reply (John 6:66-68). Think of how the slave would be proud to bear in his body the mark of his master's ownership (Gal. 6:17). There is a service that is perfect freedom, and we thank God for it.

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15:12-23

We take one last lesson from this passage. If we look through this chapter we see in v.4, 6, 10, 14 and 18 reference to the fact of the Lord's blessing upon His people. It is this blessing in all its riches that is to be stewarded and administered for the good of others. At times it will seem that a great deal of self-sacrifice is being called for but in v.18 a very wise and necessary word of counsel is given. When the way is costly, when it seems very uphill and demanding, and when at the time life seems very much a business of giving and giving yet again, receiving very little by way of thanks or appreciation or recognition, there is something we *must* do. We must look back over a considerable spell of time to count our blessings and to bring into focus all the good things God has given to us so freely. When we do this, we are surprised to be reminded of what the Lord has done for us and this will help to keep us from being infected with the dread disease of complaining which blights the whole of contemporary society. Think how well off we have been. Think of how little real suffering there has been for Christ's sake. Think of how seldom we have really been worn out or worn down by sacrificial service. Think of how seldom we have really been deprived of comfort or pleasure. In that light, should we be complaining at all? Did not the early church count it a joy to suffer and to lose possessions for Jesus' sake (Acts 5:41; Phil. 3:7ff)? We must learn gratitude. We must not forget those who have served us faithfully. We must not take God's good gifts for granted nor must we become accustomed to them. "We never miss the water till the well runs dry." Often we wish we had shown our gratitude at the right time. What do we say of v.19-23? Give only the best to God. Be the best for God, and in God's blessing you will be a blessing to others.

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16:1-8

It is a sad fact of experience that complaint and criticism, against God as well as man, are more characteristic of life than gratitude and devotion. This was certainly true of Israel's story in the Old Testament and, to correct this unhealthy, negative and destructive spirit, God prescribed certain feasts and sacrifices of remembrance. In this way His people would be constrained to count their blessings and to see in a fresh light the great things God had done for them. We have in this passage the first of the three feasts that were compulsory for all the people of Israel, the Passover. This is a summary of the detailed instructions in Exod. 12:1-28, and would remind the people of their origins in the great act of deliverance by God on their behalf. They had been delivered from the bondage of sin, called out and called together

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to be the clearly identified people of God, to live as a pilgrim people on the way to God's appointed destiny. This is a necessary reminder. We must never forget what we were before God in His grace saved us (Eph. 2:1-6,12-13). Nor must we forget the total transformation of our position and condition, from being slaves in Egypt to free men and women in Christ, as Col. 1:12-14 and Acts 26:16-18 declare in vivid terms. When we think of our salvation in this way we realise it is all God's doing and therefore secure. But there is more to salvation than just deliverance and forgiveness. The feast is to be eaten (7) because in the sacrifice made for us there is sustenance and satisfaction. There is the enjoyment of God. But this will never be ours if we lapse into a complaining spirit because we have forgotten what God has done for us and given to us. It is good and necessary to count our blessings and to give thanks for them.

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16:1-8

The New Testament writers emphasise again and again the great transformation worked in salvation when Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 5:7-8; 1 Pet. 1:3-5; 2:9-10). But they also emphasise that our new position calls for a new commitment and a new life as the people of God (Eph. 5: 8-11,15-16). This is emphasised in Deuteronomy in the reference to the putting away of the leaven or yeast (4) which stands for sin. Sin has no place in the life of the believer, whether old sins or new sins, and one of the things that blighted the life of the people of God in their journeys was their harking back to the carnal indulgences of their worldly days in Egypt (Num. 11:4-6). It is so easy to give way to a spirit of bitterness and complaint when life becomes hard and when personal satisfaction is curbed. But this is an evil spirit that has to be guarded against for it can spoil the whole of our fellowship with God and contradict our testimony. Paul makes this plain in 1 Cor.5:7-8. Here in Deuteronomy the people are helped to guard their souls by being reminded of the bread of affliction (3). There was a time when the urgency of salvation was such that there was no quibbling with God. There was an awareness of the cost of life under the dominion of sin and of the opposition of the powers of the world. Such awareness makes people realistic about the things of salvation and life. It is interesting to note that while in Exodus the feast was observed by families in their own homes, now it was to be observed collectively, with all the people gathered in the place appointed by God (2b, 5-6), a central sanctuary. This may be to signify the essential unity of the people of God and for us it may emphasise the importance of the congregation rather than the family, or the small group, or the individual believer. This is of importance in a day when there is such a tendency to abandon the "main" meeting in favour of the small group, which can so easily become inward-looking.

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16:9-12

The Passover Feast was in Spring, March or April, when the barley crop would be ripe and harvested. The Feast of Weeks was on the fiftieth day after the beginning of the barley harvest, when the wheat would be ready to reap. It began fifty days after the first day of the Passover, and so we have the Feast of Pentecost fifty days after the Cross. This was the harvest thanksgiving festival or the festival of firstfruits (Exod. 23:16; Num.28:26). Now, since all the feasts pointed to Christ in His saving work, we can see in the Passover the death of the Saviour, and in this feast His resurrection, since He is the first fruit (1 Cor.15:20,23). In the death and resurrection of Jesus we are brought to newness of life and we are provided for in rich measure, not merely outwardly and materially, but inwardly and spiritually by the Holy Spirit who is given to us. All this is given to us by God and we are to remember the transformation of our experience (12) and so be thankful. But thanksgiving is not merely verbal, spoken or sung, it must be practical and. material (10). Not only so, the thank offering must be given in a spirit of glad rejoicing, which rejoicing must be shared with others, including the visitor, the lodger, the lonely and the weak (11). Those who know Christ and are blessed by Him should be the most spontaneous, open-hearted, generous people in all the world. It is not only in money that we must give as the Lord prospers us, but in friendship and service, We must learn to be like the great Shepherd and so watch over His sheep that we will see their needs. Of course, it is not always those who have most to give who do in fact give. Jesus told a story about a poor widow whose giving was in proportion far greater than the giving of the rich (Lk. 21:1-4).

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16:13-17

The feast of booths or tabernacles was the third compulsory feast and it took place towards the end of the year (October), at the time of the grape harvest, the final harvest. If the first two feasts spoke of the beginning and the continuing of the life of the people of God, this speaks of its final consummation. For seven days the Israelites left their homes and dwelt in booths made of branches to remind themselves of the fact that they were strangers and pilgrims in this world (Heb.11:13). This is something we forget. As the old hymn says, "This world is not our home," we are only passing through. But if this really registered we would sit more lightly to the things of the world without being careless or indifferent or escapist. It is good to think just how much we are all anchored to and dependent on material things, and to what extent home, family, career and possessions (all of them very temporary) are the main considerations of life. Of course, to be a pilgrim people has a glorious side to it. It means we are a people with a destiny, direction and dynamic. We are not in any sense victims of circumstances. We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Rom. 8:37). Pilgrimage has an end and, for the believer, a glorious end, which is all that is meant by fulfilment. Of this there is no doubt (1 Pet.1:3-5; Phil. 1:6; 1 Thess. 5:23-24) and this is why the note of joy is dominant. The blessings of the people of God have a past, present and future aspect, and the best is yet to be. But until the day of fulfilment the people were reminded by these feasts that the whole of life has to be lived before the Lord (16). Some suggest that the verse should read "shall see the face of the Lord". It is difficult to say exactly what that would mean, but Jesus did say that the pure or single in heart would see God (Matt. 5:8). And did not God promise His people that His presence would go with them? We believe it to be so, and how sweet the moments are when we know it.

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16:18-20

These verses give the first of three qualities that should mark the people of God. They are to be righteous people and their integrity has to be seen and has to be operative in society. Justice and righteousness must mark out all our actions and attitudes. We must not be swayed by secondary considerations, making concessions to certain people because we like them, or because they have power and might influence our personal prospects and advancement. We must be people whose words and actions can be trusted. There must be no hedging. Let our yes be yes and our no no (Matt. 5.37) and let us abstain from all appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22 AV). Our manner of life must be in harmony with the gospel we profess (Phil. 1:27) and no man or woman of God must bring rebuke on themselves for wrongdoing (1 Pet. 4:15) because that brings dishonour upon God. Think of how the prophet charged His people on one occasion to the effect that the name of God was blasphemed among the nations because of the wrong lives of His people (Isa.52:5; Rom. 2:24). The emphasis on justice alone in v.20 could seem hard and even suggest that there is no mercy for the truly penitent. But the Word of God, even in Deuteronomy, is full of mercy and pardoning love.

"The law is hard only against those who have been hard on others. This is almost altogether forgotten in the abolition of corporal and capital punishment: the victim and the suffering and loss of the victims loved ones. Injustice and inhumanity forfeit the right to be regarded as an equal brother in full civil status. Mercy and forgiveness are only valid where repentance of the wrong committed is seen to bear some relation to the gravity of the offence and seeking to make all possible and reasonable amends. Any other 'mercy' and 'forgiveness' is cheap and meretricious." (W. Still)

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16:21-22

The second mark of the people of God is that they should be a separated people, separated from what is false and set apart for God and His truth. If the previous verses had respect for the authority and finality of God's law, these verses emphasise the uniqueness of and respect for the person of God. The Asherah (21) was a tree or a pole or a column of stone, plain at first but later carved and adorned, erected beside an altar. It was a representation of one of the Canaanite gods and therefore much more than just a "decoration" or an "aid to worship". Such representations were forbidden in the Ten Commandments (5:8-9). They are evil and dangerous because they represent man's ideas of God, that is, a god made in man's image, a distortion of the truth. The simplest of buildings, and the most uncomplicated form of worship

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around God's Word is the truest and safest form of religion. We dealt with this more fully in the Notes on 5:7-10. The practical emphasis here concerns the setting up of such a "representation" of deity alongside the altar of God. There must be no complicity with any thing, activity, association or form of religion which clouds in any way the uniqueness of God's appointed way of salvation. There is only one name and one way and one Mediator (1 Tim.2:5; Acts 4:12; John 14:6). This is something that needs to be kept clearly in view in these days when, because of the multi-national nature of society, well meaning clerics are talking increasingly about "sharing of faiths". The truth about God and the purity of worship are of fundamental importance, and anything which clouds the issue, God hates.

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17:1-7

There are really two emphases in this short passage although we stress the third mark of the people of God, namely that they should be a people crusading for righteousness. But the first verse stands alone for it points forward to the one true sacrifice that is without blemish, even Christ (Heb. 9:14). But Christ is example as well as Saviour (1 Pet. 2:21) and we must see to it that in our persons, our offerings and our activities there must be nothing which is shoddy, soiled or second-rate. He, who has given us all we have, deserves the best in quality and quantity. We must not offer to the Lord the "remainder" of our time, energy and eagerness when we have spent ourselves on other things. Why should it be that we are often reading our Bibles and saying our prayers when we are tired out and jaded? Why should our attitude be to do just enough for the Lord's service to "keep us in credit" so that we will be recognised as working Christians? Have we not heard of going the second mile? Did not Jesus call us to seek *first* the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33) and did He not promise that all else *necessary* would be added to us? Of course the "God first" and the "best for God" principle of life will apply not only to our direct worship and fellowship with God and to His service but also to His people and we will become servants of each other. Think of the example of Jesus washing the disciples' feet when they were all too spiritually proud to do the dirty work (John 13:12-15). Think of the words of Paul calling us to have the mind of Christ and to regard others as mightily valuable and worthy of care (Phil. 2: 1-8). Think of the searching words in Malachi 1:6-9; 3:6-12. It is not only our service that is involved but our witness and our personal blessing. Let this be engraved on our hearts: Only the best is right for God.

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17:1-7

When the people of God are walking in fellowship with God they will take an active stand against all unrighteousness. Of course this begins with example. "Who can fight for truth and God, enthralled by lies and sin?" (Hughes). There must be inner heart integrity and not just outward correctness, as in the case of the Pharisees (Matt. 23:27-28). Note how carefully this passage is worded in order to guard against mere rumour or false accusation, cf. 19:15ff; Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1-4. Note also that when the evil is proved it is brought to judgment and the essence of the sentence is retribution, that is, it is deserved. No doubt the severity of the sentence would be a deterrent to some, but not to others. There is no mention here of correcting the wrongdoer, although that is spoken of elsewhere in Scripture (1 Cor. 5:3-5; 2 Cor. 2:5-8). If correcting the wrongdoer is primary then ruthless governments may use treatment and brainwashing to compel conformity. If deterring others from wrongdoing is primary then it might be in order to punish an innocent man in the hope of benefiting society. The only real basis for punishment is the fact that it is *deserved*, and when society forgets this it is on the way to anarchy, and the law of the jungle. Never forget that just judgment on sin was carried out on the Cross. But part of the emphasis here is that it is not enough for people of faith simply to deplore the wrongs of society. There are all sorts of lawful channels for protest and opposition. Write to your M.P., to the B.B.C., to the Local Authority. Speak up in Trade Union meetings and risk ostracism. Let truth and principle be defended in Presbyteries and Assemblies; and that will often mean sitting through long dreary meetings. But it is duty, and it calls for both preparation and awareness of what is going on. And, in the realm of morals, where the feeble excuse is often made, "Everybody does it," then start a new movement of moral purity, and let the beauty of holiness be seen as a light in a dark place (Isa. 32:1-3).

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17:8-13

We have here a further set of instructions regarding the same earnest attitude to and dealing with evil among the people. In many cases the issue of right and wrong would be perfectly and immediately clear, but situations do arise where the only wise and right thing to do is to consult others who, by age and spiritual experience, are better fitted to counsel and guide. Often in our own peer group we are so similar in attitude and so closely involved in the situation that we are not able to have an objective view of the facts or the people we have to deal with. It is not a denial of spiritual validity to go to others for guidance, rather it is a sign of both wisdom and humility. Of course, all matters must be laid before the Lord and His mind and will sought. The reference in v.9 to the priests and the judge may indicate that we are to discern that some problems are to be resolved on a spiritual level and some on a moral level, and this is important in all matters of counselling. But adviser and advised must together learn the lesson here: Take it to the Lord in prayer! And, while individual and personal guidance is undoubtedly given, there is no doubt at all that the Lord makes His will known to the fellowship of people who are together seeking to walk with Him and serve Him. What a thrill it is at times, but not always, to sense the unanimous mind of the fellowship not only in matters of a call to the ministry or the mission field, but also in respect of romances, marriages, friendships, jobs and houses. But we are to seek to know God's will, and not just to go blundering on, hoping things will work out.

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17:14-20

When you consider the practical nature of the instructions and prohibitions of this book you realise the message was given by someone with a thorough understanding of the human mind and heart, both of which have an inborn tendency to, and capacity for, departing from God (Jer. 17:9). Human nature, left to itself, is a mass of complications, contradictions and perversity which heads instinctively towards disaster. Failure to recognise this is the basic defect of humanism which expects so much from human nature in and by itself. Into this human predicament comes the activity of God in salvation to redeem a people for Himself and to call that people to claim and to fulfil their destiny. But in the out-working of this we see constantly the clash between the purpose of God and the perversity of the human heart. Here Moses anticipates the time when Israel, in the land of promise, would insist on having a king, like all the other nations (14). Their motivation would be wrong because the action would serve to blot out the distinction between the people named as God's people and other peoples. This blurring of distinctions is a constant danger to individuals and churches because it anchors people in this world and quenches evangelical witness. After all, if those with faith in God are the same as those without faith, what need is there for an urgent message of salvation? It may be embarrassing and may yet become costly and dangerous to stand out in the world as Christ's people but anything less is sub-Christian. Think of the strong warning in Rom.12:1-2 that we should not be conformed to the world, nor moulded into its way of thinking. This is why we need to be constantly under the influence as well as the instruction of God's Word in its corrective truth and grace.

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17:14-20

In a generation of unbelief think of the witness of individuals and families setting out for church with their Bibles in their hands. We are letting it be seen that we are seeking God's presence and desiring God's presence, because we want to live to please God and have our hope in Him. Think of how the day is promised when godless people will plead to come with God's people because it is manifest that God's presence is with them (Zech. 8:20-23). This is why, by our prayers and our living, loving worship, we must seek to make our churches places where people can sense and know the saving presence of God. But what of the foolish request for a king (14)? They had a king, reigning in righteousness over them. God was their King. They needed no other. But they clamoured for a king and God granted their request in the time of Samuel (1 Sam. 8:4-9) even though the demand was stirring much earlier (Judges 8:22-23). But though God permitted them to have their own way He did not bless it, for they had deliberately chosen God's second best. But even within that backslidden situation God prescribes rules and guidelines for the

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choice of a king. He does not resign His control simply because His people are perverse. When you read that the king must be one of themselves appointed by God, you cannot but think of Christ the real King of Righteousness (Isa. 9:6-7). who ever delights to do God's will (Ps.40:7-8). In this passage there is a. real warning that the king must not be motivated by worldly power, ambition, indulgence and carnal satisfaction. He must be a man given over to the Law of the Lord. This is the only safe way for a man to lead others. Only as he is in willing submission to God can he be a blessing to the people in his charge.

