



“Moses and the Ten Commandments” by Laurent de la Hyre

Exodus Chapter 20

And God spoke all these words: “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh

day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it, you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and made it holy. Honor your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.



When the people saw the thunder and lightning, and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.” Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.” The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was. Then the Lord said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites this; ‘You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven. Do not make any gods to be alongside Me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold. Make an altar of earth for Me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause My name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you. If you make an altar of stones for Me, do not build it with dressed stones, for you will defile it if you use a tool on it. And do not go up to My altar on steps, lest your nakedness be exposed on it.’”

*“Moses With the Ten Commandments”
by Jose de Ribera*

All had been prepared, the unique significance of that which was to come having been clearly indicated by the elaborate nature of those preparations. The “*shekinah*,” the visible presence of God upon the mountain’s summit in thundercloud and fire, had filled the people with wondrous awe. The ceremonial cleansings which had been commanded had signified the purity required for sinful creatures to stand before the Holy One. Moses came down from the mountain to stand with his people before the Lord. The decisive moment had arrived. In the piety of Judaism the Ten Words have traditionally enjoyed a position of great prominence as a basic expression of the faith of Israel second only to the famous “*Shema*” - “**Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.**” (Deuteronomy 6:4). In the historic practice of orthodox Jews the Ten Words and the “*Shema*” were both contained in the “*tefillin*,” that is, the small leather receptacles always worn by the faithful during prayer in obedience to the command of Deuteronomy: “***The commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home, and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up . Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.***” (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

“***And God spoke all these words:***” - The majestic language of this introductory formula set the stage for the presentation of the moral core of God’s covenant with the Children of Israel. God (“*elohim*”) addressed His people directly, without mediation of any kind, as yet another indication of the unique importance of this moment in the covenant history of Israel. The parallel account in Deuteronomy 5 notes: “***The Lord spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain.***” (Deuteronomy 5:4) The text stresses that the entirety of this message was the Word



***“The Rabbi” by Mark Chagall
Wearing the Traditional Tefillim Bound on His
Forehead and His Hands***

of God - ***“all these words.”*** There were no editorial additions to or alterations of God’s direct communication with His chosen people. The language of this phrase will be repeated in the summary statement of Exodus 34:28: ***“And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Words.”*** (Cf. Deuteronomy 4:13; 10:4) This is the characteristic Biblical designation for what are now popularly called the ***“Ten Commandments.”*** This distinction will become particularly significant in our subsequent discussion of the proper division of the material into ten segments. Following the Hebrew text, the Greek Septuagint appropriately referred to the ***“deka logoi”*** which has come into the English language in the title ***“decalogue.”***

The address which introduces the decalogue ***“is unique in the Torah in that it does not indicate to whom the divine declaration is addressed.”*** (Sarna, p. 109) The legends of the rabbis suggest that God offered His law to each and every other nation on earth only to be rejected by them. This fanciful proposal would suggest a receptiveness - and therefore a worthiness - on the part of Israel which was absent among the gentiles. This entire concept is alien to the Biblical perspective of the call of Israel and inconsistent with Israel’s subsequent conduct throughout the balance of the Old Testament. There was no unique merit or worthiness (to use the familiar language of the Catechism) in these people. God’s callings, of Israel and of us, are always by grace, the expression of His loving nature. God love for Israel and for us is because of who He is despite who we are.

“I am the Lord your God Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” - This self-identification formula is ***“a basic phrase of OT theological rhetoric”*** (Durham, p. 283). It simultaneously served to assert the unique nature of the one God - ***“I am the Lord (“Jahweh”)*** - and the unique relationship which He had graciously established with the Children of Israel - ***“your God (“elohim”)***. This formula was typical of the formal covenant agreements of the era. So, for example, an extant Hittite treaty between the high king and his subject vassals opened with these words: ***“Thus speaks the sun king Mursilis, the great king, the king of the land of Hatti...”*** (Douma, p. 2) The Hittite monarch then proceeded to enumerate the benefits which his reign had bestowed upon his subjects. In the same manner, the Lord reminded Israel that He was the God ***“Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”*** As the Lord addressed His people at Sinai, He deigned to do so in a manner with which they would be familiar, thus enabling them to recognize the nature of the covenant bond which He was creating between them.



"The Deliverance at the Red Sea" by Johann Scheuchzer



“The Glory of the Lord Upon Mount Sinai” by Hebrew Bible Illustrator E.M. Lilien

One must be cautious, however, in drawing parallels between ancient treaties and the covenant which God established with His people at Sinai. The similarities that exist are superficial matters of form not substance. Dr. John Durham correctly observes:

“Far more is being declared here than any treaty ever claimed, above all in Yahweh’s self-revelation and self-giving, neither of which appear to have been motives of any Hittite king...These first words of Yahweh to Israel, indispensably prior to all that is to follow, are the center and focus of the whole Pentateuch, and the very heart of the whole Old Testament.” (Durham, p. 284)

The division of the Ten Words into two segments or tables, the first of which deals with God’s relationship with man, and the second man’s relationships with his fellow man, is clearly suggested by *“the context, style and language”* (Sarna, p.108) of the

Decalogue both in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Our Lord reflected this insight in His response to the Pharisees' question as to the greatest commandment:

“Jesus replied, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.’” (Matthew 22:37-40)

Beyond this basic distinction, however, the identification of each of the ten words has proven to be somewhat more controversial. Three major positions have been advocated historically within Judaism and Christianity and remain in widespread use today. The traditional specification with Judaism identifies the preamble - ***“I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”*** - as the



“Moses Upon Mount Sinai” by E.M. Lilien



“God Speaks to Israel at Mount Sinai” by Gerome

first of the Ten Words. Verses 3 and 4, pertaining to monotheism and the prohibition of the use of graven images are combined, as are all of the commands on coveting (vs. 17) which results in a total of ten. The enumeration used by the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches was first proposed by St. Augustine. Augustine removed the preamble from the Ten, and divided the prohibitions of coveting into two commandments to arrive at the necessary total. A third system is generally used among Reformed/Protestant churches. The Reformed also removed the preamble from the list, arguing that it was not a commandment and should therefore not be counted. They separate the prohibition of graven images as the second commandment in its own right while rejecting Augustine’s division of the coveting commands as arbitrary and unnecessary. This also results in a total of ten. While it is impossible to conclusively resolve this debate in the absence of a specific Biblical enumeration,

the traditional Hebrew enumeration, which includes the preamble as an integral part of the Ten Words - without resorting to artificial divisions within the commandments to achieve the necessary total - would appear to be most consistent with the substance of the text. The Biblical identification of the Decalogue as the Ten Words rather than Commandments is also consistent with this view.

“You shall have no other gods before Me.” - The first of the actual commands defined the nature of God and thereby established the moral foundation for all of the subsequent commandments. There is one God and one God alone. The Children of Israel were to give their undivided loyalty to Him. The language of the Hebrew text is most emphatically negative, beginning with the negative “*lo*” in the primary position of foremost prominence. Keil argues that the negative construct of the commandments reflects the sinful nature of fallen humanity: *“Nearly all the commandments are couched in the negative form of prohibition, because they presuppose the existence of sin and the evil desires of the human heart.”* (Keil, p. 465) The English translation would appear to acknowledge the existence of other



“Israel Before the Lord at Sinai” by Gustav Dore

gods, requiring only the primacy of Jahweh. This view, which recognizes one particular god to be superior to all of the other gods, is called “*henotheism*.” The Hebrew, although awkward in English, is more precise, literally - “*There are not to be to you other gods in My presence.*” Particularly in the context of the preceding phrase, “*I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*” - the monotheistic intent of the command is unmistakable. “*The command, therefore, warns against violating the covenant by recognizing in any manner or form what other peoples accept as deities. Israel’s God demands uncompromising and exclusive loyalty.*” (Sarna, p. 109) Moses’ commentary on the Ten Words in Deuteronomy made the point even more explicitly. Having reiterated the signs and wonders which God had accomplished on their behalf in Egypt and at Sinai, Moses concluded: “*You were shown these things so that you might know that the Lord is God; besides Him there is no other. From heaven He made you hear His voice to discipline you. On earth He showed you His great fire and you heard His words from out of the fire...Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God*



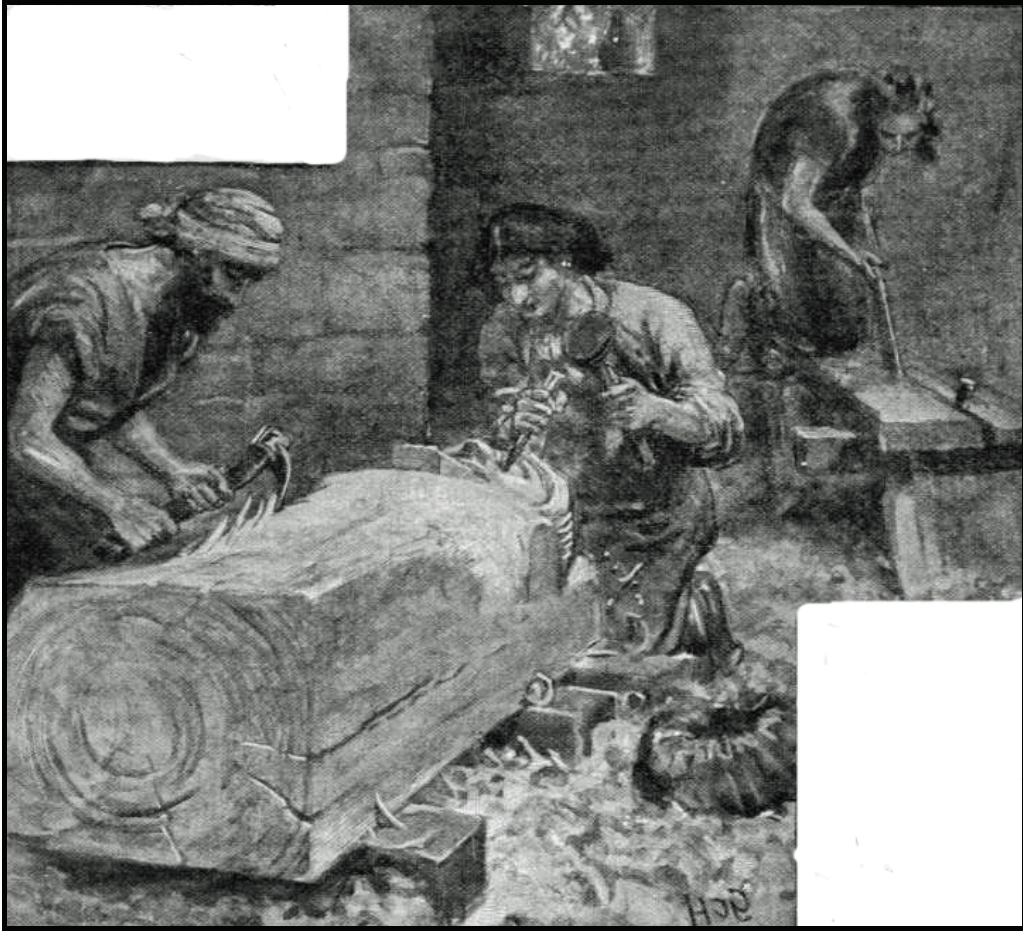
“The Glory of the Lord Upon Mount Sinai



“The Glory of the Lord Upon Mount Sinai”

in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other.” (Deuteronomy 4:35-36,39) The prophet Isaiah contemptuously denounced all of man’s idols as non-entities and lies and those who worship them as irrational fools:

“This is what the Lord says - Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from Me there is no god...You are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one. All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant to their own shame. Who shapes a god and casts an idol which can profit him nothing?...The blacksmith takes a tool and works it in the coals; he shapes an idol with hammers, he forges it with the might of his arm. He gets hungry and loses his strength; he drinks no water and grows faint. The



*“He Also Fashions a God and He Worships It”
19th Century Bible Illustration*

carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker. He roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form of a man, of a man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine. He cuts down cedars, or perhaps took a cypress or oak. He let it grow among the trees of the forest or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow. It is man’s fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it. Half of the wood he burns in his fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, ‘Ah, I am warm. I see the fire.’ From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says: ‘Save me! You are my god.’ They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see and their minds closed so they cannot understand. No one stops to think, no one has the knowledge or

understanding to say, ‘Half of it I used for fuel, I even baked bread over its coals, I roasted meat and I ate. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood?’ He feeds on ashes. A deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself or say, ‘Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?’” (Isaiah 44:6,8,9-19)

During their prolonged four hundred year sojourn in Egypt Israel had been corrupted by the idolatry of that pagan land. They had indulged in the worship of the false gods of Egypt, bringing their idols with them even as the one true God graciously delivered them from bondage. The prophet Ezekiel recalled:

“Will you judge them? Will you judge them, son of man? Then confront them with the detestable practices of their fathers and say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: On the day I chose Israel, I swore with uplifted hand to the descendants of Jacob and revealed Myself to them in Egypt. With uplifted hand I said to them, ‘I am the



“The Idols of Egypt” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

Lord your God.’ On that day I swore that I would bring them out of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most beautiful of all lands. And I said to them, ‘Each of you get rid of the vile images, you have set your eyes on, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.’ But they rebelled against Me and would not listen to Me. They did not get rid of the vile images they had set their eyes on; nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt...For their hearts were devoted to their idols...their eyes lusted after their fathers’ gods...Therefore say to the House of Israel, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘Will you defile yourselves the way your fathers did and lust after their vile images? When you offer your gifts, the sacrifice of your sons in the fire, you continue to defile yourselves with all your idols to this day...You say, ‘We want to be like the nations, like the peoples of the world who serve wood and stone.’” (Ezekiel 20:4-8,16,24,30-32)

The command of God was an unequivocal demand that Israel put the corruption of Egypt behind them and worship the one true God alone.

The English translation - ***“You shall have...”*** is a paraphrase of the Hebrew text. Hebrew does not include a verb to express possession comparable to the English verb *“have.”* The verb in this phrase actually means *“to be to,”* referring to a relationship. Thus, the original text of Exodus 20 literally says *“There is not to be to you.”* The same verb is used in the Old Testament to describe a marriage relationship and the covenant bond which God established with His people. Accordingly, the commandment forbids the Israelites to enter into relationship with any of the false gods of the heathen by worshiping or acknowledging them in any way. At the same time, the phrase ***“before Me”*** does not refer to a hierarchical ranking of greater and lesser gods. The Hebrew preposition is spatial and might more accurately be translated *“in My presence.”* The one God cannot tolerate the pretense of other gods. Those who would worship Him must serve Him alone. As Jesus reminded the Adversary: ***“Jesus said to him, ‘Away from Me, Satan, for it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.’”*** (Matthew 4:10-Deuteronomy 6:13)

“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children



“Bedouin Tents Before Jebel Musa” - 19th Century Engraving

for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments.” - The Lord expanded and defined His prohibition of the worship of other gods with specific application to idolatrous images. As previously noted, Judaism and historic Christianity regard these words as a continuation of the First Commandment. Reformed/Protestant Christians consider Verses 4 &5 to be a separate commandment. The noun *“idol”* simply refers to that which is carved or hewn, the physical reproduction of an object or a being for the purpose of worship. The description of objects which were not to be worshiped is comprehensive, typical of the gods and goddesses of Egypt, Babylon and the other peoples of the ancient Near East - *“anything in the heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.”* That enumeration would be specified in Deuteronomy (cf. Deuteronomy 4:15-20).

It is clear from the expanded commentary of Deuteronomy 4 that this prohibition of idol worship extended beyond images of false gods to include the worship of images intended to represent the true God. The necessity of this command would be graphically illustrated in the fashioning of the Golden Calf which Aaron specifically referred to as Yahweh (Exodus 32:5). The Deuteronomy text informs us that when God spoke to Israel from the mountain, while they heard the sound of His voice He

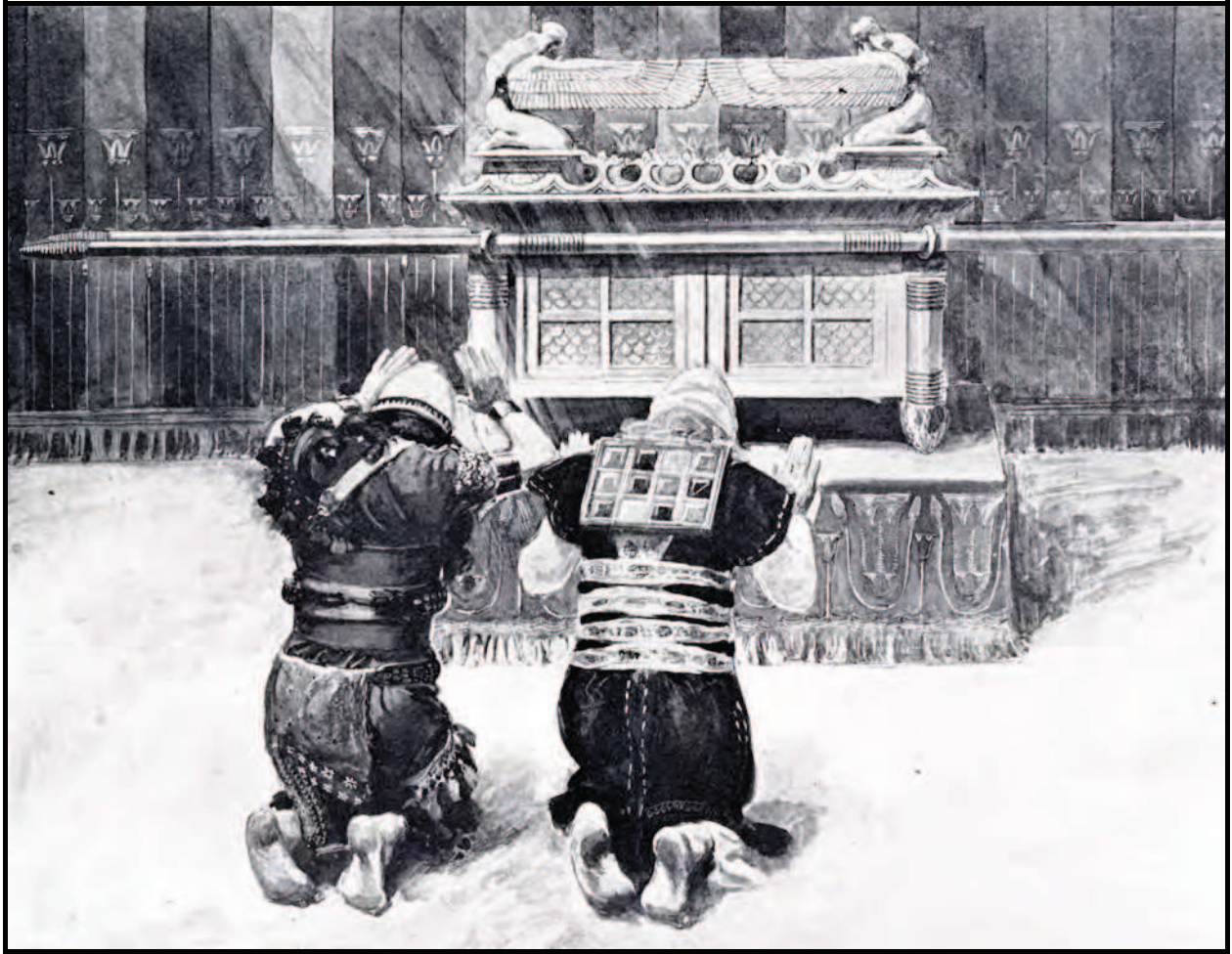
did not appear before them in any visible form. Moses contended that the absence of any such form was a deliberate indication of the absolute transcendence of God whose being could not be captured or conveyed in a physical image:

“You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness. Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice...You saw no form of any kind the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore, watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, and image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the waters below. When you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars - all the heavenly array - do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshiping things the Lord your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven.”
(Deuteronomy 4:11-12, 15-20)

It must be carefully noted here that the prohibition pertains to the worship of images.



“An Egyptian Procession Bearing the Sacred Images to the Nile” by Bridgeman



“Moses and Aaron Before the Ark in the Tabernacle” by Tissot

It is not art, nor even religious art, that is sanctioned. Rather the presumption that man may localize or manipulate the supernatural power of his own gods or presence of the true God through the use of a physical object. ***“You shall not bow down to them or worship them.”*** Those who would worship the true God must do so in a manner consistent with His nature in keeping with His commands. John Calvin, many of whose disciples subsequently indulged in iconoclastic excess, correctly summarized the meaning of the command in this way:

“After declaring in the first commandment who was the true God, He commanded that He alone should be worshiped; and now He defines what is lawful worship...There is no necessity to refute what some have foolishly imagined that sculpture and painting of every kind are condemned here...although Moses only speaks of idols there is no doubt that by implication he condemns all the forms of false worship, which

men have invented for themselves.” (Keil, pp. 465-466)

The use of religious art and images continued throughout the Old Testament. “*Nehustan*,” the brazen serpent was crafted by Moses at God’s command as the means through which they people were to be saved from the venom of the fiery snakes (Numbers 21:4-9; cf. John 3:14-15) . The serpent was destroyed centuries later by King Hezekiah because it had been perverted into an idol in the final days of the kingdom of Judah: **“He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake that Moses had made for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called *Nehustan*.)** (2 Kings 18:4) Both the Tabernacle and the Temple were adorned with sacred art, most notably the statues of the cherubim whose outstretched wings extended over the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:18-22). Thus the Psalmists praised God as **“You who sit enthroned between the cherubim and shine forth”** (Psalm 80:2; 99:1; cf. 1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2). King Hezekiah hailed God as **“O Lord God Almighty, O God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, You alone are God**



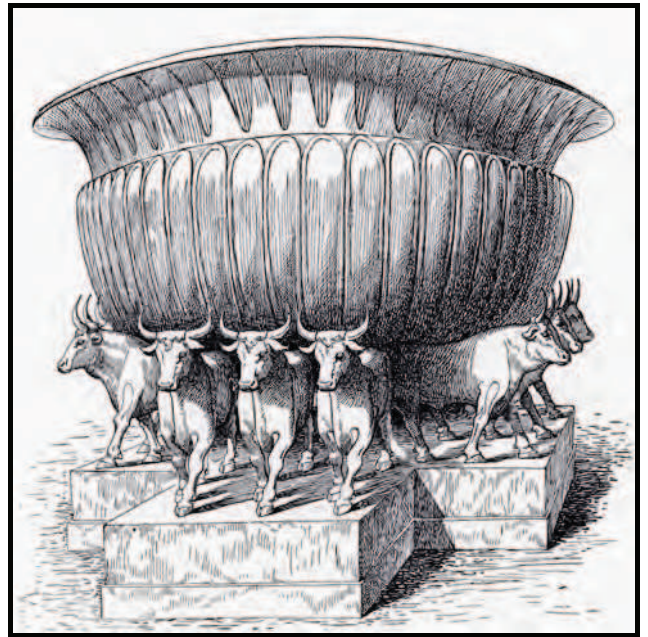
“The Bronze Serpent in the Wilderness” by Fritz von Uhde

over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.” (Isaiah 37:16)

Within the Temple of Solomon two massive golden cherubs stood within the Holy of Holies and cherubim, palm trees and flowers were carved into the golden walls of the temple buildings (1 Kings 6:19-35) The bronze sea in the temple court stood on the backs of twelve cast metal bulls and the carved reliefs of cherubim, lions and palm trees adorned the furnished used in the sacrifices and rituals (1 Kings 7) It is clear that the Israelites did not regard this command as a prohibition of religious art and statuary.