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18:1-8

If the previous passage foreshadows Christ the King, these verses point to the true Priest, Christ Himself. To the priests belonged the right to stand in the presence of the Lord on behalf of the people (5,7). They were chosen and appointed by God, from among the tribes of Israel, chosen and anointed, separated and significant, yet from among themselves. The representative of the people had to know what it meant to be a stranger and pilgrim on the earth. He had to know what it meant to be tempted and tried. He had to share the common life of the people. All of this points forward to our Great High Priest so wonderfully spoken of in Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15. The appointed priests had right of access into the presence of God at any time (6-7), and again we think of the One who appears in God's presence on our behalf (Heb. 9:24). We do not here enter into debate about distinctions between priests and Levites, nor into the question as to whether or not Levites were entitled to own property (8) , The lesson seems to be that, since they had been ordained for holy service that called for the whole of their life and time, then they must be supported by the offerings of the people who came to worship. Paul emphasises the same principle in 1 Cor. 9:8-14, even though he himself did not in fact claim his right. When the spiritual life of the people of God is healthy there will be neither lack nor unwillingness regarding the support of the servants of the church. It will be worthy but not extravagant. It will bear comparison with people's provision for themselves. It will produce a spirit of reverence in the "ministers" of the sanctuary, not only because they are provided for by "holy" offerings, often sacrificially given, but because they are responsible, under God, for the spiritual health of His people.

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18:9-22

It is always good to think of Christ in His three-fold office as Prophet, Priest and King, and when reading the Old Testament we must always be looking for intimations of Christ. The words of the Shorter Catechism are glorious in summarising these offices. "As King, Christ subdues us to Himself, rules and defends us, and restrains and conquers all His and our enemies." As Priest, "in His once offering up of Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us", He meets our every need in relation to God and the life of faith. As Prophet, "He reveals to us, by His Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation." Christ is everything we need (1 Cor.1:30) and everything is in Christ (Col. 1:19; 2:9-10). And, since God has spoken fully and finally in His Son (Heb. 1:1-3), we must learn of Him in and through His Word and we must refuse to speculate about or intrude into that realm generally called the "occult". The warning in v.9-14 is strong, specific and comprehensive and sorely needed in our own day when even in Christian circles there is a preoccupation and obsession with the "extra-ordinary". In reaction to the gross materialism of the spirit of the age many are reaching out "beyond" looking for "soul" and "spirit" to make sense of life. But all that is spiritual in that sense is not necessarily of the good Spirit of God. We are dealing not merely with superstition or magic but with evil spirits and deceiving spirits which, since the Garden of Eden, have sought to seduce people away from trust in the Word of God. Read Jesus' words in Luke 16:37 and also Isaiah 8:16-22.

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18:9-22

It is when the Word of God is scarce that people, especially young people, go seeking for help in ways that distort and destroy (Amos 8:11-14). All the activities spoken of in v.9-14 are linked with a way of life that is not acceptable to God, and some of them are techniques seeking to control events and people, especially with regard to the future. We need to be on guard because the techniques of conditioning in our

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day are not necessarily crude, although they can be ruthless. Remember that we live in days of abortion, genetic engineering and euthanasia, all of which things are stoutly defended on intellectual, aesthetic and philosophical grounds. But our passage speaks of things that are an abomination to God and which call down His judgment on those that do them. There is no need for God's people to grope in uncertainty because God promised a prophet who would speak God's Word in words God would give. God does not leave Himself without a witness (Acts 14:17) and down through the ages of Israel's history God raised up His prophets to speak His Word until in the fulness of time *the* Prophet came, who had been foretold and looked for (John 1:21,45; 6:14; 7:40; Acts 3:22-24; 7:37-38). When Moses spoke of this coming prophet as "like me" (15, 17) he was referring to the *function* of the prophet which was to speak God's given Word. But the story of Moses points forward in many ways to Christ. He was one of themselves; spared in infancy; he renounced the royal court to identify with his people; he was faithful and meek in the face of provocation; he stood in the presence of God on behalf of the people as mediator and intercessor; and he was the leader of the people, bringing them to full salvation. In so very many ways Moses pointed to Christ, in whom all the promises of God were fulfilled.

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18:9-22

Over against God's promise that He would provide a prophet for His people to speak His word, there was constantly in the life of Israel the hazard of false prophets and this danger is recognised in our passage (20-22). Moses had spoken of the solemn judgment of those who heard God's word and refused it, and in due time Jesus spoke in the same terms in John 12:44-50. Now he speaks with equal solemnity about prophets who speak falsely, speaking from their own inspiration or by the inspiration of evil spirits. This subject was dealt with previously in 13:1-5f f. The New Testament makes plain that false voices among the people of God are by no means a thing of the past (Gal. 1:7-9; Jude 4; 2 Tim. 4:3-4). The concept of lying spirits is made plain both in 1 Kings 22:5-8, 18-23 and 1 John 4:1. The tests of truth and falsehood seem to be twofold. If the prophet speaks from God what he says will be in total conformity with the Word that God has spoken, and if it is not so then there is no truth in it (Isa. 8:20 cf. AV). Keep in mind, of course, the technique of the Devil and his associates who are expert at misquoting Scripture or quoting it selectively and in part, as in the story of Jesus' temptation (Matt. 4:1-10). The second test of the prophet's word is whether or not it comes to pass. This often means that we must delay assessment and suspend judgment because things do not always work out immediately. Eating the forbidden fruit in Eden did not at first seem to have the disastrous result prophesied. Consider also Jer. 18:5-11. The situations in which God's word is declared are situations also where the prayers of the people of God are heard and answered. Sometimes we have to wait a long time before false prophets, wrong words, and evil attitudes are exposed for what they are and then brought to judgment. Truth and its ministry are self-authenticating in time. Judge nothing before the time (1 Cor. 4:5).

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19:1-13

Right through Deuteronomy when dealing with the laws and principles of life for the people of God, the spiritual and the practical are held close together (as they are in the New Testament) and these two aspects must never be separated. Nor must we choose to concentrate on the one rather than on the other. It is only as we are right with God that we are in tune with and of help to others in their human and social need. Keep in mind that the life of faith has to be lived in a world of fallen, disordered and rebellious human nature. This means we will always have to cope with the less desirable aspects of human nature as they are expressed in society. And, where there is little or no vision of God, His Law, His truth, His judgment and His mercy, there will be a casting off of restraint (Prov. 29:18). In such a situation there will be passion, crime and accident; there will be murder and accidental homicide; and the regulations in this passage are set forth to prevent private vengeance and to establish public justice. To make sure there would be no rush to ill considered judgment, nor any escape from necessary judgment, these cities of refuge were established. Three of these have already been spoken of (4:41-43) situated on the east side of Jordan. A further three were prescribed for the west side for the time when the people would enter in and take possession of the land. These six cities were so placed, with good roads clearly signposted, that no

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one would be more than about thirty miles from refuge. In terms of justice it was an excellent scheme and as a spiritual parable of the Gospel it is glorious, No guilty sinner is ever far from the one true refuge appointed by God. The Cross is the sign that points the way. But the guilty sinner must fly to refuge with no trifling, complacency or delay. Now is the accepted time.

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19:1-13

We do well to read this passage again and if time permit, the fuller detail in Num. 35: 9-34 and Joshua 20:1-9. It is clear that the deliberate murderer was not secure. In v.6 the avenger may be either the near relative or the officially appointed representative of the elders of the city where the death took place. If the guilty man was convicted after due investigation then the sentence of death was carried out. When we use this institution as a parable of the great refuge and salvation that is in Christ we must remember that sin is never *excused*. The price must be paid, and the price was paid in full satisfaction when sin was judged in the death of Christ. The sinner's guilt was removed because righteous judgment was met and was satisfied. The refuge is there to fly to (Heb. 6:18). Contrast Gen.4:9-10 where the blood of the murdered man cried out for justice and retribution, and Heb.12:24 referring to the blood of Christ which speaks mercy and pardon. Now take the final lesson. In v.1 the word "when" speaks of assurance regarding the future. The land would be theirs because God had given it to them. But in v.8 the word "if" signifies that the people might or might not take possession of all that was possible and promised. How many of us are living on a lower level and serving on a narrower way than need be? Notice in v.9 that the way forward is spoken of clearly in terms of obedience and love. Is it not strange that we are reluctant to love the God who has done so much for us? Is it because we love ourselves too much? Ponder the hymn which begins, "Hark, my soul, it is the Lord."

"Lord, it is my chief complaint
That my love is weak and faint;
Yet I love Thee, and adore:
O for grace to love Thee more." (Cowper)

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19:14-21

If the first half of this chapter legislated in respect of the sanctity of life, this half deals with stealing (14) and false witness (15ff). In v.14 the reference is to the major divisions of the land by command of God so that each man would have his rightly held share. But covetousness is the curse of human nature and the situation is envisaged where a neighbour or a powerful landowner would craftily or by pressure "take over" a man's precious inheritance. Think of the story of Ahab and Naboth in 1 Kings 21:1-19 where God's anger at this kind of thing is made plain. Greed, whether for possessions or power or popularity, is a terrible thing and it can destroy people. The only corrective is godly contentment which gladly leaves life and its issues in God's good hand (Heb. 13:5-6; 1 Tim. 6:6-10; Philip. 4:10-13). What you really value you will set your heart on and live for. That is why we must set our affections on things above and seek first God's kingdom (Col. 3:1; Matt. 6:25-33). If we steal from a brother or sister we have fallen very low and our hearts are far from God. But we can steal affection, a good name and honour as well as mere money or possessions. God is against those who steal. God knows what is done and who does it, and will judge.

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19:14-21

God is also against those who bear false witness. Without honesty of speech, especially in a court of law, society will disintegrate. Perjury is a deliberate attempt to harm another by falsehood or to escape from guilt and responsibility. It is cruel and ruthless for it does violence to the truth. Lies lead to further lies and the end is confusion. Little wonder James 3:1-10 speaks so strongly about our tongues. We have a warning here against the sin (not the weakness) of gossip, rumour, and suggestion, the last of the three

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being exercised by silence as well as by speech. If we hear wrong being spoken of another and we know it is false we must not stay silent. If we hear evil being spoken by someone we regard highly we must not judge on his testimony alone, for even the best of us are influenced by our feelings and, in times of stress are capable of saying the most outrageous things. Accusations that cannot be substantiated should not have been made in first place. This cannot mean that if an individual sees or knows of evil being done he should remain silent simply because there is no-one to confirm the facts. But in such a situation the two parties would be examined in the presence of the Lord. Exactly what that last phrase means is difficult to determine but it certainly indicated that people must be made aware that in all these matters there is the all-seeing God of righteousness and judgment to deal with. Even if there is a miscarriage of justice in a given situation, God will repay (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30). We all need to learn that the fear of the Lord is the principal part of wisdom (Prov. 1:7). If a false witness is exposed and found guilty then he shall receive the punishment he sought to bring on his brother. The objective (19b-20) is to purge the evil of false witness from the communal life of the people and to lay the restraint of holy fear on those tempted to err in this way. Honesty is always best. God is the God of truth.

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19:14-21

We need to consider the last verse of the passage which is often used by unbelieving, sceptical people to try to discredit the Old Testament, suggesting that it is sub-Christian. Such persons usually quote the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' words in Matt. 5:38-39. The idea of making the punishment fit the crime has an appeal in it but it must not be applied too exactly, as the song from Gilbert and Sullivan's Mikado suggests. Exactly measured retribution is not always the just penalty or the effective remedy for it may hurt a person's family more than the one who did the crime. This principle of an eye for an eye is strictly a *limiting ordinance* prescribing how far the punishment may go (only an eye for an eye). It is legislation to limit the vengeance that was so common in these days and which led to prolonged "tit-for-tat" blood feuds between families. In giving this guidance to the *judge* (not to a close relative) there was a guarantee of justice. But what of Jesus' words in Matt. 5:38-39? Our Lord was speaking of private relationships in which we are free as individuals to forfeit our rights and to bless those who use us desitefully (Matt. 5:44; 1 Pet. 2:23). But that cannot be the basis of established law and order, which requires the principle of retribution. "The moral order, being sinned against, has a claim against the offender. The acknowledgment of this in some form is essential to true living What, then, shall we say about Matt. 5:38-39? This is a new standard, but it is a standard for the morality of grace and not of law. It is a standard to which individuals may rise, but which cannot be made the basis of social life. Where particular persons commit themselves to this standard, then the possibilities of achievement in the general life of the community rise too. But the need for retribution in the life of the community remains still." (Torch Commentary)

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20:1-4

This whole chapter has to do with war, but it has also to do with the people of God and the outworking of the purposes of God in the world through His people. Before we react against the chapter or pronounce on world affairs we do well to remind ourselves what is in fact going on in world history. Take the parable of the Weeds and Wheat (Matt. 13:24-30) and see that there is an enemy countering and opposing God's work and God's harvest. But the work of the enemy is not allowed to hinder, let alone frustrate God's work, and the enemy is brought to judgment. This means we must face the fact that right through history there operates together both God's work of salvation and God's work of judgment. We grasp gladly the idea of a work of salvation but we shrink from the idea of a work of judgment. We accept in theory (and theology) that the judgments of God are righteous but we are slow to grasp that these judgments are in actual fact operating now in history and are inescapable. Of course, if we take a light view of sin and evil, then we will see no need for radical judgment. But if we recognise the essential evil of all we call sin, in its operations and intentions, then we can see the need for judgment. The world is not merely a sad place, but a bad place, fallen and rebellious and, motivated by the spirit of disobedience (Eph. 2:1-3; 2 Thess. 2:7-12). God does not ignore evil. He is dealing with it and bringing it to its rightful and final judgment.

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The marvel is not the fact of judgment but rather God's long forbearance in the interest of the work of salvation (2 Pet. 3:9-10). These spiritual truths are being worked out in history and are demonstrated in physical and national terms in the story of Israel. Whether we like it or not we have to deal with God.

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20:1-4

The people of God are the instrument of God in the world whereby He works out His righteous purposes. In the realities of human experience they find that God works to subdue evil, to expose it, to conscript it in His service, sometimes allowing it to operate a long time and sometimes bringing sharp and immediate judgment. Now, those who are engaged in this "holy war" and who wage war, not merely against flesh and blood but against basic principalities and powers, must do so in faith and obedience, keeping their eyes on God. Their thinking must be conditioned by the fact of redemption (1b) because this is both the inspiration of courage and the check on error and presumption. Time and again the people of God will feel that the odds against them are so tremendous that they will be tempted to fear. But in spiritual work fear paralyses and therefore we must place over against the feelings of fear something that is objectively valid. This is what we have in these verses. It is the God who redeemed us who is with us. We are His people and what we do we do at His command. This is our confidence and peace. The battle is God's. The strategy is God's, whether or not we can see even its outlines. The power and the victory are His, and He in person is with us. These are facts, and it is by facts not feelings that we live. This calls for faith, and faith must set invisible realities over against the visible factors of the situation, however frightening they may seem. This is what Moses himself did (Heb.11:27). This is how Paul kept going in the most costly of circumstances (2 Cor. 4:16-18). This is what the people of God had to learn in their own experience (2 Chron. 20:1-6,12-17; 32:7-8). This is what the young servant of Elisha had to be shown in 2 Kings 6:15-17. It calls for faith. And faith is victorious over the world (1 John 5:4).

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20:5-9

After the call to service and the assurance of victory it is fascinating to read of exemptions from the fight. But of course, since the battle is the Lord's and the issue is in His hands, the need of the commander is not the largest army possible but the best. It would be easy to read these verses in a critical way suggesting that the men referred to had divided hearts and were not willing to serve if that curbed their other interests. Jesus' words in Lk. 9: 57-62 and Paul's in 1 Cor. 7:29-35 could be adduced in favour of such an application. Certainly for some the challenge is to self-denial and the giving up of legitimate fulfilment in the interest of Christ's service. But here it seems more an act of God's great kindness in that He remembers and makes allowance for our human weakness and limitation and does not lay on us burdens we are not, at that time, able to bear (Ps.103: 13-14). There are times and circumstances when the right thing to do is to contract out of service and to do so without guilt or shame. There is a generous kindness in God and He grants temporary exemption so that the man may dedicate his house to God, or bring to God the first fruits of his vineyard, or fulfil God's institution of marriage in the starting of a family. Read 24:5 and think how important it is to let marriage, home and family take precedence over career considerations! Another aspect of today's verses is that if a man goes to service with his mind divided he will find in the pressure of crisis that he is not only distracted himself, but will be a source of distraction to others. Half-heartedness is infectious and spreads rapidly to demoralise a whole company of people (8). On the other hand a dedicated heart, warm towards God and glad to serve, is likewise infectious and inspires. It is not numbers that count. They can be a total distraction and deception. It is hearts and lives humbly yielded that serve in a way that guarantees that the glory will be God's alone.