In his recent study *The Ten Commandments:*

Background, Meaning, and Implication From a Judaic Perspective, Martin Sicker summarized the teaching of the rabbis in this way:



“The Great Bronze Sea of Solomon’s Temple”

“It cannot be overstated that the Torah, either in the Decalogue or elsewhere in the Mosaic legislation, does not register any disapproval of imagery in any form as long as it is not intended to serve or lend itself to idolatrous practices....Carved images are acceptable as long as they are not intended to intervene in the relationship between heaven and earth. Thus, the prophets did not rail against the creative works of man as long as they did not become objects of worship or adoration. In brief, the Torah does not intend to prohibit imagery, only making them objects of worship as representations of the divine.” (Sicker, p. 37)

This was exactly the same conclusion reached by Martin Luther in his struggle with Andreas Karlstadt and the “*Bilderstürmer*” (image-breakers) in Wittenberg early in the reformation. Karlstadt and his radical followers misused these verses to condemn all art and were ravaging the churches in the Wittenberg area. Against the orders of Duke Frederick, Luther left the safety of the Wartburg and returned home to restore peace. In his treatise “*Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments*” Luther condemned the Karlstadt’s action on the basis of Exodus 20:

“And I say at the outset that according to the Law of Moses no other images are forbidden than an image of God which one worships. A



“Andreas Karlstadt and the Image Breakers” - 16th Century Woodcut

crucifix, on the one hand, or any other holy image is not forbidden. Heigh now! You breakers of images, I defy you to prove the opposite. In proof of this I cite the first commandment (Exodus 20:3) ‘You shall have no other gods before Me.’ Immediately following this text, the meaning of having other gods is made plain in the words; ‘you shall not make to yourself a graven image or any likeness...’ (Exodus 20:4)...One must consider the meaning of the whole text in its context. Then one sees that it speaks of images of God which are not to be worshiped. No one will be able to prove anything else. From subsequent words in the same chapter (Exodus 20:23), ‘You shall not make gods of silver to be with Me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold,’ it follows that ‘make’ certainly refers to such gods. For this saying, ‘You shall have no other gods’ is the central thought, the standard and the end in accordance with which the words which follow are to be interpreted, connected and judged. For this passage points out and expresses the

meaning of this commandment, namely, that there are not to be other gods...Where, however, images or statues are made without idolatry, then such making of them is not forbidden, for the central saying, 'You shall have no other gods' remains intact." (LW, 40, p. 86f.)

"For I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the fathers..." - This description of God as ***"jealous"*** has elicited considerable controversy, given the often negative connotation of the term in English. The Hebrew adjective *"qanna"* is drawn from a root which means *"to become intensely red"* in reference to the flushed color of the face. Thus, *"qanna"* came to signify the most extreme and intense emotion. Hebrew scholar Nahum Sarna offers the helpful suggestion that the word might better be translated as *"impassioned"* to more accurately express the unique intensity of God's love for His people without the negative connotations of human jealousy. At the same time, Sarna cautions us to remember that human language in reference to God - particularly the language of human emotion - is necessarily inadequate in expressing the perfection of the Holy One.

"The limitations of language limit the application to God of phraseology that typically belongs in the human sphere...It should be noted, however, that the form 'kanna' is used in the Bible solely of God, never of a human being, a distinction that testifies to a consciousness that the emotion referred to differs qualitatively from the human variety."
(Sarna, p. 110)

This language is used throughout the Old Testament as an assertion that because the unique intensity of His love for His people God cannot tolerate unfaithfulness from them, He will firmly judge all those who oppose Him, and He will vindicate His people. A limited sampling of examples must suffice to demonstrate the Biblical usage:

"Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones as cut down their Asherah poles. Don not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." (Exodus 34:14)

"Be careful not to forget the covenant of the Lord your God, the covenant that He mad with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the Lord your God has forbidden. For the



“The Destruction of the Brazen Serpent by Hezekiah”

“Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.” (Deuteronomy 4:23-24)

“Jeshurun (Israel) grew fat and kicked; filled with food he became heavy and sleek. He abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock, his Savior. They made Him jealous with their foreign gods and angered Him with their detestable idols...They made Me jealous by what is no god and angered Me with their worthless idols.” (Deuteronomy 32:15-16,21)

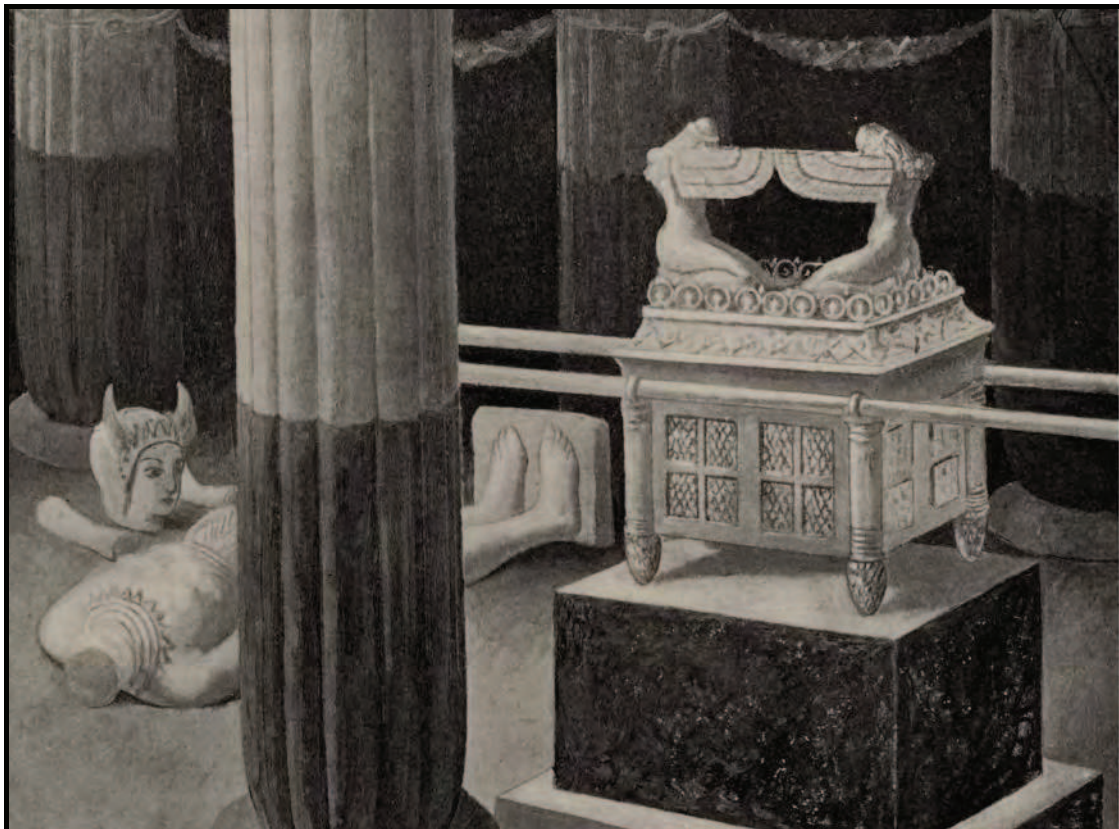
“Joshua said to the people, ‘You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; He is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods; He will

turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after He has been good to you.” (Joshua 24:19-20)

“But they put God to the test and rebelled against the Most High. They did not keep His statutes; like their fathers they were disloyal and faithless, as unreliable as a faulty bow. They angered Him with their high places; they aroused His jealousy with their idols. When God heard them, He was very angry. He rejected Israel completely.” (Psalm 78:56-59)

“The Lord will never be willing to forgive him. His wrath and zeal (jealousy) will burn against that man. All the curses written in this book will fall on him and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven.” (Deuteronomy 29:20)

“Judah did evil in the eyes of the Lord. By the sins they committed, they stirred up His jealous anger more than their fathers had done.



“The Philistine Idol Dagon Broken Before the Ark of the Lord” by Tissot

They also set up for themselves high places, sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. There were even male shrine prostitutes in the land; the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.” 1 Kings 14: 22-24)

“Let them give glory to the Lord and proclaim His praise in the islands. The Lord will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior He will stir up His zeal (jealousy); with a shout He will raise the battle cry and will triumph over His enemies.” (Isaiah 42:12-13)

“Therefore, as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord because you have defiled My sanctuary with your vile images and detestable practices, I Myself will withdraw My favor; I will not look on you with pity or spare you...Then My anger will cease and My wrath against them will subside, and I will be avenged. And when I have spent My wrath upon them, they will know that I, the Lord, have spoken in My zeal (jealousy).” (Ezekiel 6:11-13)

“For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal (jealousy) of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.” (2 Kings 19:31)



“The Babylonians Plundering the Temple of Solomon” by Tissot

“Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and with righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal (jealousy) of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.” (Isaiah 9:7)

“Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will now bring Jacob back from captivity and will have compassion on all the people of Israel, and I will be zealous (jealous) for My holy Name.” (Ezekiel 39:25)

“Then the angel who was speaking to me said, ‘Proclaim this word: This is what the Lord Almighty says: I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, but I am very angry with the nations that feel secure...Therefore this is what the Lord says, I will return to Jerusalem with mercy and there My House will be rebuilt.’” (Zechariah 14-16)

St. Paul later warned the Corinthians of their peril in provoking the jealousy of God by continuing their former practice of idol worship: ***“You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons. Are you trying to arouse the Lord’s jealousy?”*** (1 Corinthians 10:21) The New Testament’s other reference to God’s jealousy comes in the Epistle of James as the apostle warns his people that believers can no longer live in the evil ways of the world: ***“Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the Spirit He cause to live in us longs jealously?”*** (James 4:5-6)

The common theme present in all of these



***“St. Paul Opposed by Idol Worshipers”
19th Century Bible Illustration***



*“Destroying the Temples of Baal After the Fall of Ahab and Jezebel”
19th Century Bible Engraving*

texts is an emphasis upon the intensity of God’s love for His people. That passionate love makes it impossible for Him to tolerate their self-destructive sinfulness, particularly the deadly sin of idolatry. His judgement must come, even upon those He loves and yet the threat of judgement is always accompanied with the promise of forgiveness for those who turn away from sin in genuine repentance.