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20:10-18

Keep in mind that we are really studying spiritual warfare and the picture is of the people and work of God in an alien and antagonistic world. Given the chance, the powers of the world will stand against the advancing work of God, refusing to give ground. There is a God-defying spirit of evil in the world as the Book of Revelation makes clear. But evil is, and must be, brought to judgment. This is how we must

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interpret the costly carnage of history, always guarding against relating specific tragedies to specific sins in too rigid a way (cf. John 9:1-3). The land must be taken for God from the powers that have usurped it. The longsuffering of God has waited a very long time and when we read v.17 we must go back in thought to Gen. 15:16 and then consider Jesus' words in Lk. 11:48-51. There are times when the tides of evil reach their "high" and judgment comes. Note in the passage the distinction between the cities afar off and those within the land. Those afar off are to be disarmed and restrained by the elimination of their fighting men, but those within the land are to be totally eradicated. If this be a parable, then we must see the need to be more radical with our dealing with evil inside the church than evil outside the church. Judgment begins at the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17). There must be no compromise with or excuse for evil, and we had better start with ourselves. But note how the passage begins (10) with a declaration and offer of God's peace. But is it not so that a gracious presentation of God's peace, through the blood of the Cross (Col. 1:20) can arouse the most intense reaction, resistance and refusal, especially on the part of self-righteous religious people. Is it not true that "nice" people can hate the gospel more than "sinners"? Is it because they hate God and hate Jesus and have no part with Him? Read Jesus' own words in John 15:18-25 and think well. We do not now have to act in military terms as Israel did, but it is the same spiritual warfare.

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20:19-20

These verses have a very contemporary ring about them since, at long last; we seem to have learned the importance of conserving trees and forests. But before studying this passage, look back to yesterday's verses and see that the judgment spoken of is cleansing judgment, not simply in terms of removing moral filth and corruption, but also in terms of preventing it (17-18). In many situations we end up trying to take action far too late. Is this caused by blindness to the spiritual issues or is it due to a spirit of indolence that takes the easy and effortless way, hoping that someone else will do what is necessary? Finally now, we have the lesson of the trees which are not to be cut down ruthlessly and thoughtlessly. Forests and vegetation are indispensable in the conservation of moisture, and when the war-machine ravages the natural resources of nature in the interest of quick victory, it is simply guaranteeing future problems for the people. The same is true regarding the savage commercial methods that sacrifice anything in order to gather in short-term profits. It is a case of selling the future in the interest of immediate gain, whether that gain is safety or satisfaction. Think of other realms of experience in which clever scientific man is busy interfering with the course of nature simply because some people clamour for what they crave for, or to escape from the consequences of their own actions. It is the spirit that considers babies "inconvenient" and therefore to be disposed of. But what will the result in society be in ten or twenty years time? The indications are already grim. "We are all dependent upon the resources of God's creation, and the fertility of the earth everywhere is the concern of every man," (Torch Commentary). Think of the food we waste, the litter we drop, the beauty we spoil by our thoughtless selfishness. In so many ways it is easy to be destructive. It is a mark of grace to be creative, and to be good stewards of all that God has given.

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21:1-9

A spirit of unbelief is often expressed in denigration of the Scriptures, particularly chapters like this one which seems at first sight to be so severe and even ruthless. But we have been learning in our studies in Deuteronomy that the stern precepts of God's law stand over against the rampant selfishness of fallen human nature to rebuke and to curb its potential for destruction. Self-interest and self-will are terrible powers, motivated so often by immediate feeling, inclination and desire rather than by considered principle. To counter this there is emphasised in this chapter the sanctity and dignity of life and the value of the individual. But it is not mere individualism, which can run riot and cause confusion in the church as well as in the world. The individual is seen, and must be seen, as a member or part of society and he has responsibility for the actions of society just as society has responsibility for the actions of the individual. We cannot contract out and plead that horrible and nasty social situations "have nothing to do with me", and "I'd rather not get involved." We *are* involved whether as believers or unbelievers. We cannot say, "Stop the world I want to get off," no matter how appealing the prospect may be! We are in

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the world for better or for worse, and we are making our contribution, exercising our influence positively and negatively, and living with the consequences of all actions, our own and those of other people.

We do well to consider often the call to shine as lights in a perverse generation (Phil. 2:15), to preserve the savour of salt in our lives (Matt. 5: 13) and to stand in the gap for the nation (Ezek. 22:30). Tomorrow we get to grips with the details of the passage.

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21:1-9

These verses deal with the question of corporate guilt in respect of the unsolved and unpunished murder. The elders and judges of the area where the crime has been committed must, by measurement, decide which city had to take responsibility. The execution of the young cow which had neither borne a calf nor pulled a plough (which speaks of natural and legitimate fulfilment denied) is a symbolic act referring to the punishment which should have been carried out and an acknowledgment of the intention that punishment *would* have been carried out if the identity of the guilty person had been known. Before God, the representatives of the community confess their individual innocence and their corporate guilt. This is the true spirit of responsibility for the affairs of society and there is no escape into the artificiality of a "them" (who do bad things) and "us" (who maintain some rectitude). We are part of the society we have inherited from the actions of our forefathers and which we add to and further complicate before handing it on to our children. If we do not accept this as a true assessment of the situation then we are in danger of becoming like Pilate (whom we like to criticise) and washing our hands and declaring our own innocence, even though our involvement and responsibility are manifest. We are not allowed simply to blame the past generation, as some young people nowadays like to do. All must bear their own responsibility (Jer. 31:27-30). Read, if time permits, the whole of Ezekiel 18 and see the manifest righteousness and reasonableness of God, and be amazed at His forgiving grace.

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21:10-14

The closing emphasis of the previous passage concerned the effect that individual sin has upon the whole nation and its life. A glaring example of this is seen in the reverse suffered by the whole nation as the result of the sin of Achan in Joshua 7. Granted society has responsibility for the pressures and preferences that influence people into a way of life contrary to God. But individuals also have responsibility for they are the factors that create public opinion, and individual sins pump poison into the life-stream of society. It is a desperate situation in which only Divine intervention can bring salvation and change, and so deliver society from the brutalising effects of human sin. We need to remember that God deals with nations as well as with individuals. But God also sets very high value on individual personality and today's verses, which seem strange to our modern liberated (?) equality-of-sexes generation, set a standard for the treatment of women that was far higher than the general practice among the nations at that time. None of the commentaries seem to help to apply these rules to the present day, except to emphasise the importance of treating people rightly and according to them the dignity and value of personality. People are not "things" to be made use of. The words in v.14 seem to make divorce all too easy whether through loss of interest or deeper incompatibility. But the wife must remain a free-woman, with all rights and dignity, and must not be cast off back into slavery as if she were a mere chattel. Perhaps the essence of the message here is a warning to those who know themselves to be the favoured people of God not to take liberties and to see to it that they behave towards others with the same grace that God has shown to them.

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21:10-14

Bishop Ellicott comments on this passage that these regulations may apply to the situations the Israelites were finding as they proceeded to conquer the land. They would constantly be meeting new situations and new people, some of whom would be exceedingly attractive. Emotionally and spiritually that is a situation of danger to those committed to God's service. There is the suggestion that the actions spoken of in v.12-13a may be meant to spoil the outward beauty of the captive so that the Israelite man may be reminded

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that mere attractiveness is not the basis for marriage. Some forget this, and that is why many modern marriages are short-lived. The rules about hair and nails may refer to tokens of mourning, or even tokens of forsaking past life and its false religion. One suggestion is that the garment of captivity may refer to beautiful clothes put on with the deliberate purpose of attracting the captor and Ellicott refers to Jezebel's technique in 2 Kings 9: 30. On the other hand, the new garment may symbolise a new life and new status among the people of God. Time is given for mourning and it seems clear that the emphasis is on the encouragement of lawful marriage and no other form of union. Caution seems to be the necessary factor, and that is a word for us all in the matter of relationships if we would honour God. Matthew Henry suggests that the point of v.14 is that the man, having had a month to cool his heart after the heat and excitement of battle, may have second thoughts and decide not to go through with the marriage. But, "having made a fool of her, he might not make a prey of her." The awakening of a person's affections when there is no honourable intention is an offence to God.

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21:15-17

In the previous passage there may be the assumption that the man in question already had one wife. It seems that having two wives was permitted by custom but it was not sanctioned by God's Law. The pattern of one man and one woman married for life is God's stated position (Gen. 2:24; Ex. 20:14). The whole story of the Old Testament testifies to the confusion and complication that comes when this standard is ignored. Never forget Jesus' words in Matt. 19:3-9 and always allow for man's hardness of heart. Recognise also man's foolish haste and unbelief as it is seen in Abraham (Gen. 16:1-4), Jacob (Gen. Chaps. 29-30) and in the introduction to the story of Samuel (1 Sam. 1:1-2ff). In story after story the taking of an extra wife introduced both short and long term confusion and tension. How much better it is to rest in the essential peace of God's good and perfect will, costly though it be at times. We recognise how God over-rules even in wrong situations and that must not surprise us. God is not prepared to allow His purposes to be dictated to by man's stupidity. What our verses here say is that marriage obligations in the sight of God may not be set aside because a man's feelings have changed. That a man *prefers* one way rather than another is not the prime consideration. What God requires comes first. The rights of the first-born son stand secure. Of course such a son may forfeit his rights as Esau did for sheer fleshly satisfaction (Heb. 12:15-17) and as Reuben did (Gen. 35:22; 49:3-4). God also reserves the right to ordain otherwise as He did with Abraham (Gen. 17:18-19) and with Isaac (Gen. 25:21-23). When God so chooses His choice is totally without reference to the merits or demerits of the person chosen or superseded (Rom. 9: 6-16). Perhaps the lesson to learn is the need to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand (1 Pet. 5:6).

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21:18-21

This is the kind of passage that tends to shock both parents and children, and so it should. But our reaction should be to think of what is said and not simply to dismiss it. If we feel the treatment is harsh (and it is in this form) think of Rom. 1:28-32, and 2 Tim. 3:1-5 and see how disobedience to parents is found at the heart of the list of the sins that mark human apostasy. Where there is no respect for parents there is no respect for law and that is the right order. Grim as these verses are, they emphasise that the family unit is the heart of society and if evil rebellion against God is allowed to operate there the issue is disaster. Remember that the first ethical commandment regarding behaviour is in respect of honouring parents. Yes, parents at times can be far from perfect and far from wise, and the New Testament urges parents to make it possible for children to honour them (Eph. 6:4). But the N.T. also recognises most clearly the spirit of disobedience that characterises and motivates fallen human nature (Eph. 2:2-3). Every effort of the parents to curb the son's rebellion having failed they must agree together to take him to the elders because he has become not just a danger to the family but to the whole community. And, since the work of God is in the custody of the people of God, the parents recognise that their son must take second place. They cannot and will not side with their son over against God, no matter how they love their son. The story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 may be set by some over against this passage in the Law, but remember that the Father allowed the son to go, and made the finance available. In the subsequent disaster you can imagine the son wishing he were dead, and if the chastisement had not produced repentance he

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would have died, even though the Father still loved him. To be soft with sin, our own or others, is not helpful. We should read 1 Cor. 11:27-32 and then think of the Father who delivered up His sinless obedient Son to death for our salvation.

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21:22-23

Read in connection with these verses John 19:31-37; Gal. 3:13 and 1 Pet. 2:24. Obviously the New Testament writers, by the Holy Spirit, related these verses in Deuteronomy to the death Jesus died when He paid the price of sin. The body hanging on the tree was visible proof that the penalty of sin had been paid, and the body taken away at nightfall declared to the people that the defilement brought by sin had also been taken away. When the penalty is paid there is no more curse, because the curse has been borne by another. "To break the law of God and live as though He did not matter or exist, was in effect to curse Him; and he who cursed God would be accursed by God. To break the law of God and incur thereby the penalty of death, was to die the worst possible kind of death, for the means of death was a formal and terminal separation from the community of God's people. Hence the use of this verse in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians is very forceful. Christ took upon Himself the curse of the law, the penalty of death, thereby redeeming us from the curse of the law. The manner of His death, crucifixion, symbolised dramatically the meaning of His death. His separation from the family of God made possible our admission to the family of God, because the curse of the broken law - which would have permanently barred admission had been removed." (Craigie) How good it is for us to see that the Gospel is the same in both the Old and New Testaments.

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22:1-4, 6-8

We give here the substance of the introduction to the sermon when we studied this chapter on a Sunday morning. Two things have to be emphasised if we are to understand Deuteronomy. The first is that, left to himself, man by nature will destroy first his neighbour and then himself. This is inescapable because fallen man is motivated by a contrary spirit which is, of itself, incapable of health or wholeness (Jer.17:9). The second is that what God is and what He has purposed for His redeemed people must determine their behaviour. They are not

in any sense their own. They are bought with a price (1 Cor.6:19-20) and because God is holy, they must be holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16). To this end these laws in Deuteronomy are given to govern the pattern of life. It is right to distinguish between the primary and the lesser laws (Matt. 23:23) but this does not mean that some laws can be dispensed with. This chapter deals with charity and chastity, that is, love and purity. The sections deal with social, sexual and symbolic matters. Right through the whole chapter is the thought of human responsibility in the sight of God, and the detailed penalties stipulated are meant to emphasise that the matters being dealt with are not to be regarded lightly. Some commentators indicate that in v.1-12 there are no less than nine laws for various occasions but we take the verses in groups, as indicated at the start of today's note. The question to ask ourselves is: "Am I living my life in a way that pleases God?"

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22:1-4, 6-8

These verses deal with what could be called social matters. In a situation of need we are not allowed to pass by on the other side. Whether the animal is straying or being driven away the law requires us to do positive good and where possible to take action to prevent evil being done. This, of course, could become interference in areas where we have no right to act, and this would be wrong. But sometimes we have to interfere, and be both misunderstood and hated in the interest of both the wrongdoer and his victims.

Reading the first four verses makes it plain that the attitude required will cause us a lot of bother, disturb our timetable and eat into our spare time that we had earmarked for our own pleasure. But that is the standard. Jesus spoke of this in radical terms in Lk. 9:57-62. It is so plain in Scripture that God does require us to be our brother's keeper and the neglect of others simply because we are preoccupied with ourselves is sinful. In Exod. 23:4-5 even enemies have to be helped. It is not a matter of deserving help, but needing help, and the God who calls for this is the God who acted in grace towards us when we were

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still sinners. In v.6-7 the emphasis could be on forbidding cruelty to animals or respect for the whole concept of motherhood. Perhaps it has to do more with man's tendency to live for the present to the detriment of the future. The young birds and the eggs may well have been necessary for food. But if the mother bird is killed then the future supply of food for others is put in peril. Think of the current attitude (in wage settlements for example) where each man grabs all he can for himself now with no thought of how his actions will affect the future. The same note of responsibility is in v.8. It is all about taking care of those who will not or cannot take care of themselves.

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22:9-12

If v.8 emphasised the value and protection of human life which is a gift from God, then v.9-11 seem to warn against introducing confusion or contradiction into life, and v.12 calls for some visible sign or badge to signify distinct identity as the people of God. This section could be described as symbolic. The terms of the prohibitions seem to refer to unnatural combinations, the placing together of things (or people) that should not be put together. The unequal yoke is applied with important emphasis in 2 Cor. 6:14ff and the folly of a believer marrying an unbeliever is made plain. A literal application of v.11 could cause havoc in the modern clothing trade and v.9 could hit both amateur and professional gardeners who want to make full economic use of the ground. The precise reasons for these prohibitions are just not clear. It may be a call not to conform to the patterns and customs of other nations. It may be that the various things mentioned had some association with false religious or magic practices. There is also reference to tassels in Num. 15:37-41 as a help to remember all God's gracious benefits. But all "badges" have a tendency to make their wearers more aware of themselves than of God.. That is what Jesus said in Matt. 23:1-7. Perhaps these laws are simply to urge on the people of God that they should live a plain and uncomplicated life. When you think of how cluttered our lives become with so many things and activities that are neither necessary or productive, perhaps we need to be brought back to these ancient prohibitions. If we are to be conformed to the image of God's Son (Rom. 8:29) we need to remember how simple His life style was (Lk. 9: 58).

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22:5, 13-30

The strong language and the severe penalties must not distract us but rather emphasise the very serious attitude taken by God in respect of pre-marital chastity (13-21), adultery (22), seduction (23-24), rape (25-29) and incest (30). The same serious words are used in v.5 which refers to what is normally called tranvestism, which in general terms must be regarded as a personality deviation, the roots of which may be deeply hidden. No-one should ever under-estimate the hurt, confusion and struggle that some people have to live with, and if ever there was a realm for compassion and understanding it is here. The gentle kindness of the living God in respect of the bruised reed and the smoking flax (Isa. 42:2) is expressed wonderfully in some of our great hymns.