“Punishing the children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation...” - Sin is inherently destructive. It always has consequences and those consequences are seldom limited to the individual sinner alone. The destructive effects of sin spread like the infection of a deadly disease throughout the network of relationships in which the sinner is involved. Martin Luther utilized this paragraph in reference to all of the commandments in the Small Catechism by making these verses the *“Close of the Commandments.”* While the principle expressed here does apply to sin in general, it is particularly relevant to idolatry as the core concept of every sin. In a very real sense every transgression of God’s Law is ultimately idolatry

as the creature places his own will or desire before the command of his Creator. Every time man sins he denies and defies God, thus becoming his own God. In this sense the words of the Tempter in Eden, while misleading, were, in fact true. He promised Eve that if she disobeyed God to eat the forbidden fruit she ***“will be like God, knowing good from evil.”*** (Genesis 3:4) Given the nature of sin as idolatry, this warning/promise is particularly appropriate as an addendum to the First Commandment. In this light, Martin Luther noted the unique significance of the First Commandment as the basic theme of all the other commandments which follow in his *“Large Catechism:”*

“As we have heard above, this appendix was primarily attached to the First Commandment. Yet it was laid down for the sake of all of the commandments, since all of them are to be referred and directed to it...So the First Commandment is to shine and give its splendor to all the others. Therefore, you must let this declaration run through all the commandments. It is like a hoop in a wreath, joining the end to the



“Teaching the Catechism” - Muenier



Luther Teaching His Family the Christmas Gospel

beginning and holding them all together. Let it be continually repeated and not forgotten...Everything is to flow from the First Commandment's power...Now we see how the First Commandment is the chief source and fountainhead that flows into all the rest. Note again, all return to that First Commandment and depend upon it. So beginning and end are bound and fastened to each other.” (LC, pp. 420-421)

The generational dimension of this phrase - **“punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me”** - has often been criticized as arbitrary and unfair. This language is common throughout the Old Testament. (cf. Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9; Jeremiah 32:18). At the same time, however, the fact that no one should be punished for a crime they did not personally commit is a fundamental component of justice in Holy Scripture. This is clearly affirmed by Deuteronomy 24:16 - **“Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own**

sin.” This principle would later be cited as the basis for King Amaziah’s decision not to follow the typical practice of the ancient Near East and execute the entire families of those who had participated in the assassination of his father King Joash (cf. 2 Kings 14:6) In the days of the prophet Ezekiel, the Israelites sought to evade responsibility for the judgement visited upon their nation, by asserting that they were unfairly being punished for the sins of their fathers. God bluntly addressed their spurious claim in these words:

“What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: ‘The fathers eat sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For every living soul belongs to Me, the father as well as the son -both alike belong to Me. The soul who sins is the one who will die...The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him.” (Ezekiel 18:1-4,20)

In this context it is clear that Exodus 20 does not deal with moral guilt attributed from one individual to another. Instead, the point of the text here is that the cumulative consequences of sin cannot be isolated to the individual who commits that sin. Man must recognize that the inherent destructiveness of sin cannot be contained and will not remain isolated to a particular individual. John Durham correctly notes: *“Indifference to commitment is contagious, in a family, or in a society.”* (Durham, p. 287) Although often minimized or denied in contemporary culture, the fact remains that the most important single influence in



“Learning to Pray” - 19th Century Engraving

determining a person's core values are the attitudes and actions of their parents. Either by omission or commission, parents play a critical role in conveying constructive values or destructive behaviors to their children. This text affirms that foundational truth and warns that the righteous God will not fail to punish subsequent generations for committing the sins which they have learned from their parents.



“Me and My House Will Serve the Lord”

“One generation does not live to itself, but sets the agenda and the moral atmosphere for those that come after it.. ‘Sin’ is no a general word for wrong-doing, but points to religious and ethical deviance. When that becomes prevalent in one generation, the truth about God is not passed to the next generation, who consequently receive a warped religious inheritance which leads them to fall short of the standards of God’s covenant and come under His scrutiny and displeasure...Our conduct affects not only ourselves, but our families and descendants. It is not accidental that the language used here is that of the family. It is the home that is the primary training ground for the next generation, and religious decline does not arise from the failure of the church or the state, but from the failure of the family to life close to God.” (Mackay, pp. 346-347)

The language of the text is most emphatic - *“of those who hate Me.”* The verb *“hate”* indicates intense deliberate rejection and defiance. Such willful deliberate sin is particularly damaging to one’s spiritual well-being and a persistent pattern of such willful deliberate sin can lead to a hardening of the heart which ultimately precludes repentance.

“But showing love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and who keep

My commandments.” - The contrast between the warning about sin’s consequences and the promise of God’s steadfast love is inescapably clear. “*By the greatest numerical contrast in the Bible (three/four to thousands), God identified eloquently His real desire; to have His people remain loyal forever so that He might in turn show them the rich blessings of His resulting loyalty to them.*” (Stuart, p. 454) The “***thousand generations***” indicate infinity and might better be translated “*an innumerable descendancy.*” The saving power of God’s love is infinitely greater than the destructive power of evil. The Hebrew text uses two distinctly different terms for love in this phrase to distinguish between the undeserved grace and steadfast mercy of God (“*hesed*”) and the human response of inner affection and loyalty which is necessarily demonstrated by a genuine effort to “***keep My commandments.***” As St.



“Showing Mercy To a Thousand Generations”

John the Apostle declares in his first New Testament Epistle: *“This how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out His commands. This is love for God: to obey His commands. And His commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world.”* (1 John 5:2-4)



“The Sacred Name of God” - 17th Century Luther Bible Engraving

“You shall not misuse the Name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone blameless who misuses His Name.” - The Second Commandment deals with the abuse of the sacred Name of God, reflecting the profound significance of names in the Biblical perspective.

“Yahweh’s Name signified His essence. In any culture, modern or ancient, a name is a verbal symbol for a person or thing, and the ancients in particular obviously appreciated the way names connoted the very value, character and influence of a person or thing. To speak Yahweh’s Name was to recognize His awesome power and holiness and even to invite His response to one’s particular situation at the moment.”
(Stuart, p. 456)

The prophet Amos warned his ungodly nation that they dare not mention the Name of God lest He appear among them, bringing down upon them the horrible judgement they justly deserved: *“Hush! We must not mention the Name of the Lord.”* (Amos 6:10) Jesus expressed the same profound respect for the Name of God in His Sermon

on the Mount when He urged His disciples to avoid the practice of swearing altogether lest they inadvertently diminish the sanctity of God's holy Name:

“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths that you have made to the Lord.’ But I tell you, Do not swear at all; either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” (Matthew 5:33-37)

Later the Lord would condemn the sanctimonious piety of the Pharisees who substituted sacred objects or places for the divine Name in their self-righteous efforts



“The Sermon on the Mount” - 19th Century Bible Illustration by Morelli



“Christ’s Reproof of the Phisees” by Edward Armitage

to avoid the technical violation of the commandment and then proceeded to legalistic distinctions between which of these substitutes were more binding than others:

“Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the Temple it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the Temple, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind fools! Which is greater; the gold, or the Temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind men! Which is greater;, the gift or the altar which makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and everything on it. And he who swears by the Temple, swears by it and the One who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven, swears by God’s throne and by the One who sits on it!” (Matthew 23:16-22)

This words should not be misconstrued as a categorical prohibition of any and all oaths. This view would contradict not only a host of Old Testament texts (i.e. Leviticus 19:12; Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21; Psalm 132:11; Proverbs 8:7; 12:19; Jeremiah 5:3; Hosea 4:1; Zechariah 8:16; Malachi 2:6) but the example of both our Lord and His apostles. Christ responded under oath to the High Priest at His trial affirming that He was indeed the Son of God, the promised Messiah (Matthew 26:63,64) So also St. Paul regularly called upon God to witness the truthfulness of his

statements (i.e. Romans 1:9; Galatians 1:20). Hebrews 6:16 likewise affirms the necessity of oaths when the subject of that oath is of appropriate importance:

“Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of His purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, He confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.” (Hebrews 6:16-18)

Christ’s words condemn oaths which are flippant or false and the hypocrisy of those who use the holy Name and the holy things of God to conceal their own dishonesty.



“The Pharisees Attacking Jesus” by J. James Tissot

The Second Commandment does not specify that which constitutes the ***“misuse”*** of God’s name. The Hebrew text - which literally reads *“Do not raise (or invoke) Yahweh’s Name for nothing”* - clearly suggests prohibition of the frivolous, careless use of the divine name. This concept is reflected in the traditional KJV translation - *“Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain.”* God’s people’s

reverence for their Lord was to preclude any casual use of His holy Name. However, the term “*nothing*” can also refer to falsehood. Thus, traditional rabbinic interpretation has tended to focus on perjury, that is swearing to falsehood as the basic thrust of the commandment. The rabbis cited a series of Old Testament passages which prohibit false swearing in support of this view. David declared: ***“Who may ascend to the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear falsely.”*** (Psalm 24:3-4) Jeremiah 7:9-10 included perjury in the detestable things committed by apostate Israel:

“Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before Me in this house, which bears My name, and say ‘We are safe, safe to do all these detestable things?’”

Zechariah also used false swearing as a hallmark of the wickedness which had overtaken God’s people. He was given a vision of the banner of God’s judgment flying throughout the land:

“This is the curse that is going out over the whole land; for according to what it says on one side, every thief will be banished, and according to what it says on the other, everyone who swears falsely will be banished. The Lord Almighty declares, ‘I will send it out, and it will enter the house of a thief and the house of him who swears falsely by My Name. It will remain in his house and destroy it, both its timbers and its stones.’” (Zechariah 5:3-4)

Those who would dare to use the name of God in support of falsehood or corruption thereby demonstrated their contempt for the Holy One.

“This commandment is couched in language deliberately chosen to permit a wide range of application, covering every dimension of the misuse of God’s name.” (Durham, p. 288) Given the broad language of the text, Luther is no doubt correct in defining the meaning of the commandment to forbid any abuse of the Name of God in the service of malice, falsehood or evil: *“We should fear and love God that we do not curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie or deceive by Name, but call upon Him in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks.”* God’s Name was to be kept sacred, free from the



“Saul and the Witch of Endor” by Kunz Meyer - 19th Century German Bible Illustration

taint of corruption in any form. Luther's inclusion of witchcraft in this commandment refers to the use of the Name of God in magical spells, incantations, and necromancy (communication with the spirits of the dead) as a means of attaining and controlling supernatural power. While such practices are typically nothing more than pretense and deception, in those rare instances when supernatural power is actually at work, it comes from the devil, not from God. God cannot be manipulated by the mere mention of His Name in the proper sequence of magic words. By the same token, when the devil or one of his demons choose to become involved in witchcraft or black magic they are in no manner under the control of the witch or magician. Instead, the powers of hell use the superstitions of these mortals to grant the delusion of control in order to manipulate them for their own nefarious purposes. The pathetic episode of King Saul's attempt to conjure the spirit of Samuel through the craft of the witch of Endor

(1 Samuel 28) is a typical example of such deadly foolishness. The end result of that event was the suicide of the despairing monarch.



***“King Saul and the Witch of Endor”
Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot***

“For the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His Name.” - While men may deceive one another and evade the punishments they justly deserve, God cannot be deceived. He will most surely punish those who are guilty of the abuse of His holy Name. The addition of the warning, as in the preceding commandment, serves to emphasize the particular importance of the manner in which God's holy Name is used is a direct expression of one's attitude toward God. Keil/Delitsch observes: *“This commandment prohibits all employment of the Name of God for vain and unworthy objects, and includes not only false swearing as a profanation of the Name of Jehovah, but trivial swearing in the ordinary intercourse of life, and every use of the Name of God in the service of*



“Saul and the Witch of Endor” by Salvatore Rosa

untruth and lying, for imprecation, witchcraft, or conjuring; whereas the true employment of the Name of God is confined to invocation, prayer, praise, and thanksgiving which proceeds from a pure, believing heart. The natural heart is very liable to transgress this command, and therefore it is solemnly enforced by the threat ‘for Jehovah will not hold him guiltless...’” (Keil, p. 469)

Some are puzzled today by the prominence given to this commandment within the Decalogue. The particular importance of the commandment is linked to the recognition that names and the manner in which we use them exert a profound influence upon our attitude toward that which is named. At the same time, the commandment and the warning it includes, reflects the unique blessing which God had graciously bestowed upon His covenant people by the gift of His Name. That sacred Name

had been revealed to Israel alone as a mark of the unique intimacy with the Creator with which they had been blessed so that they might carry out the task which had been entrusted to them as custodians of the Messianic promise for mankind, Dr. John Durham stresses this covenant community dimension of the revelation of God’s Name to Israel in his explanation of the prominence of the Second Commandment:

“The commandment is directed not toward Yahweh’s protection but toward Israel’s. Yahweh’s Name, specifically the tetragrammaton, but in principle all Yahweh’s names and titles, must be honored, blessed, praised, celebrated, invoked, pronounced, and so shared. To treat Yahweh’s Name with disrespect is to treat His gift lightly, to underestimate His power, to scorn His presence and to misrepresent to the family of humankind His very nature as ‘the One Who Always Is.’ So serious was such an abuse, and apparently also so widespread that the

commandment was expanded by a warning. Any member of the covenant community who dishonors Yahweh's Name, and so Yahweh's presence, will not be left unpunished.” (Durham, 288)

The warning does not define the threatened punishment, which, in a sense, makes it all the more ominous, leaving God's options open - so to speak - ranging potentially all the way from minor chastening to death depending on the nature of the particular offense.

One final note before leaving the Second Commandment. The concern of this command is the sanctity of the Name of God. It therefore forbids profanity of every kind. The commandment, however, does not apply to vulgarity, that is, offensive reference to sexuality or various body functions. The standards which define vulgarity are socially determined and thus may vary widely from culture to culture across the century. That which is offensive in a particular time and place may be entirely acceptable in another. That is not to say that the issue of vulgarity is morally insignificant. Standards of verbal decency reflect the moral values of a community and become an important factor in shaping those values. However, contrary to the popular misconception, the Second Commandment does not address the issue of vulgarity.



“Moses Receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai” - Luther Bible Woodcut



“The First Sabbath Day” by E.M. Lilien

“Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it, you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath Day and made it holy.” - The Third Commandment is the longest of the words of the Decalogue. It is explained and defined to an unprecedented degree, signaling its importance as the unique observance which was to become the cornerstone of Judaism. J.H. Hertz, Chief Rabbi of Great Britain in the 1960's did not exaggerate when he asserted: *“Without the observance of the Sabbath, of the olden Sabbath, as perfected by the Rabbis, the whole of Jewish life would, in time, disappear.”* (Rushdooney, p. 257) Nahum Sarna contends that the Sabbath observance, specifically rooted in the pattern of divine creation, *“expresses the quintessential idea of Israel’s monotheism: a God who is entirely outside of and sovereign over nature.”*



“And God Blessed the Sabbath Day” by C. Gutherz

“The Sabbath is wholly and Israelite innovation. There is nothing analogous to it in the entire Near Eastern world. This is surprising, since seven day units of time are well known throughout the region. Yet, the Sabbath is the sole exception to the otherwise universal practice of basing all the major units of time - months and seasons, as well as years - on the phases of the moon and the solar cycle. The Sabbath, in other words, is completely disassociated from the movement of the celestial bodies. This singularity, together with Creation as the basis for the institution, expresses the quintessential idea of Israel’s monotheism: God is entirely outside of and sovereign over nature.” (Sarna, p. 111)

Umberto Cassuto emphasized the uniqueness of the Hebrew Sabbath as an expression of Israel’s particular understanding of God and the centrality of the Sabbath observance within Judaism in a similar fashion:

“The precept of the Sabbath is included in the Decalogue because of its primary purpose, which is to recognize and attest that the Lord is the Creator of the world...the Hebrew Sabbath assumed an entirely new and

original form, an immeasurably nobler and higher character than all of its precursors, and became the treasured possession of Israel and of all the peoples who received it from them.” (Cassutto, pp. 244,245)

“Remember the Sabbath Day...” - The Third and Fourth Commandments come are unique in the Decalogue in that they come in the form of a positive commands rather than negative prohibitions. The essence of the command is expressed in the Hebrew verb - “*zakor*” - which, most appropriately for this instruction regarding the seventh day, begins with the seventh letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The verb is an infinitive absolute, denoting continuous ongoing action. It means “*to call to mind*” or “*to remember*” and is typically used in the context of a contractual obligation. The sense of the term here is that for Israel the observance of the Sabbath as a priority without pause or interruption. The concept of remembrance also conforms to the institution of the Israel’s Sabbath as a reflection of the pattern of God’s action in the seven days of creation. When they rested on the seventh day they would recall that God had also rested on the seventh day.

The first mention of a Sabbath command comes in Exodus 16 in conjunction with God’s provision of the manna. The people were instructed to gather a double portion on the sixth day because: **“This is what the Lord commanded: Tomorrow is to be a**



“God Providing Manna to Israel in the Wilderness” - Luther Bible Woodcut

day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord.” (Exodus 16:23) Although many contend that the Sabbath observance began in Eden, there is no evidence anywhere in Scripture that this was the case. *“From the history of creation, that had been handed down, Israel must have known, that after God had created the world in six days, He rested the seventh day (Genesis 2:3). But hitherto there had been no commandment given to man to sanctify the day.”* (Keil, p. 469)

The origins of the term **“sabbath”** itself has been the subject of considerable discussion among linguists. In the Akkadian dialect of Mesopotamia the term **“sabbattum”** referred to the fifteenth day of the lunar month, the time of the full moon. The cuneiform texts refer to this day as *“the day of the quieting of the heart of the god”* without further explanation. Conservative scholars have suggested a possible allusion to the divine rest of the creation week in this reference. But there was no connotation of rest or diminished activity in Mesopotamian religious practices in connection with the monthly lunar **“sabbattum.”** Bible critics are quick to point out that the Akkadian **“sabbattum”** was also a monthly occurrence without any connection to a seven day weekly cycle. Despite extensive study, the etymology of **“sabbath”** remains uncertain. Nahum Sarna correctly summarizes: *“Whatever the true etymology of the Hebrew term may be, the institution itself has no connection with any known Mesopotamian observance.”* (Sarna, p. 112) The Biblical Sabbath is derived from the Hebrew verb **“shabat”** which means *“to cease, desist, or rest.”*



“And God Blessed the Seventh Day”
Bible Illustration by Rudolf Schäfer

“To keep it holy” - Accordingly, the Sabbath Day was to be a time which the ordinary pattern of labor which characterized the other six day of the



“The Giving of the Ten Commandments” by Arnold Friberg

week ceased, to be replaced by a day of rest set apart for the Lord. That is the root of the word *“holy,”* - to be set apart and its distinctively different nature carefully maintained.

“Keeping it holy points to that day being marked as out of the ordinary run of human activity and devoted to divine service...It was a day on which the ordinary routines of life were suspended, not for idleness or mere recreation, but for particular consecration to divine service.”
(Mackay, p. 348)

The holiness of Israel as a nation which had been set apart by God to play a unique role in His eternal plan for the salvation of humanity was expressed and reflected by the holy day which Israel was to set apart in the weekly cycle of their days. In this way, the Sabbath served as a sign of the covenant which God had graciously established with His people. It was an on-going constant reminder of their identity as the chosen people of God. God stressed this dimension of the Sabbath as He

reinforced the importance of the observance to Moses and applied the penalty of death to those who violated the sanctity of the Sabbath day:

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe My Sabbaths. This will be sign between Me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy. Observe the Sabbath Day because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people. For six days work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath Day must be put to death. The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between Me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He abstained from work and rested.’” (Exodus 31:12-16)



“The Third Commandment”

17th Century Woodcut Catechism Illustration

Thus, the Sabbath Day would serve as the visible reminder of the Sinai Covenant and the Deliverance from Egyptian Bondage in the same way that the rainbow served as the sign of God’s covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:12-13,17) and circumcision served as the sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17:11).

“Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.” - As previously noted, the purpose of the Sabbath is not mere recreation or the pursuit of personal pleasure. These words do not denigrate the work of the other six days in any way. The two terms used in this phrase - *“labor”* and *“work”* are, in fact, used in reference to the activities of God in creation and of man in the perfection of Eden (cf. Genesis



“And God Rested on the Seventh Day”

19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

2:2-3,15). *“‘Work’ had no overtones of drudgery; it is the activity of a skilled craftsman, and can be used of God’s own activity. ‘Labor’ looks back to the privilege which God gave man in making him guardian of the garden.”* (Mackay, p. 349) There is, at the same time, the suggestion that the Sabbath Day is provided as a time of rest and rejuvenation, particularly for those servants and animals who would often bear the brunt of the labor: *“Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well, may be refreshed.”* (Exodus 23:12)

The commandment makes no effort to specify or define the work which is prohibited on the Sabbath. It simply indicates that *“On it you shall not do any work”* Previously, the gathering of manna had been cited as a prohibited effort (Exodus 16). Subsequently, other Bible texts would cite examples of forbidden activities. The Sabbath rest was to continue throughout the hectic seasons of plowing and harvesting: *“Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest.”* (Exodus 34:21) The daily routine of kindling fire and chopping wood was to be interrupted each week for the Sabbath: *“For six days work is to be done, but the seventh day shall be your holy day, a Sabbath of rest to the Lord. Whoever does any work on it must be put to*



“God Blessing the Seventh Day” Bible Illustration by William Blake

death. Do not light a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day.” (Exodus 35:2-3) This most pertinent prohibition was grimly reinforced by a direct judgement of God:

“When the Israelites were in the desert, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day. Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and the whole assembly, and they kept him in custody because it was not clear what should be done to him. Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp.’ So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the Lord commanded Moses.” (Numbers 15:32-36)

The ordinary course of trade and business was also to cease in observance of the Sabbath day. God instructed the prophet Jeremiah to warn the people of Jerusalem that their failure to obey the Lord in this matter would result in the downfall of their city:

“Say to them, ‘Hear the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah and all people of Judah and everyone living in Jerusalem who come through these gates. This is what the Lord says: Be careful not to carry a load on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem. Do not bring a load out of your houses or do any work on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy as I commanded your forefathers. Yet they did not listen or pay attention; they were stiff-necked and would not listen or respond to discipline...But if you do not obey Me to keep the Sabbath day holy by not carrying any load as you come through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle an unquenchable fire in the gates of Jerusalem that will consume her fortresses.’” (Jeremiah 17:20-23,27)

God’s prophet Amos denounced the greed and corruption of the merchants of Israel who yearned for Sabbath to end so that they might immediately resume their dishonest trade the second it was over:

“Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, ‘When will the new moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?’- skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy with a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat.” (Amos 8:4-6)

The reforms of Nehemiah, after the return to Jerusalem following the Babylonian Captivity focused on the restoration of the Sabbath as a crucial component in Israel’s religious life. Nehemiah the powerful aristocrats who were ***“treading winepresses on the Sabbath and***



10th Century Bible Illustration of the Prophet Amos Sounding the Alarm

bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath.” He reminded them of the dire consequences their fathers had experienced for the same defiance of the command of God. The prophet’s words are particularly striking in that they cite the desecration of the Sabbath as a primary cause of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of Judah:

“I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, ‘What is this wicked thing you are doing - desecrating the Sabbath day? Didn’t your forefathers do this same things so that our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath.’” (Nehemiah 13:15-18)



“Nehemiah Rebuilding the Walls of Jerusalem” by Carolsfeld



"The Scribes and the Pharisees" by J. James Tissot

Such straightforward simplicity is not acceptable to those who have chosen to live under the law. Legalistic definition and extreme casuistic expansion must be added to explain and apply the law to conceivable situation and each minute detail. The *Mishnah* informs us that the rabbis of Judaism devised thirty-nine categories of activity which were to be considered "work" which could not lawfully be performed upon the Sabbath Day. Each one of these thirty-nine categories was broken down into innumerable sub-categories which could be applied to the most insignificant momentary effort. In his classic study, *The History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ*, Dr. Emil Schürer listed the Sabbath categories and provided astounding examples of the detail of application within the sub-categories.