"There is no place where earth's sorrows
Are more felt than up in heaven;
There is no place where earth's failings
Have such kindly judgment given." (F.W. Faber)

"To those who fall, how kind Thou art,
How good to those who seek." (St. Bernard of Clairvaux)

But there is a great difference between those who, in Christ and for Christ's sake, struggle to subdue and channel strong impulses into good and creative use, and those who in a spirit of rebellion seek to express to the full all the imbalance of their personalities to the hurt of themselves and others. We need to take seriously the salutary teaching of such passages

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as Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; and Eph. 5:5-8. There is in the gospel not only the promise of forgiveness and cleansing but the power of the indwelling Spirit to enable us to be ever increasingly conformed to the image of God's Son.

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22:5, 13-30

Quite apart from the emotional confusion spoken of yesterday in relation to v.5 we must recognise that dress can often be a true expression of personality and motivation. Some forms of dress are deliberately provocative and unseemly and indeed irreverent. Some fashions of dress indicate a pattern and disposition of behaviour designed deliberately to shock and to flirt with the dangerous if not the forbidden. To be provocative is a dangerous game and underestimates the power of temptation, while over-estimating the power of control. No doubt there is a place for rebelling against the "collar and tie" image and the rigid customs of behaviour and dress. But in a generation that has become obsessed with "unisex" and with nudity, which has degenerated into sexual promiscuity, and which begins to adulterate and propagate perversion, we must recognise that we are in the realm of dangerous evil influence. The awareness of nakedness in the Garden of Eden is linked with confusion, but the clothing of the man of Gadara (Mk.5:15) is linked with peace and salvation. A missionary spoke of how in Communist China fellows and girls were dressed alike as if to assert that a new order was being instituted by man in which God-ordained distinctions were to be obliterated. Dress and behaviour are closely linked and we do well to consider the matter of seemliness in both realms. An older generation in the North-East of Scotland used to speak of how some people "had no sense of the fitness of things". If the grace of God does not affect our manners, appearance and behaviour there is something wrong.

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22:5, 13-30

If ever there was an area for witness to Christian standards it is in the realm of the powerful drive of sexual motivation. We live in a generation full of blackmailing influences and of blatant invitations to immorality. There is operative everywhere the lie of the Devil that life is only good if it has full freedom of expression in this physical realm. Scripture says it is good. (not better) for a man not to touch a woman (1 Cor. 7:1). There is no psychological inhibition or frustration necessarily involved in bringing this deep drive of human nature under discipline and into subjection. Our Lord Jesus Christ was in every sense truly man, integrated, balanced and fulfilled. There is the lie of the Devil to the younger generation that "everybody does it". This is a lie. And it is a lie that these turbulent hungers and temptations must be yielded to and that they lead to fullness of life. The only way to life is God's way. It is part of the evidence that our generation is far away from God that such a chapter as this would seldom, if ever, be preached on. And if it was preached there would be astonishment at and rejection of its standards and penalties. But this is certainly made clear in the chapter: God takes moral wrong seriously, and there is no easy escape from the consequences of moral. wrong. There is a beauty in holiness and a fulfilment in purity. This is what our manner of life must say and say clearly to a bewildered generation.

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23:1-14

It will help us to study and understand this difficult passage if we first read v.14. The message concerns the purity of the people of God and the exclusion of everything that is unclean or defective. This is expressed in terms of physical and historical considerations, and indeed, in terms of personal hygiene. In spiritual terms we could think of the children's hymn about heaven, "Closed are its gates to sin; nought that defileth can ever enter in." Keep in mind that Israel (the people of God, the church) is not only the possession of God but the expression of what God is. He is represented by His people and therefore there must be nothing soiled in the life or behaviour of the people, whether in public or private. The prohibition in v.1 probably refers to those whose emasculation was with consent in the interest of some pagan religious commitment rather than due to accident, illness or force. We must affirm in the gospel that whatever has made us what we are, there is hope in God who accepts us as we are for Jesus' sake. Consider Matt. 19:12; Acts 8:27; and Isa. 56:3-8 and see how glorious an acceptance there is for the

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broken and needy. These were the very people who gathered to Jesus (Matt. 4:23-25; Mk. 1:32-34). Their need brought them. Similar caution must operate regarding v.2 because this may refer to children born as the result of evil practices in pagan temple worship, and not just to illegitimacy. The prohibition in v.3-5 may be linked with the belief that the Moabites and Ammonites were the descendants of Lot by his incestuous relationship with his daughters. But their evil opposition to Israel is also named as reason for their permanent exclusion (to the tenth generation). But in due time a Moabitess was gloriously brought to faith (Ruth) and she took her honoured place in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt.1:5). Where sin abounds, grace abounds even more (Rom.5:20AV).

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23:15-25

While reading this easier passage, glance back at v. 6 which requires us to recognise that there is in some areas an abiding separation and enmity which nothing will change. As a people cursed by God they are cast out, and yet the gospel speaks of those outside and far off being brought near (Eph. 2:11-14). Note also in v.7-8 that Israel is forbidden to abhor Edomites and Egyptians because of past relationships. Contempt for and devaluation of people is forbidden to those who owe all. they are and have to the free, undeserved grace of God. Now consider well v.14 which is the crux of the whole chapter. God walks in the midst of His people, not only to save and to bless but to have fellowship with them because they are precious to Him. The burden then of all these regulations about purity and behaviour is that nothing should be allowed to cast a shadow on that fellowship. Since Israel is a nation, redeemed and brought to liberty from bondage, the runaway slave is not to be handed back to anyone who would deprive him of his human dignity. It is assumed that "believers" would treat the slave better than unbelievers. But is it always so? Solemn words in v.17-18 give yet. another warning of the dangers inherent in the wrong use of the sexual drive in human nature. The atmosphere of the nations among which Israel lived was evil and both men and women are warned against the kind of religion that "used" this faculty (17). There are places and activities that Christians should keep clear of. Linked with this is the declaration that "dirty money" must not be given to God. Our givings to God must signify gratitude in respect of His blessings given to us. And God does not bless what is unclean.

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23:15-25

There is great emphasis in passages like these on the fact that religion and morality go together, and what God has joined no-one must sever. Faith without works is dead, and not faith at all (Jas. 2:14-26) and the Bible throughout insists that believing and behaving go together. This is as true in the business realm of life as in the realm of sexual morality. The laws about interest do not seem to apply to a society like our own in which more and more people live on the basis of overdrafts. In Israel loans were generally for the relief of a "brother" in distress and to take advantage of someone in need would be a denial of humanity. It seems that business transactions with foreigners were permitted on normal business terms. We cannot but think of the money orientated society in which we live, with everything reduced to cash considerations and the ability to spend and acquire. What we do not seem to have at all is contentment and we do well to consider James 4:13-5:6. The verses dealing with vows (21-23) need no exposition since they are plain indeed and constitute a warning against false spirituality which is always geared to impress others, not God. Read Eccles. 5:1-7. Think well about baptism, membership and marriage vows. And in all life see to it that our word can be trusted (Jas. 5:12; Matt. 5:33-37) because mistrust leads to confusion in society. Perhaps we need to emphasise duty because procrastination weakens the resolve and leads to neglect. The closing verses highlight the reasonableness of attitude required to make the life of a rural community workable. But reasonableness must not be taken advantage of. On the one hand generosity is a necessary grace which leads to fellowship and mutual encouragement. But hospitality must not be misused by taking greedily more than is needed. Christianity is very practical.

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24:1-4

This passage does not deal with the general question of divorce but with a particular case of re-marriage. This is seen when we underline the words "if" in v.1 and 2, and "then" in v.4. The words "displeasing" (v.1) and "dislikes" (v.3) must be given a more serious and more technical meaning than in our present day use, else divorce would be sanctioned on the flimsiest of inclinations. We do not have here legislation instituting divorce but rather rules governing a situation that already existed. This is made plain in Matt. 19:3-9. Even though this is not the place for a full discussion on divorce and re-marriage we do well always to read carefully our Lord's words in Matt. 5: 31-32 and Mark 10:2-9. The standard is high, very high, and seems to allow divorce for one reason only, saying nothing about the question of re-marriage. That God does in fact in sheer grace grant to some a new beginning is a fact of experience. We must be careful not to make marriage breakdown the only human failure for which there is no pardon or restoration. But at the same time we must start on the highest ground which is the God-ordained pattern from the beginning, of one man and one woman for life. The confusion which results from concessions multiplies as these verses in Deuteronomy make plain, for the second marriage is also ended. Think of the disastrous effect on the children born of such temporary unions, growing up not really knowing whom they belong to. But the burden of our passage is to prevent the easy passing of a woman from man to man, because that leads only to the distortion of a relationship which should be marked by exclusive allegiance. The stern restriction is placed upon the man, and the stern warning to the nation should be noted carefully. Read. Malachi 2:13-16 and see the prevalence of divorce (linked with spiritual apostasy) and God's hatred of it.

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24:5

It is marvellous in this book of the Bible which contains so much regarding God's righteousness and His sternness towards the wrongdoer to find such a verse as this. It is full of exquisite humanity, tenderness and consideration. After the verses on marriage breakdown God now speaks in the interest of happy marriage and fulfilment. Nothing is to be allowed to keep a man from establishing his home, loving and comforting his wife, setting and regulating his new way of life, and starting a family. It seems almost assumed that they will want a family right away. Now in our generation all sorts of considerations of career and finance are put forward to justify a quite different pattern and practice and, no doubt, a strong case would be put forward to defend this. But without question, when both parties to a marriage continue their former careers they may lose out on the particular delights of what this verse speaks of, and they lose out in a way that cannot by the very nature of the thing be recouped later. After a year or two (often far longer nowadays) you cannot again be "newly-married". We recognise that considerations of finance and housing are very different from the days when houses could be rented rather than bought but it may be that we now set our sights too high and require too many creature comforts. Not a few have taken on financial liabilities really beyond them and the pressures have produced a fretful spirit of complaint because all their income is mortgaged. It is all too easy for that complaint to become one of spiritual discontent. Perhaps the main emphasis of the verse is simply that happy and contented family life is at the heart of a nation's stability.

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24:6-9

The reference in v.6 is to the taking away from a man the tools of his trade and so depriving him not only of his livelihood but his self-respect and dignity. This is a word that requires us to have consideration for others as well as for ourselves. Someone at the current Trades Union Conference was suggesting that no one should work overtime and so allow others, presently unemployed, to have a job. The proposal did not seem to appeal. Perhaps it is not practical. Yet the principle of not creating hardship for another is, and should be, practical. Verse 7 seems to deal with kidnap, take-over or manipulation, which has to do with stealing a person's name or life or hope or dignity or purity. This is evil in God's sight and must not be tolerated. Verses 8-9 speak of the laws of quarantine in respect of which there are to be no exceptions, no matter how important the person may be. Leprosy, in the Bible a vivid symbol of sin in its nature and

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effects, must not be allowed to spread through the camp. Reference is made to the story of Miriam in Numbers 12 and the point is not Miriam's criticism of Moses and the spirit of devaluation of his God-given leadership. It is rather the fact that even though she was Moses' sister, a leading figure in Israel, she was dealt with according to the laws of Leviticus 13-14 and put outside the camp for the prescribed time. God is no respecter of persons. And all who endanger God's holy people and work put them selves in peril. God Himself deals with this in the way His wisdom ordains. Sin has no place among God's people, and there are no special dispensations.

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24:10-22

These various laws have a tremendous realism about them, recognising how easy it is for human nature to presume and prey upon others. In v.10-13 there is recognition of the fact that a poor man may well find himself compelled by circumstances to request a loan from a brother Israelite. Assuming that his financial predicament is not due to foolish extravagance (and that is not always so), provision is made to preserve the man's personal dignity. The privacy of his home must not be breached lest the creditor should see and demand as security some treasured personal possession. It is never right to ride roughshod over a person's feelings and when we do so we sin against God. If the man is very poor he will have only his "cloak" or blanket to pledge and this must be returned each nightfall so that he might be protected from the cold night air. Isn't it amazing that God the Lord takes such a practical down-to-earth view of life and circumstances? When we do the same God blesses us. In v.14-15 the same principle is stated regarding paying the poor hired servant at the end of each day because he would need the money to buy food for himself and his family. It is so easy to be heartless and it is important to do the right thing *at the right time*. Some people have to live a hand-to-mouth existence, and not just in terms of cash, Some can just cope with life and no more, and forgetfulness in giving them the word of encouragement and fellowship can cause them untold hardship. Such a person will be heard when he cries to God in his hurt and God will take his side. If our salvation theology does not make us caring people there is something wrong. James 5:1-6 applies this principle radically.

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24:10-22

The emphasis in this whole passage is on individual responsibility within the family. We *are* our brother's keeper (Gen. 4:9; Gal. 6:2). Thoughtlessness is the theme of v.14-15 and we need to be careful, for example, when organising some outing that we do not leave out someone who needs to be and should be invited. Nor must we plan things on a level of expenditure that will automatically exclude the less well off. In v.16 the emphasis is that we stand by ourselves when dealing with God and cannot hide in another's faith. The faith of a husband, wife, or children cannot save the other members of the family. On the other hand, in spite of the emphasis on the solidarity of the family unit in Israel, there is this emphasis (16) that the judicial penalty for the sin of one individual is not to involve other members of the family. Of course, depending on the nature of the crime, while the guilty person must accept the legal punishment, the repercussions of the crime would certainly spread to affect others in the family. This is one of the terrible things about personal sinning. We hurt others dear to us who may have done their best to protect us from temptation and to keep us from evil. No man lives unto himself. Even in society we are bound together and certainly in Christ we are members of each other in one body as 1Cor. 12:12ff makes so very plain. The essence of the remaining verses (17-22) is generosity of attitude and action towards all who are less well off than ourselves, for the simple reason that all we are and have is the result of God's free grace when He redeemed us from the lostness that was once our lot. Think of all God has done for you and learn to be kind (Eph. 4:31-5:2). This is God's command (18b, 22b).

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25:1-4

We have seen already in recent chapters that anything that devalues, dishonours, degrades or manipulates a person (the one doing it or the one at the receiving end) is wrong and comes under the rebuke of God. The theme here again is judgment and punishment for wrongdoing although no doubt there is also an

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element of correction and deterrence. But remember that the God who speaks so sternly in v.1-3 speaks with great compassion in v.4, just as He spoke with human care in the previous chapter. We emphasise as we have done so often in these studies that these laws from God are in fact words of grace. They are words of the God who when He spoke in Eden saying "Where are you?" was speaking as a Father calling his lost and erring son, rather than as a judge calling a convict to judgment. Wrongdoing that is uncorrected leads only to further wrong and that is why discipline and judgment are necessary. Here the theme is judgment after due process of investigation and sentence. The punishment is ordered and carried out only if it is deserved. This element of retribution is the only real justification for punishment. But even here there are regulations limiting the punishment so that the principle would not be abused and the offender not dehumanised. This raises all manner of debate regarding methods of punishment whether the "short, sharp shock" or a term of incarceration in prison or some other form of penalty, corporal or otherwise. But this is not the place for a full-scale debate. The principle here seems to be that punishment should be limited to the least possible compatible with the due establishment and operation of righteous law. The alternative is to lapse into a lawless society which, as our present generation shows, is a jungle of human ruthlessness.

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25:1-4

Consider these verses again in order to link them with the New Testament. The principle of punishment spoken of was still operative in Paul's day with the limit of lashes reduced to thirty-nine to make sure no-one exceeded the law (2 Cor. 11: 24). In v4 we must take the literal and immediate application first. It is a restriction on the heartlessness of man that would make unreasonable demands on his working animals. In the Ten Commandments the ox is granted its sabbath rest as well as its master. In Prov. 12:10 we have the stark statement that a man who is right with God will never be cruel to his animal. The beast must be given its rightful and necessary share of the fruit of its toil and this should not be grudged. We are speaking here of a mean spirit that never wants to give anything to anyone. That spirit is a contradiction of grace and a denial of a man's profession of faith. Those who know God will show consideration to all who serve them, whether animals or people. This principle and this verse are taken up by Paul in 1 Cor. 9:3-14 and 1 Tim. 5:17-18 to emphasise that those who serve in the ministry of the gospel are entitled to adequate financial support. If God looked after the ox, much more would He look after His servants. "The ox that trampled out the grain, which was part of the farmer's staple diet, was not to be muzzled but was allowed, as some compensation for his toil, some share in the grain. Similarly those who toil to produce spiritual. food for Christian believers should receive adequate compensation for their labours represented in terms of a share in the material benefits enjoyed by those they had helped." (Thompson)

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25:5-10

Read Mark 12:18-27 and see the distorted use the Sadducees (who did not believe in any life after death) made of this passage in an attempt to ensnare Jesus. But Jesus dealt with this by showing that the life to come is not simply or merely a prolonging or extension of present human relationships, but a new order of life that is greater and fuller. The passage here states first the regulation (5-6) and then the action to be taken if the brother is unwilling to fulfil his obligations (7-10). The situation is that of the close-knit family unit which was really an extended family all bearing the same name. The important thing in Israel was that the "name" should not disappear and that a man should have a son and heir to carry on the family name. In this way the man who had died could, through his "son", still have a future share in the covenant promises and blessings. Perhaps there is some emphasis here on the unity and continuity of the people and work of God, an emphasis that is sorely needed in our generation of individualism and exclusivism. We lose out greatly if we lose the sense of having emerged from the past and of handing on to the future. Others have laboured and we enter into their labours (John 4:37-38). It is clear in the passage that the brother-in-law had a legal right to refuse his obligation. But there was a legal procedure that followed whereby it was made public, by the pulling off of the sandal, that this man refused to stand on God's call to spiritual responsibility. The shame of such an attitude is also made plain by the act of spitting, all this done in the presence of the elders. It may all sound strange to us but the lesson concerns allowing personal

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considerations to take precedence over spiritual duty. There would be consternation in a congregation if such public denunciation of spiritual failure was exercised.