"Of course the Rabbis could not rest satisfied with this simple prohibition. They must accurately define what work was forbidden. And consequently, they at last, with much ingenuity, got out of it that on the whole, thirty-nine kinds of work were prohibited, but very few, of course, anywhere alluded to in the Pentateuch. These thirty-nine



“A Pharisee Reading from the Torah Scroll”

prohibited works are: 1. Sowing, 2. Ploughing, 3. Reaping, 4. Binding sheaves, 5. Threshing, 6. Winnowing, 7. Cleansing crops, 8. Grinding, 9. Sifting, 10. Kneading, 11. Baking, 12. Shearing wool, 13. Washing, 14. Beating, 15. Dyeing, 16. Spinning, and 17. Warping it, 18. Making two cords, 19. Weaving two threads, 20. Separating two threads, 21. Making a knot, 22. Untying a knot, 23. Sewing two stitches, 24. Tearing to sew two stitches, 25. Catching a deer, 26. Killing, 27. Skinning, and 28. Salting it, 29. Preparing its skin, 30. Scraping off the hair, 31. Cutting it up, 32. Writing two letters, 33. Blotting out for the purpose of writing two letters, 34. Building, 35. Pulling down, 36. Putting out a fire, 37. Lighting a fire, 38. Beating smooth with a hammer, and 39. Carrying from one tenement to another. Each of these chief enactments again requires further discussions concerning their range and meaning. And here, properly, begins the work of casuistry. We will bring forward a few of its results...The prohibition of making a tying a knot was much too general to rest satisfied with. It was also necessary to state to what kind of knot this applied and to what it did not. ‘The following are the knots the tying of which renders a man guilty: the knot of camel drivers and that of sailors; and as one is guilty by reason of tying, so also of untying them.

Guilt is not incurred by reason of a knot which can be untied with one hand. There are knots by reason of which one is not guilty, as one is in the case of the camel driver’s and sailors. A woman may tie up a slit in her shift and the strings of her cap, those of her girdle, the straps of shoes and sandals, of skins of wine and oil, of a pot with meat.’ The prohibition of writing on the Sabbath was further defined as followed: ‘He who writes two letters with his right or his left hand, whether of one kind or of two kinds, as also if they were written with different ink or are of different languages, is guilty. He, even, who should from forgetfulness two letters is guilty. Also he who writes on two walls which form an angle, or on the two

tablets of his account book, so that they can be read together is guilty. He who writes upon his body is guilty. If anyone writes with dark fluid, with fruit juice, or in the dust of the road, in sand, or in anything in which the writing does not remain is free. If anyone writes with the wrong hand, with the foot, with the mouth, with an elbow; also, if anyone writes upon a letter of another piece of writing, or covers another writing; also if anyone meaning to write 'm' has only written 'n n' or if anyone has written one letter on the ground and another on the wall, or upon two different walls of the house, or upon two pages of a book so that they cannot be read together, he is free.'” (Schürer, 2, II, pp.98-99)

Scores of similar examples could be cited. The observant Jew was not allowed to travel more than 2,000 cubits from his place of residence on the Sabbath Day without his footsteps being considered labor. Then hundreds of pages were written debating how to precisely define the perimeter of one’s residence from which the measurement would commence. This obsession with trivia virtually guaranteed that the true purpose of the Sabbath would be lost in a morass of legalism and self-righteousness. In this context it was virtually inevitable that one of the most frequent attacks upon Jesus and His disciples were because of His alleged violations of the Sabbath commandment. Jesus used the attacks of His enemies to reaffirm the loving purpose for which the Sabbath Day had originally been instituted by God:

“At that time, Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, ‘Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath!’ He answered, ‘Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the House of God and he and his companions ate



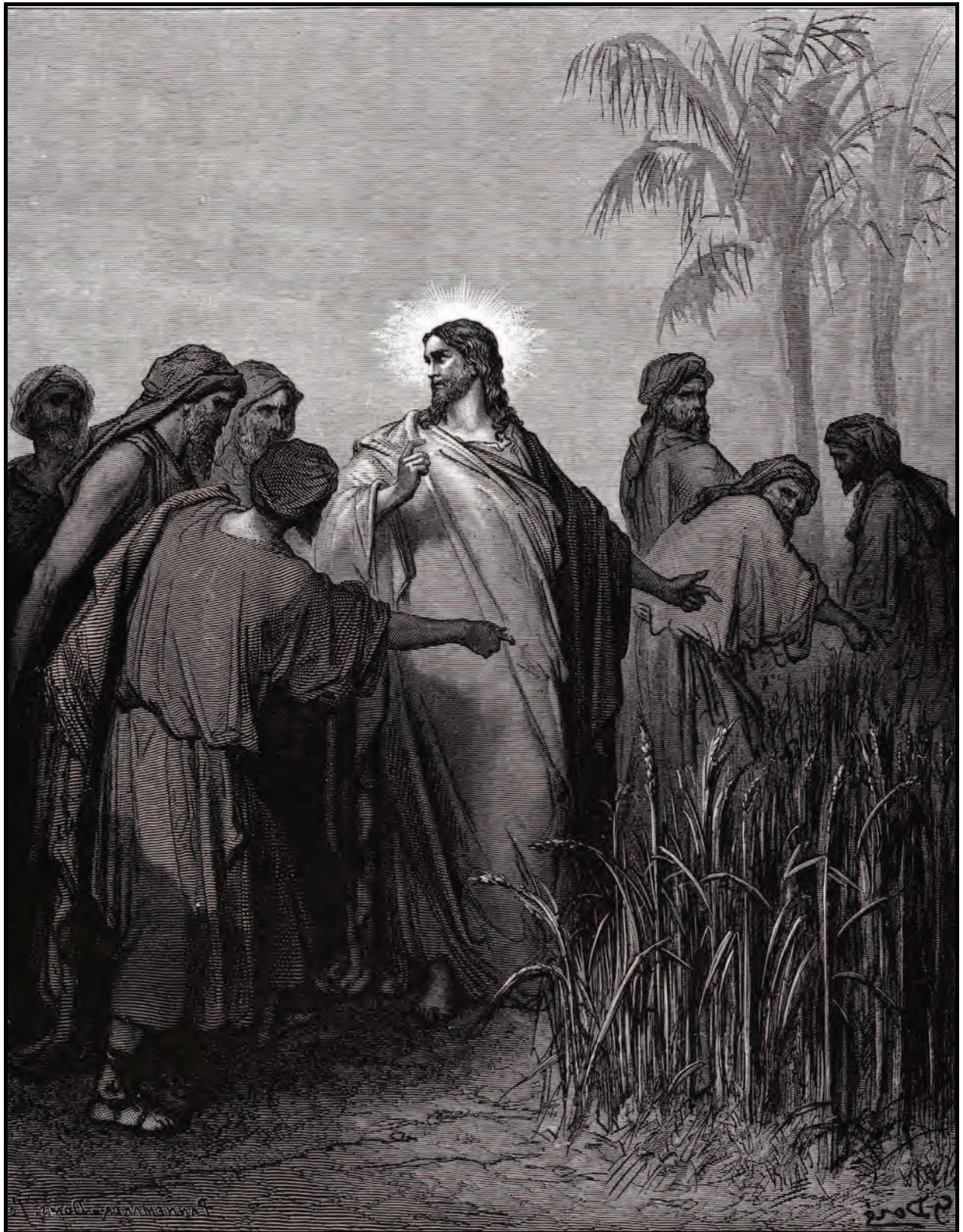
***“The Pharisee Entering the Temple”
by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld***

the consecrated bread - which was not lawful for them to do but only for the priests. Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the Temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? I tell you that One greater than the Temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.' Going on from that place, He went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked Him, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?' He said to them, 'If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on a Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.'

(Matthew 12:1-13)

“neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maid servant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates” - The list of those to be included in the Sabbath rest includes seven categories, thereby emphasizing its perfect inclusiveness. There are to be no exemptions or exceptions in the household of Israel. The Sabbath Day was to be a time of rest for all. The commandment appears to anticipate the desire of selfish or greedy men to continue ordinary labor on the seventh day by simply delegating that labor to others within their extended households while they themselves observed the letter of the Law. This meticulously complete listing precluded that temptation. *“It is an attempt to plug the obvious loopholes; not only is the Israelite not to work on the Sabbath, neither is anyone else, or even any animal, that might conceivably be doing his work for him.”* (Durham, p. 289) As previously noted, the parallel text in Deuteronomy 5 supplements this precedent with a reminder of Israel's slavery in Egypt, God's deliverance of His people from that slavery and a humanitarian concern for the well-being of those who now serve the Israelites as a rationale for inclusion of slaves and beasts of burden in the Sabbath rest: *“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath Day.”* (Deuteronomy 5:15)

“For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the seventh



“Jesus Debating the Sabbath With the Pharisees in the Grainfield” by Dore



“Moses Presents the Ten Commandments to Israel” by Gustav Dore

day and made it holy.” - The Sabbath is directly linked to the pattern of creation and God’s action in resting on the seventh day from his labor in calling the universe into being. The language of the text stresses the truth the God is the Source and Maker of all things - *“the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them.”* The nature of God as the divine Creator provides him with the authority to bless and sanctify the seventh day as a day of rest for His chosen people Israel.

The debate over the obligation of Christians toward the Sabbath Day raises the more basic question of the role of the Ten Commandments themselves in the lives of God’s

people today. God's covenant with Israel at Sinai included hundreds of stipulations and laws which defined His unique relationship with the people whom He had chosen to be the custodians of the promise of the Messiah for humanity. The Decalogue occupied a special place of prominence at the core of that covenant as a summary of the basic moral principles for Israel which applied to everyone. Thus, Christians have historically found it useful to continue to utilize the Ten Commandments as a summary of the moral law. It must always be remembered, however, that the specific formulation of that moral law given at Sinai was designed for the nation of Israel. In that context, the New Testament makes it very clear that the Sabbath commandment, with its requirement that Saturday be set aside as a day of rest in commemoration of God's rest in creation and the deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt, was particularly intended for the people of Israel in order that they might remain set apart from the nations among whom they lived across the centuries of the Old Testament era. For Christians, the rest prefigured by the Sabbath has been perfectly fulfilled in the coming of the promised Messiah and the peace with God which Christ has won for us by the forgiveness of our sins. Accordingly, the Sabbath commandment, as presented at Sinai, is no longer binding upon the people of God in Christ. We are free to worship God on any and every day. Those who continue to observe a Saturday Sabbath may certainly do so, but as a matter of personal preference, not divine command. This conclusion is not an arbitrary exemption from the Commandments based upon individual opinion, but the clear teaching of the Word of God. The following texts are among the New Testament passages which address this question:

“Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own Master he stands or falls. And he will stand for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special does so to the Lord.”
(Romans 14:4-6)

“When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all. ‘You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it then that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?...So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. So you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If

you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise...You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you!" (Galatians 2:14, 3:24-29; 4:10)

"Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath Day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come. The reality, however, is found in Christ." (Colossians 2:16-17)

"Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, 'So I declared on oath in My anger, 'They shall never enter My rest.' And yet His work has been finished since the creation of the world, for somewhere He has spoken about the seventh day in these words: 'And on the seventh day God rested from all His work.' And again in the passage above He says, 'They shall never enter My rest.' ...There remains then a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience." (Hebrews 4:3-5,9-11)

"The Law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the realities themselves. ...Therefore, when Christ came into the world, He said: 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body you prepared for Me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings You were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am - it is written about Me in the scroll - I have come to do your will, O God.' ...He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all...And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:1,5-7,9-10,24-25)

The transition from Saturday/Sabbath to Sunday/Lord's Day which took place during Christendom's first generation reflected this awareness of the fulfillment of the old covenant by the new.