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25:11-19

There are three subjects here. The first deals with modesty which "is the hedge of chastity, and therefore ought to be very carefully preserved and kept up by both sexes" (Henry). When attitudes and actions become crude and carnal in the realm of personal privacy and dignity, then men and women are in an area where God makes His displeasure known in radical terms. Keep this in mind when you become aware of the distasteful "gutter" type of jokes regarding the intimacies of life bandied about both in social gatherings and on radio and television. The second theme in the passage concerns honesty. The great safeguard is in not even having in your possession false weights. That way you keep out of temptation's way. Dishonest dealings with others simply and swiftly undermine the whole of society, and (do not forget this) bring us into the realm of the judgment of God. The wider application of v.13-16 concerns all we mean by exploitation, taking advantage, and manipulating people for our own ends. The prophets of the Old Testament were not slow to speak about this matter of honest trading, as Ezek. 45:9-12; Amos 8:4-8; Micah 6:6-15 make plain. Morality in the Bible is not a haphazard game with adjustable rules and with one man's opinion held to be as good as another's. There are objective rules of right and wrong and God has spoken them. We should do His will because it pleases Him and we love Him. But at times we must do certain things and refrain from others because God has declared that there are consequences that cannot be evaded.

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25:11-19

The third lesson in the passage concerns the judgment of the Amalekites and we must not deal with this, as some do, by setting Old Testament vengeance over against New Testament forgiveness. The issue here is far deeper than a mere personal or national issue. Go back to Ex. 17:8-16 and see that Amalek was a kingdom under the curse of God. Read also 1 Sam. 15:1-3 and see that Amalek was a nation that was relentless in its persecution of Israel and persistent in its cruelty. It seems that Amalek harried Israel in her journeys, always attacking the weakest in Israel and attacking Israel when she was weakest. The issue then is not personal or national, but one concerning the principalities and powers of the world that are set for ever to militate against God and His kingdom. We must never forget that this is the dimension of the conflict we are engaged in (Eph. 6:10ff) because if we do forget we will become unduly preoccupied with, and bitter towards, mere men failing to see them as dupes and servants of the Devil. But at the same time we must recognise that men and nations do in fact choose deliberately to take their stand against God. They will not change or repent and, however long they may seem to continue to operate with apparent impunity, their day of judgment will come in due time (Dent. 32:35). The vivid imagery of the Book of Revelation tells us plainly that the end of the kingdom of evil is final and total judgment. Once we have seen sin in its hellish, impenitent, anti-God spirit, refusing to repent no matter how stringent the judgments that come upon it, we will begin to understand and be realistic about judgment (Rev. 9:20-21;16:9, 11).

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26:1-11

This chapter brings us to the end of the detailed exposition of the Law in its application to the life of the people of God. Here we have a ritual that emphasises an acknowledgment by the people that all they have and all they are is from God's goodness and blessing. This is something we need to be reminded of constantly and it is a corrective to pride and an inspiration of gratitude (1 Cor. 4:7). We forget that apart from God's grace and the working of His Spirit within us we would be left as miserable victims of our fallen natures in all their disintegrative potential. Even spiritual achievement gives no ground for pride.

"And every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness,

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Are His alone." (Auber)

When we think like this we begin to realise that in Deuteronomy, while there are many times that God seems to stand over against us saying no to our deepest desires and hungers, in fact God is for us (Rom. 8:31) in glorious, gracious, dynamic salvation whereby we are able to rise above both heredity and circumstances and begin to live instead of merely struggling to exist. We begin to see that happiness and holiness are inseparable. We begin also to see that we have a God who plans good for us and who is leading us forward into the possession of it. This helps us to keep the various elements of life and experience in perspective and to interpret them in a positive way, recognising that in salvation all is positive and progressive, even if at the time it seems only harrowing and futile. Note carefully the first word in the chapter. It is "when" not "if". There is no uncertainty. God is for us not against us.

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26:1-11

The future is ours because it is God's and the blessings in store are also ours because they are God's to give. That seems to be the emphasis of v.1-4, and these words are being spoken to a people who had already failed miserably many times. God's grace is greater than all our failures put together. These firstfruits are not so much a token of Israel's giving to God but of God's giving to Israel. Is it not amazing how we tend to concentrate on our own efforts and acts of sanctification? But the firstfruits are not only a token of what we have tasted of God's goodness but a testimony to and a foretaste of all that is to come. We are, in Christ, men and women of the future, and we do well to consider what God has planned for us, even though it will always be better than we can possibly imagine (1 Cor. 2:9). The second half of the passage (5-11) is a testimony which recognises that all we are and have we owe to God alone. It is good for us to look back and to remember what we were and what we were becoming before God, in His grace, laid hold on us. The poet Arnold refers to man as "A foiled circuitous wanderer" and Tennyson describes him as a frustrated seeker who says,

"Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move."

Paul in Eph. 2:12 states it more searchingly when he speaks of sinners being Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless and Godless. The Psalmist brings it all into focus when he speaks of being taken by God from a pit and set on a rock with a new song and a new way established (Ps. 40:1-3). There is security as well as relief. We do well to be very grateful, and to show it.

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26:12-15

Note how this subject of tithing has been introduced by the immediately preceding verses which speak of worship and rejoicing (10-11). The only way to deal with the practicalities of money, and the giving of it to God, is in an attitude of reverence that bows before God, and with a happy heart that is eager to bless God for all His goodness. This delivers the matter of Christian giving from the mean, self-centred, legalistic spirit of the Pharisee in Lk. 18:9ff. It points us in the direction of 2 Cor. Chapters 8-9 where Paul deals comprehensively with the subject without actually mentioning money. The Lord loves a cheerful (literally "hilarious") giver (2 Cor. 9:7), not least because that attitude to sacrificial giving indicates a generous spirit in the heart. There are Christians whose lives are sadly inhibited because they have never really done a truly generous act in their whole lives. It is not a matter of giving to God what we can afford (2 Sam. 24:24) but of giving freely to God what is His by right. In v.13a the emphasis is simply that "I have not kept for myself what is God's by right." It is all too easy to calculate all the various "charges" on our income and then to give God a portion of what remains. The prophet Malachi seems to describe this as robbing God (Mal. 3:6-12). The commentaries seem to debate as to whether there were in fact three different tithes to be given (that makes us gasp) or whether the tithe was allocated differently every third year. This is not the place for a detailed discussion. Nor should we allow this subject to

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become a basis for considering or criticising what other people do. Remember Jesus' words in Lk. 21:1-4. We must deal with the God who has been so good and generous to us. It is really very simple.

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26:16-19

We have here two testimonies, introduced by the exhortation in v.16, that there should be no half-heartedness in keeping the terms of the covenant set out in these long chapters of Deuteronomy. Putting heart and soul into something does not call for extremism, emotionalism, or false enthusiasm. It is a healthy attitude that recognises that whatever we are in as God's people is worthy of the best that can be given. This is seen in the New Testament in the call to do every thing as unto the Lord (Col. 3:17; 1 Cor.10:31). The language in v.17-19 is reminiscent of a marriage ceremony in which vows of love and loyalty are pledged one to the other. Go back to Deut. 7:7-8 and see that the first move came from God. Again this is echoed in the New Testament where it is made plain that God commended His love to us in that while we were still sinners, with nothing to commend us, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:6-8). It is in the light of what God has done, giving us life from the dead and making us a people with hope and destiny (1 Pet.1:3-6; 2:9-10), that we give our testimony to the fact that we have chosen God and have answered His call of grace to be His people. How often we need to reaffirm our vows, Sunday by Sunday and Communion Service after service. It is a confirmation to ourselves and a testimony to others that we are God's people. But then look at the often repeated affirmation from the God of salvation. He has chosen us and pledged Himself to bless, establish and prosper us. Think of it: we are chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world and are destined for glory and honour at Christ's coming (Eph. 1:3-14; Rom. 8:1, 17-18, 28-39). Think last of all of the fact that God, having chosen us, is not ashamed of us (Heb. 11:16). He wants us, and He wants to be proud of us, and He will stay faithful to His vows of love and loyalty. Read Hosea 11:7-9 and be astonished at the love of God.

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27:1-10

Having regard to the length of time we have spent studying Deuteronomy we are not disposed to go into the many details raised in this chapter. The story in Joshua 4:15-24 tells of Israel crossing Jordan at Gilgal which was a considerable distance from Mt. Ebal, much further north. The word "when" (2) is a general term signifying, as in v.4, that the river has been crossed and there is no going back. The people knew and needed to remind themselves that things could never be the same as in the past. In a very real sense God had made all things new, and in His salvation they now lived a new life "on the victory side" (Rev. 21:5; 2 Cor. 5:17). This monument was to be plastered and the words of the law written on it, whether in summary or detailed form we cannot say. Since the people were then to journey on this must be thought of as an act of testimony or affirmation rather than one of warning or challenge. They would leave the monument behind them, but they would remember. No doubt others who passed that way later would read and ponder. It is not clear whether these stones were set up near Jordan or carried on to Mt. Ebal, and set up there on the lower slopes or carried to the peak of the mountain (3084 ft.). Think of the inscription on the top of Snowdon in North Wales (3560 ft.). It is written in four languages: "Wanderer, stop a while and think of the marvellous works of God and of your short passage on Earth." It makes you think, and this is exactly what these memorials are meant to do. In like manner the Lord's Table and the preaching of the Word are meant to remind us of who we are, what we are for, where we are going and what we owe to the God of our salvation.

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27:1-10

The altar of unhewn stones seems to speak of a salvation that owes nothing at all to the efforts of man but is from beginning to end the work of God in His grace. But note how reference to the altar is set firmly between two references to the word written clear and plain (3, 8). This is a necessary caution because there are still those who would seek to create a church and a fellowship by means of the sacraments without the Word of God. Note also how the life of the people of God, guided and undergirded by Word and Sacrament, is also described clearly as a life of obedience (10). No amount of Biblical knowledge or

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devotional activity, however sound and reverent, can take the place of obedience. Jesus said it so plainly, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." (John 14:15) But do not lose sight of the fact that the altar speaks not only of worship but of fellowship, that is, fellowship with God and in consequence, fellowship with each other. This is the thrill of being one of the people of God. It is not only for service but for all the rich delight and benefit of belonging to a holy and happy family (1 John 1:7; Eph. 2:12-13, 18-19). But of course, we must see to it that we behave as members of the royal family of God. If we don't, we bring dishonour on the family name and the Father is spoken of unworthily (Ezek. 36:23 ; Rom.2:24). All that we have been saying emphasises that man's chief end is indeed to glorify God. But we must not forget that we are also to enjoy Him with rejoicing (7). Read Psalm 16:8-9,11; 34:1-8; 126:1-3). We have good cause to rejoice.

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27:11-26

Note how in v.2, 4 and 12, the emphasis is on the future. Everything about the people and work of God has this dominant and assured note. In Christ we are people of destiny, and that destiny is sure (1 Pet. 1:3-5). But there is responsibility as well as thrill, as the symbolism here indicates. "The space between Ebal and its neighbour Gerizim, south of the vale (of Shechem) provides a natural amphitheatre with wonderful acoustic properties." (New Bible Dictionary). Reference has already been made to this procedure of blessing and cursing in Deut. 11:26-32 and now the matter is given specific detail. It appears that six tribes were set on either mountain slope and the priests probably addressed the people alternately in the form of "Blessed is the man that and, Cursed is the man that". The people in turn would signify their assent by the word, "Amen". In this passage only the cursings are detailed, twelve in number, and this suggests some formalising of the precepts of the Law for the particular occasion. Note the downward trend in the various curses. They begin with reference to spiritual disobedience, then family disorder, then social disorder, then personal moral uncleanness, then the corruption of justice and finally spiritual intractability (26). The last verse highlights the spirit of disobedience that motivates fallen human nature (Eph. 2:1-3). We will never cope with Christian life and service unless we recognise this spirit of perversity, not least in our own hearts (Rom.1.32). We must recognise also the consequences that fall on the whole of society because of man's evil (Eph. 5:3-6; Col. 3:5-7).

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28:1-14

This is the kind of passage to make you gasp. It is so full of promises and possibilities and it focuses our thoughts and hearts on the God who is able to do far more abundantly than all we can ever ask or think (Eph. 3:20). It is a testimony to the sheer abundance of the things God has prepared for them that love Him (1 Cor. 2:9). When will we truly believe in the goodness of the God who is eager to bless His people? What a difference it would make to our lives, and certainly to our families and friends, if we spent more time counting our blessings than reciting our complaints. The blessings are more than can be numbered and they are in respect of every area of life and personality (Ps.40:5). The promises are totally realistic, not least in the recognition that there is an enemy (7) who will always seek to steal our blessings or frustrate our enjoyment of them. But the enemy is not a real problem, because the Lord is his conqueror. When will we really believe that the Devil is a defeated foe? The whole of life for the individual and the community will be blessed by God when obedience is the motivation of the people. International standing, social welfare, agricultural economy, personal and family intimacies, business and travel will all be enriched by God, and it will be manifest that this is a people whose God is the Lord (Ps. 33:12) and whose God is smiling on them. There is never any need for the children of God to go the way of the world when the riches of God's grace are so freely offered and bestowed (Eph.1:7-8). The tragedy is that it is often the enjoyment of God's blessing that draws the heart away in forgetfulness of God the giver.

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28:15-46

We do not propose to go into great detail in considering the very long list of "curses" that are tabulated as the direct consequence of spiritual and moral disobedience (15). Human nature being what it is, fallen and disordered and essentially self-centred, will always try to blame others for the unpleasant consequences of its actions. This is how it was in Gen. 3:12 13. The woman blamed the man, and the man blamed the woman whom God had given him, thereby passing the blame to God. When life presses in on us in an unpleasant way we tend to interpret circumstances in terms of political, economic and social factors, so that we sympathise with ourselves rather than examine ourselves. What is being brought home to the people of Israel here, at a critical juncture in life as the future opens up before them, is that being right with God and doing right by His laws is of the very essence of ordered life and prosperity. When everything goes wrong (and it is every aspect of life and experience that is being described) we have to look for the explanation in the spiritual realm. We make allowances for the psychological legacies of the past, the social and material complications each generation inherits. Of course we must recognise at times the deliberate work of Satan who introduces disorder to the human situation and who is ever trying to destroy the peace of the people of God. But since God is a God of glorious salvation no one needs to be a victim of heredity or circumstances. There is victory and life in Christ and the promise that sin will not have dominion over us (Rom. 6:14). But that victory and deliverance hinge on the obedience of faith, and without that everything goes wrong.

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28:15-46

Select certain verses simply to highlight some of the practical lessons that have to be learned. Whether it is the life of the individual or that of the nation we are shown disorder on every level. Nothing that is tried works out and every scheme launched to benefit the situation ends in confusion and frustration (20). What a lesson to a church that has become desperate in its invention of "schemes" to revive the flagging fortunes of a moribund ecclesiastical establishment that is slowly grinding to a halt with financial limitation and crumbling buildings. Note how the emphasis is on the activity of the Lord. What is happening is not accidental. By strong discipline God is seeking to turn His people back to Himself, to spiritual priorities and to obedience. In v.25 the "anti-God" forces are carrying everything before them and protests by the "righteous" fail to stop the advance. No longer is the church turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6). It seems rather that the world is scattering the church. In v.28- 29 we are told of a terrible confusion of thought and attitude in which people cannot see what is happening nor how their own attitudes are making things worse and worse. That is a picture of the obsessive grasping for more and more of everything with less and less responsibility that is the blight of modern industrial relations. But people cannot see nor do they want to see. Their blindness is a judgment from God. Some commentators see in these verses a reference to the consequences of wholesale breaking of the laws of sexual behaviour, and that certainly has introduced confusion into society. When there is no vision the people cast off restraint and perish (Prov. 29:18 AV). That is when the accounts come in for payment.

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28:47-57

This passage details in a grim way the distress and degradation of a once proud nation. If we look back to v.43- 44 we see reference to how the aliens within the land prosper and become more powerful than the resident population who are so proud of their lineage. Is this a reference to racial tensions that are becoming an increasingly explosive element in our own society? In v.41 the natural supply of qualified people for the nation's economy would disappear to other lands. But none of this need have happened to Israel, although Old Testament history testifies that it did happen. They had been blessed with the riches of God's goodness but sat lightly to the God who had given them all they had and made them all they were (47). What a challenging word this is to congregations that have been signally blessed by God! What a temptation there is to sit lightly to spiritual responsibility. What a temptation there is to think that what happened to others will not happen to us. Israel never thought the land would be over-run and Jerusalem destroyed but it happened. There is ground for thinking of v.47- 48 in terms of exchanging the easy yoke

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of God for the harsh iron yoke of sin that pays grim wages (Matt.11:28-30; Rom.6:20-23). The whole of this passage speaks of a terrible reversal of standards of life and behaviour, and a degradation of humanity to the level of ravenous animals. This of course actually happened in Israel's history as 2 Kings 6:24-31 makes plain. But are we not living in similar circumstances? Is there not a devaluing of life? Is there not a ruthless devouring of each other and a heartless refusing to share with the needy? Are not mugging, assault, brutality, rape, murder and bestiality the marks of modern society? This is the way a nation has chosen to go, and God is not in the thoughts of those who seek to bring forward political remedies.

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28:58-68

This passage summarises all that has gone before. It also foretells the sad story of Israel's history right on through the downfall of the nation, its being taken into captivity in Babylon, its dispersal after its rejection of Christ its King, and indeed it foreshadows every terrible persecution of the Jews right down to the present day. "The idea developed in these verses is that, since Israel has broken the covenant, Yahweh will abolish all the benefits about which she had boasted (6:21-23; 26:5-9)." (Thompson) There is a picture of Israel being sent back to the miserable life of bondage in Egypt from which she had been delivered at the beginning. It is indeed a terrible reversal. There are not only the inescapable facts of experience, there is also the inward agony of hopelessness and futility (67). But v.68 describes the ultimate humiliation. They are reduced to offering themselves for sale as slaves but no-one is prepared to buy them. They are in every sense rejected. This is the consequence of backsliding and spiritual disobedience. And it is God who speaks and God who brings it to pass. It is the same God who speaks in Hosea 11:7-9 in the most amazing love, promising to heal the backsliding of His people, not because they deserve it but because of the depth of His love which will not let them go. All the grim things we are reading are designed to bring us back closer to God, and to keep us there. We can sum up our reaction in the words of William Cowper's hymn which we will make our meditation for tomorrow.

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28:1-2, 9-10, 12, 15, 20, 43-44, 47-48, 62

These verses speak of what could have been and what actually was the experience of the people. They speak not only of losing God's blessing but of forfeiting His service and being displaced by others. Such were the words of Jesus to the leaders of the people in Matt. 21:43. Are sin and disobedience ever worth it?

"O for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame,
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!

Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His word?

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill.

Return, O Holy Dove! return,
Sweet messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,
And drove Thee from my breast.

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The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.

So shall my walk be close with God,
Calm and serene my frame;
So purer light shall mark the road
That leads me to the Lamb." (Cowper)

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29:1-9

It is difficult to decide whether v.1 is the conclusion of the previous section or the beginning of this one, the third address of Moses to the people (l: 1 ;4:44: 29:2). If it refers back to previous chapters then the emphasis is on the words of the covenant God made with the people. Then at v.2 Moses began to recite all the actions of this same God in respect of His chosen people. They were now standing in the land of Moab, on the threshold of Canaan, about to move forward into a new stage of life and work. It was a good time to remember the past and to realise that the most tremendous thing that could happen to any people is to be laid hold on by God, given a name and a destiny, and be drawn into God's scheme of things for the future. The time had come for a new dedication and so Moses took them right back to the beginning of their salvation experience, reminding them of their deliverance at the time of the Exodus. They were a redeemed, emancipated, liberated people who owed all they were to the grace of God. They were a people for his own possession (1 Pet. 2:9-10; Exod 19:1-5; Duet. 14:2). They were reminded that their deliverance involved solemn judgments on Egypt as the "powers of the world" were broken. But this people, who had seen and lived through so many tokens and experiences of God's judgment and mercy, and who had received so much of God's favour and blessing were still insensitive to their privilege (4). They had not yet grasped that their privilege had brought them responsibility, nor that their own experience had to be set into the context of God's far greater and more extensive purposes. That is enough for us to think of today.

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29:1-9

It is good to consider the difference between listening to the Word of God and hearing what God is saying. Why were the people so lacking in understanding (4)? It was their disobedience and chronic self-centredness. Like the man with the muckrake in Bunyan's Pilgrims Progress they were often so pre-occupied with the debris of their own immediate situation that they failed to look up and be aware of the crown of glorious possibilities offered to them. There is a solemn warning about this in Hebrews 4:1-2. Of course, we are here into the realm of Satan's activity (2 Cor. 4:4) and of God's mysterious purposes of election (Rom.11:11, 25). But the emphasis here in Moses' words concerns the responsibility of the people to answer God's goodness, and he reminds them of the forty years of wandering in the wilderness which were the result of their fathers' disobedience. Moses is speaking to the new generation who, although they would have known the stories of the past, had not experienced as their parents had the wonder of God's miraculous provision and His gracious forbearance. This is the problem of some young Christians who have been converted to Christ in the context of a living established Biblical church. They have no idea of the costly struggle of those who fought and suffered to establish Christ's claims in a church that had been spiritually dead for years. Certainly there were few in Israel who appreciated the debt they owed to Moses' ministry and leadership. God's provision and deliverances were no figment of the imagination. They were real.

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29:10-15

The meaning of this passage is echoed in the formal words used in churches on various significant occasions such as ordination of ministers and elders, baptisms, admission of new members by profession

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of faith and marriages. The assembled company are addressed, "We are gathered here in the presence of God in order that we might ..." The purpose and intention having been stated, and the terms of God's covenant having been made plain, the people are called to stand for a solemn act of commitment, entering into the sworn covenant with its sanctions and blessings. Note that it is God's covenant. He initiates it, makes it and seals it in His sovereign free grace. He wants this people to be His people and He is not ashamed to be known as their God (Heb. 11:16). But note how this call to decision and commitment comes to the people only after all the implications of it have been spelled out in detail. There is a lesson here for modern evangelism which all too often calls for decisions on the basis of the minimum statement of the gospel. This is one reason why there are so many people whose only claim to conversion is their own action in making a decision (sometimes very vague) at some point in their experience. Note how all embracing the covenant is. All classes, including the most humble workers, the women and children, the aliens or strangers and those not present, which may refer to the children not yet born (15 cf.v22). All are included in the promise of blessing and the privilege of being called the people of God. This does not mean all were then or subsequently brought to saving faith. But it does mean all were blessed with hope and possibility. We underestimate God, and we tend to limit the operations of His grace to what we see, know and understand.

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29:16-21

The warning here seems to be against hypocrisy and the false spiritual confidence that goes hand in hand with it. It applies to those who can speak "the language of Zion", make all the appropriate responses at the right time, and go to all the recognised places but whose hearts and lives are not right with God (19).

Such were the Pharisees who were so meticulous about small, spiritual technicalities and yet ignored the important things, and whose lives were a hindrance to the work of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 23: 1-7,14-15). Such people are a menace to themselves and to all they come in contact with (19b). But God will not ignore such people and their baneful influence and He will take it upon Himself to single out, to expose and to deal with them as He did, for example, with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). In v.16-18 Moses warns the people not to be seduced away by the attractions of the gods of the nations no matter how much they seem to promise fulfilment. This warning seems to be repeated in Rom. 12:1-2 where we are warned not to be squeezed into the mould of the world's thinking, and in 1 John 2:15-17 where we are warned against the powerful enticements the world can and does offer. There is a choice to be made which Moses himself made, choosing rather to suffer with the people of God than enjoy the temporary pleasures of sin (Heb.11:24-25). There are pleasures as well as follies in sin, but in due time the account comes in and the price is high. The way of the transgressor is hard (Prov. 13:15 AV). There is finally a warning against the root of bitterness that Heb. 12:15 speaks of. To be adrift from God sours the soul and infects everyone we touch.

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29:22-29

This final passage looks into the future to describe the desolation that comes when a land is judged (23). It speaks of the coming generations of Israelites and others asking the awesome question, "Why has this happened; why has God acted in such a way?" The answer is spelled out in uncompromising terms (25-28). Cause and consequence are inescapable and both individuals and nations have to live with the harvest of the seed they themselves have sown. Perhaps only those who have travelled through it can understand the terrible desolation and the salty wastes of the area around the Dead Sea and understand the tremendous work involved in channeling underground water before there is any hope of growing anything. Small oases of grass and trees are a veritable miracle. Apply the picture in spiritual terms and you have a nation that has dried up; its life in relation to God is withered so that in vast tracts for long periods there is not a single green sprout of spiritual life. In that situation the ground of men's hearts grows harder and harder and the prophetic call to break up the fallow ground (Hos.10:12 more and more costly to obey. How we need to face the question, "What are we doing to the church and the nation?" in these days of spiritual drifting. It is plain from our passage that the world watches the church and draws conclusions from her experience. What we have here in the passage is very different from the gloriously

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hopeful verses in Zech. 8:20-23 where we see people longing to go with the people of God because it is so obvious God is with them.

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29:29

In all these studies we are being taught not only to listen to and learn from the Word of God as it is spoken but to discern the hand of God in the on-going affairs of nations, communities, churches and individuals. It is only faith that can do this, and only faith will have the courage to declare (but not hastily or harshly) that God's judgments are operating on the face of the earth. Unbelief insists on interpreting everything in materialistic terms rather than moral terms; in sociological and political terms rather than in spiritual terms. Even when the most alarming disasters happen and the most appalling crimes against humanity are committed there is an almost total refusal to consider the activity of God in judgment. We do not seem to believe as the ancients did that there are such things as national sins and that we, as believers, in our intercessions must identify with the nation as Daniel did (Dan. 9:1-11ff). There is no contracting out. There is no easy escapism into irresponsible pietism. There is a God to reckon on and we must prepare to meet Him. This was the carefully reasoned argument of Amos 4:6ff. We do not and cannot ever understand fully the ways of God in judgment or in mercy for His ways are past finding out (Rom, 11:33) and His ways are higher than ours (Isa. 55:8-9. There are many things we do not need to know and have no right to know or to speculate about (Acts 1:6-7). But there are things revealed in plainest of terms in God's word of gracious Law so that we might obey them and walk with God in His blessing. It is by faith that we will understand (Heb. 11:3) and learn that man cannot live by bread alone (Matt. 4:4).

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30:1-10

These studies in Deuteronomy have taught us how much we need to learn what God is like and how much we must learn to respond to what we are taught of His ways and working. We must learn to take God at His word and allow Him to bless us. Our reluctance to do this is a work of Satan, as it was in Eden where God's integrity and His motives were questioned. God's laws, prohibitions, requirements and providences, far from denying us our rightful entitlements to life are together working to lead us ever more fully into God's blessing. We must refuse to think of God as waiting for us to fall so that He can smite us. That is a lie and a distortion from the Devil. God is the God who gave His Son and who gives us all things in His Son (John 3:16; Rom. 8:32). Everything God does with us is designed to bring us to Himself as these verses make plain. Even when the people were humiliated as a nation and carried away captive and dispersed among the nations God's Word was still one of grace leading them to repentance. But repentance is much more than just being sorry for the mess we have got ourselves into. There is a sorrow that simply anchors us in self-pity and leads nowhere (2 Cor. 7:8-11). The Prodigal must get up and start the journey back to the Father and refuse to be turned aside from his resolve by any or all of the fluctuations of feelings that accompany that painful journey. Going away from God is an easier road than coming back, not least because we are spiritually and morally weakened. But there is a Father's welcome as v.3 makes plain, and it waits for us no matter how far we have been away, how bad we have been nor how long we have waited. What a God we have!

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30.1-10

Along with this passage read the story of the Father of the Prodigal in Luke 15:11ff, the only place where God is portrayed as being in a hurry. Read also the story of the Good Shepherd in Lk. 15:3-7, because we are told in Deuteronomy of the God who gathers His wandering ones from afar (4). What a word this is to those who feel they are off the rails and far away! The very fact that you are beginning to grieve and long to be right is a token that God by His Spirit is working in your heart. Do not grieve or resist the Spirit, because His desire and function is to bring you back to where you belong. Read Psalm 139: 1-12, 23-24 and think much of the right hand of God's salvation that holds you and works for you. There is so much in this passage about the God who desires to bless His people richly. Together with all the promises of

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blessing and abundance there is the promise of a new heart, "a heart in every thought renewed, and full of love divine" (Wesley), a heart that is sweetly capable of responding truly to the prior love of God. Read Ezek. 11: 19-20; 36:24-32. The circumcision of heart spoken of is not an outward religious formality but an inward work of God's grace, a new birth and a new life. It is a gospel promise and we have to grasp the glorious truth that in Christ we are new creatures, totally new (2 Cor. 5:17) and the life we live is none other than the total, risen, victorious life of Christ in us by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 2:20). We are partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) and God Himself takes the enemy to task on our behalf. There is enough in all this to keep us studying for days.

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30:11-14

This passage should make us think at once about Paul's use of it in Rom. 10:5-13 in the context of urging us to believe what God has said and to rest in what God has done. This is the source of power given to enable sinners to be in Christ, by faith, what God calls them to be. What God asks, He gives; and what He commands He enables His people to do. That is why Moses says that this commandment of obedience unto life is not beyond our understanding nor is it too hard, nor is it too far off or unattainable. It is not inaccessible, as if we had to fight and struggle our way to Heaven to bring it down. Neither is it barricaded behind some insurmountable barrier as if we had to cross the wide seas to gain it. We do not stand helpless and hopeless as if truth was concealed in some deep mine of philosophy which only mighty intellects could plumb. The Word is near, right beside us, and its inherent power, as well as its command and demand, is available for us. God has said so. God has come near. God has acted. Salvation is an accomplished and given fact. It is ours in Christ by faith. The power is all there, ready and available. The Word, all that God is, has said, and has done, has been made flesh and dwells among us. Salvation is as near as that, and in a form that need not frighten us. The last six words in today's passage are a great and encouraging affirmation to all who are in Christ. You *can* do it. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you (Phil. 4:13). We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Rom. 8:37). That is the gospel.

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30:15-20

Possibilities are glorious and indeed limitless in the Gospel by the power that works within us (Eph. 1:19ff.). But all the power in the world is vain unless it is laid hold on and used. This is what is now laid before the people in plain language that has nothing pressurised about it. It is a simple straightforward choice which they must make. One way forward will be blessing without measure, the other way will be loss and desolation, also without measure. Just as a prodigal may choose to leave the father's home, fellowship and service, so may Israel choose to walk the broad road that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13-14). What they must see is that they would be turning away, not from law and legal demands, but from love and grace. Look well at v.16 which speaks of obeying, loving, walking and keeping. This is the way of life, increase and blessing. Now, if we are to choose to do otherwise, we do well to consider and calculate the consequences which are spoken of in v.18. There is something inconsistent, illogical and almost insane in choosing to go away from God, but people do it. And when wilfulness in its blindness and heat is determined, there is nothing that can be done, as the Father in the story of the prodigal knew full well. That is why he let his son go to the far country and, apparently, did not follow him to plead. It would have been pointless. Some people only learn the hard way. Some people never learn. That is the truth behind Jesus' sorrow and tears over Jerusalem when He said, "How often I would have gathered you ... but you would not." (Matt. 23:37-38). In v.20 holding fast seems to suggest bonds of love such as those that make husband and wife hold faithfully to each other. It is all about love. And we love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:10 19).

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31:1-6

It is clear that the second giving of the Law (Deuteronomy) is virtually finished. It is also clear, to Moses at least, that his life and ministry are virtually over, something already indicated in 1:37-38 and 3:23-29.

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There is a quiet dignity in Moses at the end of forty years of ministry and leadership for he recognises and accepts not only his God-given leadership but also the God-ordained limitation of it, a limitation that cannot be separated from his own spiritual failure. There is no suggestion at all in Moses that the work of God and the future blessing and achievement of the people of God would in any way be narrowed down by his departure. Not even the greatest and godliest of men, no matter how richly they have been blessed and made a blessing, are indispensable. Everything about Moses here looks to the future and he recognises it as God's future, for which the past decades and the more immediate ministry of the Word had been a necessary preparation. Note how Moses speaks first about his natural and human limitation (2a). He has no desire to be a burden to the work. Then he states so clearly that the barrier is God's specific command (Num. 20:10-13; 27:12-14). There is a solemn lesson here. Our spiritual failures bring distress and pain to our lives and we grieve because we have grieved God. There is forgiveness with God and we must claim it and rest in it. But there can be hindrance to and limitation of our own usefulness to God and consequently of our usefulness in the blessing of others. This is a steep price to pay for sin. Joshua learned the lesson from his spiritual father and colleague Moses and this is evident in Joshua 3:5. This is the message to us as we set ourselves to go into the future with God: sanctify yourselves.

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31:7-8

There is a similarity between the charges given to the people and those to Joshua. There is a great spirit of confidence in God and a great God-centredness in them. Note first the emphasis on the fact that God has spoken (2b). It is a word of instruction, inspiration, correction, encouragement and challenge. It is a word of commitment from God concerning His intentions and His covenanted presence. It is a word described in the New Testament in terms of great and precious promises (2 Pet. 1:4) and the Word by which faith is created and nurtured (Rom. 10:17). It is the Word that constantly affirms the utter dependability of God who cannot lie and who is to be trusted, come what may (Heb. 6:18). It is the Word that ever seeks to stir and strengthen our confident hope regarding the outcome of all our life and service. He will not fail (7-8). What God has begun He will bring to completeness (Phil. 1:6). The God who called us is faithful and He will do what He says (1 Thess. 5:24). Right through these opening eight verses there is an awareness in Moses of how the enemy of souls always seeks to instil fear and doubt and thus to paralyse action by diminishing faith. That is why there is such an emphasis here on getting our eyes on to God. It is His works; His power that will accomplish it; and His presence that will go with His people. Joshua needed this assurance greatly as is evidenced by God's personal confirmation of it in Josh. 1:1-9; 5:13-15. How we need to be reminded that we are not in charge. God is in charge. That is our peace and confidence.

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31:9-13

The motto of our city is "Let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of His word and the praising of His name." Sadly it is in practice reduced to "Let Glasgow flourish." Bereft of the "God" emphasis there seems no valid reason why a godless city here or anywhere else should flourish. But it is so easy to let great spiritual heritage slip away from us. That is the warning in Heb.2:1, and it is emphasised in Ps.127:1. The essence of Moses' command here is that the Word of God should be seen to be the centre of the life and worship of the people of God. It is not to be given an "honorary" place, revered and nothing more. It is to be read, spoken, heard and obeyed from generation to generation. It is failure to do this that has resulted in a generation growing up who are essentially ignorant pagans. The ignorance of the Bible inside the church, let alone outside it, is frightening, and we are not surprised by the proliferation of false and evil sects which seduce the people away into falsehood. We need to be under the influence of the Word of God not only for instruction in righteousness and for knowledge of salvation (2 Tim.3:14-17) but in order that our patterns of thought might be conformed to Scripture and not to the mould and categories of the world (Rom.12:1-2). Consider Neh.8:1-12 to see the Word of God in relation to building a work of God. Then consider Daniel 9:1-19 to see the relation between the Word of God and the prayers of the people. This was Moses' emphatic note as he prepared the people for the future.

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31:14-15

There is something very moving about this picture of a private meeting of Moses and Joshua with God. The generality of the people were left in no doubt about what was happening, for the presence of God was visibly marked by the pillar of cloud. We wonder what the "congregation" thought about this particular "happening". Perhaps they had a "leave it to the ministers" attitude. Perhaps they prayed for the two men of God on whom such a burden of spiritual responsibility lay. This commissioning was in the presence of the glory of God and so was Moses' retirement. It must be a solemn moment when you know your life and work are done. No doubt there would be regrets and a wish that you had been a better servant of God. It was at the end of his life of mighty ministry that Paul felt himself the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). But at the same time he spoke with confidence in 2 Tim.4:7-8. We need to note here that Moses ended his days still entrusted with holy service for the people. He was not a reject! Note also that Joshua, being then commissioned, was by no means a novice. He had been by the side of Moses for a long time and he had proved himself in many ways (Ex. 17:8ff; 24:13). He was a man who was ready when the time came. We never know when a crisis of spiritual responsibility may come upon us. We need to be ready. Watch and pray. Things are changing very rapidly in both church and nation. The enemy is busy sowing many tares among the wheat (Matt.13:24-30). But God does not leave Himself without a witness (Acts 4:17AV). Who knows but that we are being prepared for such a time as this when faith must be ready to stand, act, and if need be die (Esther 4:14).

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31:16-23

Set in the context of Joshua's commissioning (14-15, 23) we have God's solemn words about the developments of coming days; days of deep and terrible backsliding on the part of a people who had been both disciplined and blessed. Moses was commissioned to write a song that would become part of Israel's life and worship. If we assume Joshua was present and hearing God's words to Moses, then it must have been a most disturbing experience for him. In the earlier verses of this chapter there seem to be glorious promises of blessing and progress, but now warnings of disaster. Does this mean that Joshua's work was doomed to failure before it started? No! But it was not long before Joshua discovered that he was by no means leading a people who were all "saints" (Josh. 7:1-5) and in time of reverse they collapsed very quickly. However, it was not during the "heady" days of crusade, activity and conquest that the danger came. It was later, when success had been gained and the work established, that the people "lost the place" and became careless and presumptuous. God was therefore acting in anticipation of their folly because, after all, God knows human hearts only too well. He recognises that when reverses come the people will blame God for failing them (17-18). But will they ask why God is not blessing them? Does our nation now ask why God is a stranger in the land (Jer. 14: 8)? Does the church ask why there is so little evidence of saving power in its life and so little impact on the nation? Sometimes people refuse to ask the right questions because they do not want the answers which God has already given. Read v.20 and see how complacency and unfaithfulness on the spiritual level are given as the explanation. Go to the gospels and read Jesus' answer regarding the powerlessness of the disciples (Mk.9:29). God will not bless an unfaithful people.

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31:24-30

Some might suggest that it was unsound psychologically at such a critical time to speak so plainly to the people about their forthcoming backsliding. But that is not so. People (including ministers) tend to be "high" and enthusiastic at a new beginning, especially when it is also a time of a new leader. That being so they need to be reminded that they do not become saints overnight. Soon they would be mourning for Moses and in later generations they would boast about him. But now they needed to be reminded that times without number they were a people who refused their leader's guidance, who broke his heart, and who brought him near to the point of resignation. Moses was aware that there were people there before him who would begin to backslide almost as soon as his funeral service was over. They had been kept right, not by loyalty to God but by Moses' personal influence. But at the same time Moses would be fully

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aware, as God was aware, that there would be those who would listen to the words of v.26 (about the Law being a testimony against them) and v.29 about the danger of future days. They would take these words to heart in a way that would bring them nearer to God in a true dedication of spirit and preparation of life. Then, every time Moses' great hymn was sung, the Spirit of God would bring the events of this day back to them to remind them, reassure them, and urge them on in faithfulness. This is the realism of faith, and without it we will never cope with what life brings. We must always be getting ready for the future, putting away what is past (successes as well as sins) and setting our hearts on what is to come (Phil.. 3:12-15; Heb:12:1-2).

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32:1-4

The hymnology of the church is of great importance, carrying the people forward with a sense of history and continuity. This is why both words and music must be worthy, because when either or both are merely products of or a reflection of a passing stage in human experience, then hymnology becomes a distraction rather than a means of grace. Some feel that instrumental music should have no place in worship and, considering some contemporary music whose beat is similar to the throb of primitive pagan dances, then they may be right. But unaccompanied singing, when the same few tunes are used over and over again, can become a weary dirge which does nothing to lift the heart. When music in its appeal and performance becomes more important than the congregation's praises; when praise is sung at an unthinking gallop or at a dreary slowness, all sense of God disappears and it is apparent from looking at a congregation that they are merely mouthing words while their thoughts are far away. Some years ago articles were published in an evangelical magazine concerning "The Gospel in Waltz-time" and while many such hymns have good theology in them, the sentiment communicated by the music had more to do with inculcating a nice feeling than stirring the spirit and leading the people into the presence of God for worship. Any who read these words and who have responsibility for conducting services should see to it that the items of praise should together form the context for the ministry of the Word. There is no better way to start a service than with the words, "Let us worship God." That is a definitive statement, and sets the course for all that follows. Words of geniality and affability cannot do this. Words that are facetious and funny can destroy worship.

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32:5-9

Even though it may involve repetition we take this song of Moses section by section to allow its truth to sink into our minds and hearts. This was the emphasis in v.2. The refreshing comes from a consideration of the great God who is the Rock of His people and whose ways are justice and faithfulness (3-4). This is where worship begins, in the presence of God, contemplating His glory and grace (cf. Ps.95:1-7). But in contrast to the constancy of the Rock of their salvation the people have shown themselves to be perverse and crooked. (cf. Phi1.2:15). They have chosen and manifested the spirit of the unbelieving world rather than the spirit and ways of God. By their chosen life-style they have disowned their God (5a). Their dealings with God have been so totally opposite to His dealings with them (6a; cf.Isa.1:2-3). Think back, says Moses. Is it not true that all you are and have has come from your Heavenly Father? Is it not true that the whole story of the past traces the good hand of the living God working grace and salvation? The reference in v.8 seems to be to Gen.10. Among all the nations God's particular people for His own possession was Israel (9;cf. 1 Pet.2:9-10). Apart from God in His free and undeserved grace, Israel and we would be absolutely nothing. Think back to what we were before salvation lifted us. Read Rom.6:20-23; Eph.2:1-6, 12-13, 19; 1 Cor.4:6-7 and then consider words of various Psalms and hymns we sing in church: "He drew me from a fearful pit. ... and on a rock He set my feet..... He put a new song in my mouth.... I was lost but Jesus found me,... All I have needed Thy hand has provided." Can there ever be any justification of our unfaithfulness to God?

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32:10-14

The story seems to go back to Egypt, described as a miserable desert and a frightening wilderness. Everything about God's dealings from then on was marked by generous and tender kindness. The family of a wandering Aramean (26:5) was treated as the apple of God's eye (cf. Zech. 2:8) and cared for with fatherly tenderness (Hos. 11:1, 3-4). God was to them like the eagle who stirs up her young to get them to fly and yet hovers under them to protect and reassure them at their first feeble attempts. If we need to be ejected from the spiritual nest that has got so comfortable that it is making us feeble and unwilling to grow up, then God will throw us out, but by His eternal Spirit we will be upheld. Never forget that God's mighty Spirit is indeed the Comforter who ministers to us when we feel like frightened, homeless orphans (John 14:18). It is God who makes His people ride high, enabling them to forget and to shake free from the inhibitions of the past, giving them a new dignity in an awareness of their destiny. And God gave them, and still wants to give us, the sweetest and finest of food, rich and satisfying. When, oh when will we begin to believe in the immensity of God's kindness, for He gives us all things richly to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17). In His presence is fulness of joy and rivers of pleasures (Ps 16:11; 36:8), all of which we can enjoy so long as we do not allow the gifts, and all the satisfaction they bring, to make us forget the giver. That is exactly what happened, as the next verses go on to say.

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32:15-18

The people so richly blessed forsook the God of kindness and began to devalue all His good gifts. They became careless, unattractive, totally self-centred people and in the process they began to do things of a despicable kind that they never thought they would do. They became insensitive to all spiritual issues. They no longer took into consideration the Rock that gave them life. They forgot God. We may sit at the Lord's Table and by His grace we will be constrained to remember, and to respond afresh to the wonder of His love. We may even sing these words of Joseph Addison:

"When all Thy mercies, O my God!
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I'm lost
In wonder, love, and praise.

Un-numbered comforts to my soul
Thy tender care bestowed,
Before my infant heart conceived
From whom these comforts flowed.

When in the slippery paths of youth
With heedless steps I ran,
Thine arm, unseen, conveyed me safe,
And led me up to man.

When worn with sickness, oft hast Thou
With health renewed my face;
And, when in sins and sorrows sunk,
Revived my soul with grace.

Ten thousand thousand precious gifts
My daily thanks employ;
Nor is the least a cheerful heart,
That tastes those gifts with joy."

Little wonder the Psalmist calls us to use every faculty and capacity to bless the Lord (Ps. 103:1-5ff).

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32:19-27

Moses' hymn is all about God and His dealings with His people and it is expressed in human language rather than strict theological terminology. In this way the realities of experience are interpreted for the people. We have been made to think of the God of faithfulness (1-6) and the God of grace and care (7-14). Now we see the God of grieved and jealous love. In v.19 the word "spurned" (RSV, which has ideas of devaluation in it) is better read as "rejected" or even "condemned". God was deeply vexed and hurt by the treatment He had received from His own sons and daughters and the hiding of His face is as much in sorrow as in anger. Love can be angry, and rightly so, and love does grieve when it sees those who are precious and valuable spoiling themselves, their lives and their usefulness, and so inviting upon themselves disastrous consequences. These unfaithful children were to be left to live with their own choices. But there would be more to their experience than just natural consequences. God was going to arrange the circumstances of their discipline because He hates sin even when, or especially when, it is in the lives of His own children. It is a contradiction of all that He has saved them for. The reference to "not a people" (21) indicates that people and things that would normally have presented no problem to Israel would become quite un-manageable. Everything would go wrong (24). Israel would be shocked to discover just how far wrong and how far down they would go. When famine and hunger afflicted them they would realise just how much they had lost by their foolish sinning, and how much their sinning had involved and hurt those who were in fact innocent (25b). We have considered a solemn theme today. God does at times withdraw His blessing from a congregation or a nation as well as from individuals. Jesus said so (Matt. 21:43).

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32:28-38

The God whom Moses is singing about is also the God of discipline whose actions are designed to bring repentance and restoration. The evil that He brings on His people is not uncontrolled, nor are those who are the instruments of evil free of responsibility. Their time of judgment will come. That is the point of v.35-36. This is a gloriously reassuring truth when all the powers of evil seem to be rampant. And it is, or should be, the refuge of the people of God at all times, whether they are living with the fruits of their own backsliding and unfaithfulness or suffering the costly contradictions of experience when set to do God's will. Read Psalm 73! But look what God says in the opening verses of today's passage. His people were without sense or discernment, not lacking ministry or advice but deaf to it. They failed to ask the right question, which was, "Why is all this happening?" Sound ministry can be wasted (Heb.4:2) and so can the disciplines of experience (Heb.5:14; 12:5-11). There is a time to apply cold logic to spiritual issues and to ask why the seemingly impossible actually happened (30). Here the reason was their backsliding. At other times it is the work of the Devil against those who are set to do God's will. How important it is to read rightly the signs that indicate that all is not well and we are treading in a minefield of possible disaster. We must ask in time, "Where is this route taking me?" (29b). Then, lest His people become demoralised into hopelessness by their situation and by the awareness that they had got themselves into the power of evil, God makes the great statement which we considered at the start of this note. Evil is not stronger than God. There is salvation and hope.

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32:39-43

The essential emphasis of this passage is the sovereignty of God, a doctrine which some feel is stern and grim. Perhaps it is, but in time of need it is the source of glorious comfort. It is not reassuring to sing, "My times are in Thy hand" if the God we look to is limited and at the mercy of human whim and manipulation. But there is no doubt about God. He declares Himself to be supreme (cf. Isa.40:10ff). All the issues of history are in His hand alone. How seldom do we take time to consider such passages as Rom.11:29-36. Yes, they are difficult to understand or even to grasp, because the sweep of their truth is limitless. But we need the exhortation that Moses gave to the people: Let God be God. After all, in a world of political turmoil, with mighty powers threatening all of life, is it not comforting to read of God speaking to the pagan emperor Cyrus in Isa.45: 1-7? It gives a new and hopeful slant to history. Similarly,

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this sovereign God deals with us in a very personal way, cf. Job 5:17-18. All that the song of Moses is saying is that the God who wounds is the heavenly surgeon who uses the sharp knife to cut out the cancer of sin from the life of the people He loves so that they might have a hopeful future (Job 5:17-18). But there is no comfort for the powers of evil in the fact of the sovereignty of God (40ff). The vivid words speak of God who has "loosed the fatal lightning of His terrible swift sword" as He goes marching on. Do not fail to see in v.43 the fact of God making atonement, dealing Himself with the reality and judgment of sin, in order that His people might have salvation and newness of life and service. What a God! Why do we ever doubt Him, even when His ways are past finding out?

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32:44-52

It is always a moving experience to be at the side of a saint of God when he finishes his appointed course. When Moses had finished this last work of ministry, that very day God said his time was over (48). He was allowed to climb the mountain and view the land across Jordan, a land he was not to enter along with the people because of something that had happened not all that long before. In the story in Numbers 20:1-13 it appears that Moses allowed his angry temperament to surge up in impatient action just as he had done in his early life when he killed the Egyptian (Exod. 2:11ff). Without doubt the people of the congregation of Israel had to bear some of the responsibility for their leader's failure, as Ps.106: 12-13 makes plain. But we must not allow Moses' failure to cloud his spiritual greatness, a greatness that was married to his meekness. In Num.27:12-23 we see the man's main concern to be the provision of a leader and shepherd for the days that lay ahead. What future generations were to think of him was not in Moses' mind and heart. No doubt he grieved deeply that he had failed his God who had given him the privilege of serving Him. But Moses, the man of God, did not allow his own personal failures to get in the way of God's future work. He passed on the privilege and responsibility to God's next man, already prepared and trained by Moses himself. The other thing that Moses did, as his last service, was to urge upon the people to hear and to do God's word (46-47). What a way to die! He was faithful to the end. Read Heb.11:24-29. Little wonder Heb.13:7 urges us to follow the pattern of faith of such a man. Moses life was finished, but his service was not finished. Read Lk. 9:30. Then read Rev.22:3-5. His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face. Just think, we shall serve with un-sinning hearts. What a life, and it is for ever!

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33:1-5

To study this chapter in detail would lead to a major study of Old Testament history and that is beyond the scope of these notes, especially after such a length of time spent in studying Deuteronomy. The chapter begins and ends with God, and in the middle we have words about the individual tribes of Israel. It has all to do with the future progress of the work of God and how individuals and families will develop and take their place, or lose it. When we preached on this chapter in a Sunday morning service we spoke of how the Old Testament story goes on to record the journey of the tribes of Israel from spiritual promise to disappointment, and from what might have been to what actually came. There is nothing more tragic than unfulfilled potential, those who begin well but who seem to waste away. Are there some who read these notes who are past their spiritual best already and who soon will be seen to be so? Such exposure is inescapable because God is moving His work and people on, and stragglers can be left behind. Think of how Heb. 2:1 urges us to take this seriously. The way to begin is in today's verses which picture our salvation as having its beginning in the glory of God. This majestic God is the One who came to visit and redeem His people (Acts 7:2; Lk.1:68). This action of God was the beginning of the identity of this people, making them the people of God who were the recipients of His faithfulness and blessing down through the years. God loved them. God held them in His hand. God marked out the way for them. God gave them His Law. God ruled over them. This is "gospel" news indeed. Little wonder we love to sing, "O, greatly blessed the people are, the joyful sound that know" (Ps.89:15-18 Metrical Version).

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33:6-12

What would God say if asked for a spiritual "reference" for us in respect of future life and service? All the characters mentioned here had their own personality and temperament and in this there is great possibility. But temperament can often be found fighting against God. There is a death to die to self as well as to sin if we are to be of use to God. There is for all of us the promise of grace as v.25 declares, but we are to be on guard lest we receive the grace of God in vain (2 Cor. 6:1). Reuben, the first born son, is blessed in the promise of continuity and there is suggestion that their numbers would not diminish too far (6). But in Gen.49:4 Jacob himself faced up to the fact of the instability of his son. When we go to Judges 5:15-16 we find in the men of Reuben great spiritual meditation but a refusal to get involved in the real business of God's work. It seems the sheep in the pleasant meadows were their real interest. The tribe of Reuben really faded from the picture. How sad! The reference to Judah is difficult to understand but it may be a prayer for those men who seem to have the task of being in the front rank in battle (Num.2:9). Levi is spoken of in terms of dedication to holy service which, of course, is costly. Did not Jesus speak of forsaking father and mother (?) There is reference to several occasions when the Levites were tested along with the rest of Israel, but perhaps the most pointed reference is to Ex.32:26-29 when even family loyalties were in subjection to the solemn work of carrying out God's judgment. There are other references to Benjamin which speak of war-like character and activity, but here the emphasis is on the security that will be his in the love of God. His God is round about him, and he rests in His strong love. He is safe beside God. And so are we.

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33:13-17

The blessing of Joseph is described fully and recalls for us the marvellous stories in Genesis where, after being disciplined because of his teenage pride and bravado he is seen as a man full of grace and truth. Read Jacob's blessing of Joseph in Gen.49:22-26. This is the tribe that divided into Ephraim and Manasseh. Take from these verses the word "best" in v.16, linked with "choicest" and "finest" in v.14-15, and you see how God desires us to have the best of His blessing in fullest possible measure, for no other reason than that He loves us. He will give us these blessings to the extent that is safe for us. His restrictions are not denials of His grace, but rather expressions of it, for He knows what we need and what is best for us. Note in regard to Joseph that all these blessings and the exaltation that they bring would not in any way reduce the strength of Joseph who would remain strong in the Lord of Hosts for service. We must think of the God who has given us all things richly to enjoy (1 Tim.6:17); the God who, having given us His Son, will give us all things in Him (Rom.8:32). He is the God who gives His people blessings more than can be numbered (Ps.40: 5); the God who opens His hand and heart to give liberally to all (Ps.145:15-17). How right it is for God's people to testify that God has done great things for them and has made them glad (Ps.126:3). To speak thus makes the writer of these notes think back to the start of his ministry when a godly woman expressed in a congregational meeting her prayer for the ministry just beginning, "That God would open the windows of heaven, and pour out such blessing that there would not be room enough to contain it" (Mal.. 3:10). That God has been good, and nothing but good, to His people.

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33:18-19

The details regarding these three tribes are not really clear, even when we link our verses with Gen. 49:13-15,19. Their actual territory is given in Joshua 19:10-23 but it is still not clear whether they had access to the sea (Mediterranean or Galilee) and perhaps only those with a gift for map-reading and study of trade routes need to go into the details. Both Zebulun and Issachar are called to rejoice, not just in their going out and coming in of trade and prosperity, but in the God who blessed them. If we could learn to see that all our good is supplied from the good hand of God we also would learn to rejoice, no matter our actual circumstances at any given time or place. Think of Paul's insistence on rejoicing even when he was in jail (Phil. 4:4). What God gives and what He withholds are alike for our good and our blessing. Of course, we must remember that the prosperity that comes from trade brings contact with all kinds of

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people with their religions and their lack of belief and this can create a danger which has to be guarded against. The best protection against spiritual infection is spiritual good health, and such manifest good health in relation to God is its own powerful witness in an infected world. Although v.19a is difficult to understand we could see in it simply the statement that Zebulun and Issachar took their business contacts with them to church to experience true spiritual worship. What seems clear is that these tribes were to relate all aspects of their lives and activities to God. But in Gen. 49:14-15 there is a clear suggestion that Issachar was perhaps unrefined and coarse, and not a little lazy, so that he was content to take the easy way out even to the point of losing his liberty. Lack of effort and an excessive desire for comfort are not good signs.

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33:20-21

We have already dealt in measure with Gad in the note on chap. 3:12-20. The territory of this tribe lay between the southern shore of the Sea of Galilee and the northern shore of the Dead Sea, and is described as the best of the land (21a). The men of Gad were fighters of the highest calibre, as 1 Chron. 12:8 makes clear. But, as we have seen in the note referred to, it was only after they had made sure of their rich territory that they made themselves available to fight the Lord's battles. When they did fight they fought well because, after all, they had that natural capacity and it was to be expected that they would do well in that area of service. They are spoken of here (21b) as servants of God along with the rest of Israel in carrying out the plans and commands of God. But the fact still remains that they did this service after looking well to their own personal and material interests. This is not a failing that belongs to long ago. How many Christians plead business and family commitments as the excuse for not taking their place consistently in the forefront of the spiritual battle? Why is it that it is our Christian involvement that gets adjusted first rather than our business commitments? Why is it that our home church commitments get adjusted in the interest of "other" Christian involvement? There are those who, like Gad, rally to the cause when there is a crisis. But, had they been there constantly, the crisis might not have arisen. Since different aspects of this tribe present themselves perhaps it is best for us not to try to pass judgment. Sometimes we just do not know enough to make a valid assessment. But God knows, and He alone is judge (1 Cor. 4:3-5).

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33:22-23

We should not fail to notice the amazing variety of personality, character and capacity marking these tribes of Israel. They are all different, as we are different, and yet they constituted one people. Perhaps Paul had this in mind when he spoke of the interdependence of the members of the body in 1 Cor. 12:12-26. Although differences can cause clashes, they also challenge, correct and complement, and help a company of diverse people to become a united instrument of God's purposes. Dan is spoken of as a lion, but in Gen. 49:17 he is referred to as a serpent or viper alarming the horses. The lion's cub may seem playful and yet it has potential for ferocity. It was the tribe of Dan that produced Samson. The long story in Judges 18 tells of Dan's daring and determination to conquer and possess what was desirable. The tribe seems to have settled in the north, near the source of the Jordan, and the city of Dan (sometimes called Laish which may mean lion) became a centre of idolatry (Judges 18:30-31). Was it the spirit of wilfulness in Dan, along with his drive and determination, that led him so sorely astray? Human capacity and personality have great potential for good or ill. Naphtali is spoken of in terms of the rich blessing that God's grace and favour bring. The lake referred to is the Sea of Galilee and this tribe is commanded to take possession of their territory and refuse to allow anyone to crowd them out or steal their blessing. Perhaps the lesson for us is simply to consider the goodness of God and His blessing and recognise that no sin or disobedience is worth losing that blessing for.

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33:24-25

Yesterday's reading should have left us thinking of the shores of the Sea of Galilee where, in the fullness of the time, the people saw the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, listened to His gracious words and saw

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His mighty works. Asher's name means happy or blessed, and seemingly he was to be held in special esteem by his brothers. The reference in Judges 5:17 seems to suggest a settling down in an easy way but might also refer to long-lasting prosperity and a life lived in enjoyment of the blessing of God. Why should increasing years and old age limit either service or enjoyment? Turn forward to the Christmas story and read about one old lady of the tribe of Asher (Luke 2: 36-38). Old though she was, she was still very much alive and "with it" and took her place among the earliest evangelists of the birth of the Saviour. What a thrill! How many older folk read these notes? We need you in the ripe maturity of your years to kindle our hearts afresh. Now, in this spirit, consider the glorious promise in the second of today's verses. It speaks of security against the enemy and of daily strength for daily needs. This should at once, in measure at least, quench the fears that come when we anticipate all sorts of situations that may arise. Of course, we should not speculate, but rather live one day at a time. But we need the reassurance that no matter what comes the faithful God who stands by His promises will see to it that strength is given. He will not fail, and he will supply all our need on the scale of the riches of His glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19). What a promise! What a God! And what a way to go forward!

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33:26-29

These verses speak of God, unique and majestic, who rides through the heavens for the help of His people. All His ways are glorious and yet, so often, there is the hiding of His power (Habak.3:4). But God is (Heb.11:6), and He is above, beneath, before and around His people. This is why He is spoken of now as the dwelling place, or refuge of His people. Think how we love to sing the metrical version of Ps.46:1-7, 10-11. God is both refuge and strength, and His strength is the most marvellous tenderness of His outstretched arms. These cradling, guiding, keeping and comforting arms are the everlasting arms of the Eternal God. They never grow weary. They never lose their grip. They never crush, they only carry and cradle, restricting and correcting only when necessary. But they are arms which are constantly active against our enemies, whether or not we recognise our enemies; whether or not we are disposed to thrust them from us. At times we hesitate to do what is right, but God acts swiftly for our good. He is prepared to be misunderstood and criticised for being hard on and unfeeling towards His children. This is love indeed. This is a God to be trusted. But we must go on in the business of learning what God is like. It will increase our faith, teach us to worship, create in us a spirit of gratitude, and make us desire more and more to be worthy of Him. Writing these words recalled for the writer the first time he ever "gave his testimony". It was in Bombay; he had been a Christian (as far as he knew) for a month or two at the most, and he was called on without warning (which should not have been done). All he could do was to quote the chorus of the hymn that had just been sung. He was short of words in those days! But his testimony would still be the same, but more so.

"I never will cease to praise Him,
He's done so much. for me."

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32:26-29

These are marvellous verses to study and they awaken memories. (Is this reminiscing a sign of old age?) On the first Sunday of my ministry in Sandyford (1956), at the afternoon Communion Service, my brother preached from Psalm 146:5 (AV), "Blessed is the man who has the God of Jacob for his help." Happy indeed is the people who have this God, who has made them His heritage (Ps. 33:10-22). Our last verse in this chapter is echoed again in the Psalms when David, who knew so much struggle, slander and failure, spoke of God as the one who lifted up his head and gave him back the dignity of his humanity (Ps.3:3). This is also New Testament teaching for it is made plain that in Christ we have been raised to royal honour and made kings and priests unto God (Rev.1:4-6). Little wonder Peter breaks into a doxology of rejoicing in 1 Pet.1:3-5. Paul likewise rejoices and is happy in his God even though he is in prison, when he calls us all to rejoice in the Lord and to bring our requests in prayer to God with thanksgiving (Phil. 4:4-7). Why should we ever worry about the years flying past when there is a future calling us forward to richer pastures of grace and blessing than ever we have known before. The possibilities are limitless. God

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is able to do far more than we could ever imagine (Eph. 3:20). But it is by faith that possibilities become actual experience. Now is the time for laying aside weights and hindrances and for getting ready to run the race for which God has set the course. And we run, looking away to Jesus (Heb.12:1-2).

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34:1-12

We have already studied the historical details of this event recorded in Chap.32:44-52, and we have drawn out the spiritual lessons. But what we emphasise here is not the rebuke to Moses nor his exclusion from the land to which he had led the people, but rather the kindness of God in arranging for Moses a pre-view of the land about to be occupied. In v.4, having shown Moses the glorious expanse of the land (1-3), God then reminds him of His great faithfulness. God had kept his promise down through the generations. Now it was in close company with God that Moses ended his life, and there is no suggestion of a shadow of any kind. Yes, he had his failures and he accepted the consequences, but there was no bitterness, because the whole tenor of this passage points to the future which was yet to be, a future about which neither God nor Moses had any doubts. Perhaps the best "text" for today is Heb. 11:3, "These all died in faith, not having received ... but having seen it and greeted it from afar ... " (RSV). Isaac Watts wrote a hymn based on this passage and made it all apply to heaven: "There is a land of pure delight, where saints immortal reign." The words are very poetic and the music quite sentimental, but if we remember that the "land" we are promised is not just heaven to come but the life of promise that lies before us, then the hymn has something to say to us, especially if we are timid, as many are, about the unknown future.

"Could we but climb where Moses stood,
And view the landscape o'er,
Not Jordan's stream, nor death's cold flood
Should fright us from the shore."
The future is God's, and it is ours in Him, through Christ our Lord.

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34:1-12

We preached on this passage on a Remembrance Sunday and referred to the grave of the unknown warrior in London's Westminster Abbey. In this passage we have the unknown grave of a well-known, well-tried, faithful warrior of God. It was said of Christians in days of martyrdom that they died well, and so it was with Moses. He rested in God. He knew his work was over, and like the great missionary apostle after him, he was ready and willing to go (2 Tim. 4:6-8). He had done his part, and we must give him credit for recognising it was so and that it was time to hand over to the man God had already prepared for the next stage of the work. According to v.7 Moses did not at all feel that his strength or capacity had ebbed, let alone ended, and yet he accepted without a murmur of dissent the decision God had made that another should now lead forward the people Moses himself had led and trained these many years. There must have been a tremendous inner security in Moses making him know he was accepted and valued in person, and that his work had stood and would stand the test of time. This must have come from his fellowship with God which is described in v.10 in terms of close and confident friendship. It was not just that Moses had confidence in God but that God had confidence in Moses. He was not ashamed to be called Moses' God (Heb. 11:16). But this close intimate fellowship with God had not made Moses unrealistic, for in chap. 31:1-2 he tells the people, who had a great regard for him and a great dependence on him, that his limitations were real. He would not allow the people to think of him as indispensable to them or to God. Faith is realistic.

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34:1-12

We do well, as we end the story of Moses, to read the summary of and comment on his life of faith in Heb. 11:23-29. Moses was well remembered by Israel and her prophets, as Isa. 63:11-14; Jer. 15: 1; and Ps. 106:23 make plain. We must never forget the appearance of Moses in the New Testament (Matt. 17:1-4). It was not a dead Moses, but very much alive in God's glorious kingdom and ministering

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encouragement to the Saviour regarding His approaching death for the world's salvation. (Does this story mean that Moses did in the end enter the Promised Land?) It was little wonder that Israel wept for Moses, but perhaps they had left it rather late to express appreciation to the leader whom they had criticised so constantly and to whom they owed so very much. It would not have served Israel well if they had known the whereabouts of Moses' grave because they would have made it a shrine of remembrance which, as their previous history testifies, could easily have become an idolatrous preoccupation and distraction. We do not serve the cause well when we idolise the servants of God during their lifetime or canonise them after their death. God is far more realistic and He places on record here the testimony or epitaph for Moses (10-12). Here, as in Hebrews 11, it is the triumphs of faith and obedience that are recorded for posterity, not the faults and failures. God is good. In their weeping for Moses the people might well have lapsed into bleak, negative depression which would have dragged the work to a stop. But God had all things prepared. Joshua was ready, and was a man leaning on God and not trusting his own wisdom or strength. That is why he could be trusted by God. There was no presumption. Now read Joshua 1:1-9, and as we leave these great men give heed to Scripture when it says of them, "Whose faith follow" (Heb. 13: 7 AV).

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