The Sabbath commandment concludes the First Table of the Law and that portion of the Decalogue which pertains to man's relationship with God. The focus now shifts to man's relationship with his fellow man which is the subject of the Second Table of the Law. Leviticus 19:18 sums up the substance of the Second Table of the Law with the cogent phrase: ***“Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”*** Jesus quoted this phrase in His own summary of the two tables of the Law in response to the questions posed by the pharisees: ***“Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.’”*** (Matthew 22:37-40)

“Honor your father and mother so that you may life long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.” - In a sense, the family commandment serves as the bridge between the First and Second Tables of the Law in that it pertains to a horizontal relationship between people while also alluding to the covenant bond between Israel and ***“the Lord your God.”*** It is no coincidence that the Second Table of the Law opens with the family commandment. In the loving providence of God, the family unit has been designed as the keystone of human society. ***“The parallels point up the supreme importance which the Torah assigns to the integrity of the family for the sake of the stability of society and generational continuity. Family life is the bedrock on which Jewish society stands.”*** (Sarna, p. 113) It is the Creator's intent that children be reared within the stability of the lifelong commitment of a man and a woman to one another in holy marriage. The family is to be the context in which authentic male and female identity and moral



***“Honor Your Father and Mother”
by Rudolf Schäfer***



*“As a Mother Comforts Her Child, So Will I Comfort You”
(Isaiah 66:13) by Rudolf Schäfer*

values are taught, by both example and precept. The crucial importance of marriage/family in this regard is indicated by the inclusion of two commandments within the Decalogue (Commandments 4 & 6 in the traditional Augustinian/Lutheran Reckoning). That prominence is reinforced in Leviticus 19:3 where the respect of parents is combined with the sanctity of the Sabbath at the beginning of a restatement of the commandments: **“Each of you must respect his mother and father and you must observe My Sabbaths. I am the Lord your God.”** That same unique prominence is reflected by the facts that: **“No other item in the decalogue is similarly formulated wholly in positive terms, and for none other is there a promise of reward.”** (Sarna, p. 111) When the Lord addressed the city of Jerusalem to denounce the sins of her people, disrespect for parents figured prominently among the evils which led to the downfall of the kingdom - just as the commandment had warned: **“In you they have treated father and mother with contempt; in you they have oppressed the alien and mistreated the fatherless and the widow.”** (Ezekiel 22:7)

The commandment opens with the verb **“honor”** to describe the God-pleasing attitude of children toward their parents. The Hebrew term is *“kabad”* which literally means *“to be weighty, heavy, of great value and worth.”* (Currid, II, p. 45) The point of the verb in this context is not simply a matter of respect, although that is most certainly included. Parents - both father and mother contrary to popular stereotypes about chauvinistic Hebrew society! - are to be recognized and valued for the crucial role that they play within the family. That recognition is then to be expressed in obedience. St Paul makes precisely this application in his restatement of the commandment to the Christians in Ephesus: ***“Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother - which is the first commandment with a promise - that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”*** (Ephesians 6:1-3)

Respect for and obedience to parents is a consistent theme throughout the Torah and the balance of the Old Testament. Exodus 21:15,17 imposes the most severe



“As a Father Has Compassion on His Children, So the Lord Has Compassion on Those Who Fear Him” - Psalm 103:13

punishment upon those who attack their parents, either physically or verbally: ***“Anyone who attacks his father or his mother must be put to death...Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.”*** (Cf. Leviticus 20:9) The restatement of the commandment in Deuteronomy 5 links respect for parents to Israel’s continued possession of the land of Canaan: ***“Honor your father and your mother as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”*** (Deuteronomy 5:16) The law of Moses required death for ***“a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother.”*** (Deuteronomy 21:18-21) The Book of Proverbs places particular emphasis on the wisdom and blessing which children may receive from respect for their parents: ***“Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.”*** (Proverbs 1:8-9)

“My son, keep your father’s commands and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever, fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life.” (Proverbs 6:20-23)

This perspective, of course, is typical of human culture throughout history, until very recently. Dr. William Propp observes the tragic uniqueness of contemporary society in this regard:

“There is probably no culture save our own that does not place a supreme value upon respect for one’s elders. Contemporary Western civilization is uniquely characterized by its belief in progress instead of decline, the inherent superiority of the new over the old.”(Propp, p. 178)

The focus of the honor commanded here is not exhausted by the obedience and respect of children. It extends to the loving care of and support for the parents who cared for me when the weakness of advancing age renders them too feeble to care for themselves. ***“Filial piety is essentially an intergenerational bargain; I tend my children when they are young and weak, so that they will tend me when I am old and weak.”*** (Propp, p. 178) The proliferation of ***“old folks’ homes”*** throughout our land where the elderly are often abandoned and forgotten by our fractured families is



“The Ages of Life” by Rudolf Schäfer

symptomatic of our culture’s selfish obsession with and endless pursuit of youth. The extended families of our not too distant past did a much better job of caring for their own in a manner that fulfilled our obligation to **“honor your father and your mother.”** We would do well to recall the Bible’s admonition: **“Children’s children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.”** (Proverbs 17:6) Our drastically declining birth rate is yet another ominous indication that we have forgotten the importance of family. The Bible describes children -not wealth or success - as precious blessings from the Lord. **“Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from Him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.”** (Psalm 127:5)

“So that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.” - The reward promised to those who honor their elders is - most appropriately - that they will live long enough to become elders themselves. The repetition of the



*“The Temptation of Eve in the Garden”
by Walter Crane*

commandment in Deuteronomy 5 adds the explanatory phrase *“and that it may go well with you”* (Deuteronomy 5:16). The promise suggests the inherently salutary nature of God’s Law. That which the Lord commands is always an expression of His love designed for our good. Since the beginning (cf. Genesis 3:4-5) the devil has artfully insisted that God’s Law is repressive, designed to keep man in a position of inferiority. That has always been a lie and remains so today. But it is a lie sinful man is most prone to believe. Like our first parents we seek freedom and pleasure in disobedience. The result of our willful quest for liberation and self-satisfaction is always bondage and pain. At the same time the promise of this commandment refers to the life of the entire nation. If the covenant people remain faithful to the covenant the Lord will continue and bless them. When parents fulfill their responsibilities to their children and families function in a manner consistent with the divine intent then religious truth and moral values flourish within a society. Sadly, the opposite is also true. When parents fail and families falter unbelief and immorality become dominant within the culture. Israel’s religious and

moral apostasy throughout the Old Testament era can always be traced back to the decline of marriage and family within Israelite society. Although the reference here is to the Israelite nation, the same pattern prevails in every nation, including our own.

In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther properly extends the application of the Fourth Commandment beyond parents and the home to all those whom God has placed in positions of authority. In the Biblical perspective every level of authority throughout society springs from and is an extension of the basic authority of parents. Luther notes this perspective in his *“Large Catechism”*:

“In this commandment belongs a further statement to all kinds of persons in authority who have to command and to govern. For all authority flows and is born from the authority of parents. Where a father is unable alone to educate his rebellious and irritable child, he uses a schoolmaster to teach the child. If he is too weak he gets the help of his friends and neighbors. If he departs this life he delegates and confers his authority and government upon others who are appointed for the purpose...Whoever will not be moved by this and lean toward godliness we hand over to the hangman and the skeleton man. The same should also be said about obedience to civil government. This is all included in the place of fatherhood and extends farthest of all relations. Here ‘father’ is not one person from a single family but it means the many people the father has as tenants, citizens or subjects. Through them as through our parents, God gives us food, house and home, protection and security. They bear such name and title with all honor as their highest dignity that it is our duty to honor them and to value them greatly as the dearest treasure and the most precious jewel upon earth.” (LC, p. 402)



*“Luther In Wittenberg” by R. Schäfer
 “Whoever wishes to live in a city should know the rights of that city if he wants to continue to enjoy them” Dr. Martin Luther*

This view is reflected in Scripture as teachers or leaders of government are often referred to with parental titles. So, for example, Joseph described his office as the Prime Minister of Egypt as having become *“father to pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.”* (Genesis 45:8) The

prophetess Deborah celebrated the manner in which God had raised her up by proclaiming: ***“Village life in Israel ceased, ceased until I, Deborah arose, arose a mother in Israel.”*** (Judges 5:7) When Elijah was taken up in the fiery chariot, his student Elisha cried out: ***“My father! My father! The chariots and the horsemen of Israel!”*** (2 Kings 2:12) When Elisha died, pious King Jehoash used the same words to mourn his passing (cf. 2 Kings 13:14) In the same way teachers in Scripture often refer to their students as ***“my children”*** (i.e. Psalm 34:12; 45:11; Proverbs 1:8,10, 15) It is most important to recognize that the role of parents and of family is the key to a stable and peaceful society. The loyalty and support of the Christian citizen to the government under which he lives - with the single exception of ***“obeying God rather than men”*** (Acts 5:29) when the government commands us to do something forbidden by the Word of God - is the direct result of the Fourth Commandment. St. Paul makes this application in Romans 13: ***“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted.”*** (Romans 13:1).



“Reading for Grandpa” by La Blante - 1891



“The First Murder - Adam and Eve Mourning the Death of Abel” by Bougeareau

“You shall not murder.” - In the Hebrew text the commandment which expresses the sanctity of human life comes in the form of two blunt words - *“Never murder.”* *“Life is the gift of God and it is not at human disposal.”* (Mackay, p. 351) Scripture directly connects the unique value of human life to the original creation of humankind in the image of God. **“And from each man too I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.”** (Genesis 9:5-6) Dr. Nahum Sarna explains the concept of the text in this way:

“This means that society must exact satisfaction for the crime of murder because life, being derived from God, is infinitely precious and is His alone to give and to take. By his unspeakable act, the murderer usurps the divine prerogative and infringes upon God’s sovereignty; and because human beings are created in the divine image, he also affronts God’s majesty.” (Sarna, p. 113)

The phrase uses the Hebrew verb “*rasah.*” This verb occurs only forty-seven times in the Old Testament, reflecting its restricted meaning. It refers specifically to the improper or unauthorized killing of one human being by another. The verb is never used in reference to capital punishment or the slaying of an enemy in warfare. These activities do not fall within the category of murder but are proper activities of the government which God has established to preserve and protect the lives of the innocent. The “*Mishna*” reports that the great Hebrew teacher Rabbi Gamaliel affirmed this truth in his criticism of two of his colleagues who opposed the imposition of the death penalty: “*Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiba say: ‘Had we been members of the Sanhedrin, no one would ever have received the death penalty.’ Rabbi Simeon ben Gamaliel says: ‘They would also have multiplied those who shed blood in Israel.’*” (Sarna, p. 113) Romans 13, the chapter which affirms the divine institution of government, specifically asserts the authority of government to use physical force (“*the sword*”) to enforce the law and maintain peace among its citizens:

“For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not



“The Death of Abel - The First Murder” by Camille Belenger



“Cain’s Murder of Abel” by Lord Leighton

bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to do punishment upon the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment, but also because of conscience.” (Romans 13:3-6)

The comprehensive wording of the commandment allows for no exceptions or exemptions. Its protection applies to all human life. Accordingly, abortion, euthanasia and suicide are also forbidden by the Fifth Commandment. *“No unauthorized private person or group has the right to end a human life. Moreover, the ban on murder has no modifying conditions; taking one’s own life or ending someone else’s life for purposes of ‘mercy’ do not qualify as allowable exceptions.”* (Stuart, p. 463)

The New Testament expresses the essence of the commandment when it points out that not only the physical act itself, but the attitudes of hatred and anger from which

the action springs are also wrong. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus alluded to the commandment and declared:

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgement.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.” (Matthew 5:21-26)

The Apostle John used the illustration of Cain’s murder of his brother Abel to illustrate the perils of indulging in hatred or anger and warned Christians that such attitudes cannot remain in the heart of a true believer:



“Do not be like Cain who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brothers were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.” (1 John 3:12-15; cf. 2:9-10)

The Swiss reformer John Calvin aptly labeled hatred as “*the murder of the heart*”:

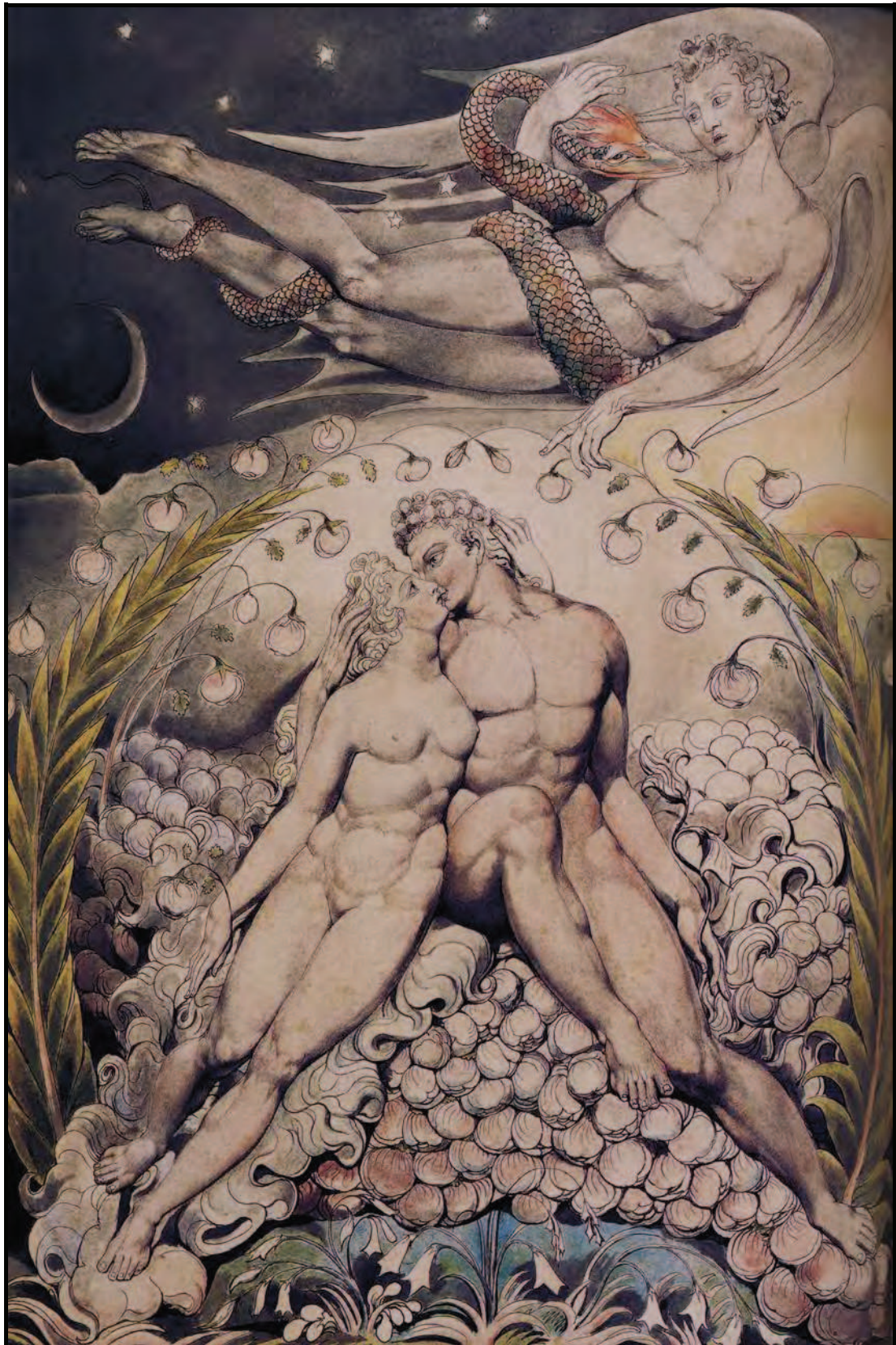
“Jesus’ interpretation of this law goes well beyond the physical act of murder. ‘It also forbids murder of the heart’ - as Calvin puts it. Indeed, it is the hand that gives birth to murder, but it is the heart, infected and inflamed with hate and anger that conceives it.” (Currid, p. 46)

“The Death of Abel” by Salvator Rosa



“David and Bathsheba” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

“You shall not commit adultery.” - The Lord now returns to the subject of marriage and family. Having defined the relationship between parents and children, the Decalogue now turns its attention to the marriage bond between husband and wife. Numerous other sexual prohibitions of sexual immorality will appear in the covenant stipulations which follow, but the most important of them all, marital fidelity, is included in the Ten Commandments themselves. As in the preceding commandment, the Hebrew text includes only two words, literally *“Never commit adultery.”* *“Adultery”* is sexual activity - not necessarily limited to the act of intercourse - by someone who is married with anyone other than their marriage partner. The essence of the sin is the violation of the marriage vow and the trust of the marriage partner. The divine institution of marriage in Eden unequivocally asserted the central importance of the sexual relationship between husband and wife as a primary expression of the emotional unity which bonded them to one another. Nowhere else was that sense of personal intimacy more powerfully enacted than in the literal bonding of their bodies with one another as they *“became one flesh”*: ***“For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother and be united to his wife, and***



*“Satan Coveting Adam and Eve’s Love for One Another”
Illustration for Milton’s “Paradise Lost” by William Blake*

they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame.” (Genesis 2:24-25) In his crafty deceit, Satan used this profound intimacy as a tool to perversely facilitate the downfall of humankind. By approaching Eve first and having her bring the fruit to Adam, the devil was able to manipulate Adam’s love for his wife to make him more receptive to the suggestion that he eat the forbidden fruit

St. Paul used this Genesis text to warn the Corinthians that sexual sin is particularly damaging because of the nature of human sexuality as the physical expression of intimacy, commitment and love between husband and wife. Given that divine intent, for the descendants of Adam and Eve there can be no such thing as “casual” sex:

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ Himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘The two become one flesh.’ But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with Him in Spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All the other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually, sins against his own body.” (1 Corinthians 6:15-17)

In his subsequent discussion of marriage the apostle reinforced the Scriptural emphasis of sexuality as a core component of the intimacy between husband and wife:

“The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.” (1 Corinthians 7:3-4)

The same theme was later sounded by the apostolic author of the Epistle to the Hebrews: ***“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all of the sexually immoral.”*** (Hebrews 13:4) When the wife of the Egyptian Governor Potiphar attempted to seduce Joseph and commit adultery with him, the young Hebrew’s horrified response was: ***“How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?”*** (Genesis 39:9) The Book of



“Joseph Tempted to Adultery by Potiphar’s Wife” Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot

Proverbs compares adultery to playing with fire and warns that those who indulge in such destructive behavior will most certainly be destroyed:

“For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the ways of discipline are the way of life, keeping you from the immoral woman, from the smooth tongue of the wayward wife. Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes, for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread and the adulteress preys upon your very life. Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man’s wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished. Men do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving. Yet, if he is caught, he must pay sevenfold, though it cost him all the wealth of his house. But a man who commits adultery lacks judgement; whoever does so destroys himself. Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will

will never be wiped out; for jealousy arouses a husband's fury, and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge. (Proverbs 6:23-24)

Wise Solomon went on to warn his readers to carefully avoid the twisted path of adultery. He personified this deadly sin as a seductive temptress who would do all within her power to entice those who had departed from godly wisdom:

“With persuasive words she led him astray. She seduced him with her smooth talk. All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose, till an arrow pierces his liver; like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing that it will cost him his life. Now then, my sons, listen to me; pay attention to what I say. Do not let your heart turn to her ways or stray into her paths. Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down into the chambers fo death.” (Proverbs 7:21-27)

The sanctity of marriage within Israel and the concomitant recognition of adultery as a most serious and particularly damaging breach of the Creator's intent for humanity



“I Am My Beloved's and He Is Mine” by Dominico Morelli



“As a Bridegroom Coming Forth to Meet His Bride” by E. Lilien

were unique among the nations of the ancient Near East. Amid cultures where polygamy was the norm and the wife or wives were typically viewed as the property of their husbands, the act of adultery - that is, consensual sex by a married woman with someone other than her husband - was viewed as nothing more than a violation of the husband's property rights. This was a purely private matter to be resolved at the discretion of the man whose rights had been infringed upon by the adulterer. *“Adultery was a private wrong committed against the husband, an infringement of his exclusive right of possession. Hence the punishment or pardon of the violators was left to his discretion.”* (Sarna, p. 114) At the same time, extra-marital sex by a husband, with prostitutes or concubines, was not only tolerated but looked upon as normal and socially acceptable. From this perspective, marriage was a purely secular institution to be defined by society according to male needs and desires. The violation of this institution did not involve or offend the gods. In Israel the opposite was true. Marriage was recognized as a divine institution, the violation of which was inherently

an offense against God. Scripture condemns the adulteress as ***“one who has left the path of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God.”*** (Proverbs 2:17) At the same time, the Bible rejected the dehumanization of women which prevailed in surrounding cultures and recognized marriage as a mutual commitment, equally binding upon both husband and wife. In this context, the prophet Malachi used the illustration of an unfaithful husband who was guilty of the divorce of his wife as a prime example of the spiritual unfaithfulness of His people:

“You weep and wail because He no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, ‘Why?’ It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His. And why one? Because He was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. ‘I hate divorce,’ says the Lord God of Israel.” (Malachi 2:13-16)

Scripture is often caricatured by its critics as being puritanical and opposed to pleasure, particularly sexual pleasure. This view is a blatant distortion of the truth. A cursory reading of the Song of Solomon, an intensely erotic dialog between the bridegroom and his bride would quickly dispel any notion of Biblical denigration of sexuality or sexual pleasure. A brief example from Chapter 7 in which the Lover described the alluring beauty of his Beloved’s body must suffice:

“How beautiful your sandaled feet, O prince’s daughter! Your graceful legs are like jewels, the work of a craftsman’s hands. Your navel is a



“The Prophet Malachi”



“The Bridegroom and His Beloved” by E. M. Lilien

rounded goblet that never lacks blended wine. Your waist is a mound of wheat encircled by lilies. Your breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle...Your hair is like royal tapestry; the king is held captive by its tresses. How beautiful you are and how pleasing, O love with your delights! Your stature is like that of the palm and your breasts like clusters of fruit. I said, ‘I will climb the palm tree and take hold of its fruit.’ May your breasts be like the clusters of the vine, and the fragrance of your breath like apples, and your mouth like the best wine.” (Song of Solomon 7:1-9)

Scripture celebrates the physical intimacy of a husband and wife as a uniquely profound expression of their love for one another and rejoices in the pleasure which that expression of love brings to each of them as a precious gift from God.

What the Bible rejects, however, in firm and emphatic terms, is the trivialization of human sexuality by the reduction of sexual desire to mere selfishness and sexual activity to nothing more than the manipulation of my partner of the moment as a “*sex object*” which I use to meet my own needs and thoughtlessly discard. Scripture’s term for any sexual desire and/or activity apart from the love and commitment of a husband and wife to one another within marriage is “*fornication*” (Greek - “*pornia*”). This more general term includes all sexual sin. Accordingly, adultery is also fornication, but not all fornication is adultery. The prevalence of sexual sin throughout modern culture is the consequence of the basic trivialization of human nature, which views men and women as nothing more than the latest predator at the top of an evolutionary food chain. If human beings are nothing more than animals it should come as no surprise that human sexuality is reduced to nothing more than animal lust. In our commentary on the Fourth Commandment the centrality of the marriage and the family as the keystone of cultural stability and the setting in which the moral values of one generation are passed on to the next was discussed. In this context, a number of specific issues relating to human sexuality and the abuse thereof must also be addressed.



“Sampson Betrayed by Delilah” by Solomon

The Bible condemns homosexuality as a devastating perversion of the Creator's intent for humankind. While homosexuality is, in itself, no worse or more damning a sin than any other, it reveals a willingness to deny and defy the will of our loving God who created humankind as male and female in the beginning. That divine design linked human sexuality to the lifelong commitment of a man and a woman in holy marriage in such a way that mankind, created in the image of God, was given the high privilege of participating in procreation. Like God's love human love is life-giving. Through the physical expression of love between man and woman new life comes into being, life which is a part of each of its parents and yet a totally unique individual. By its very nature homosexuality contradicts this fundamental order of creation and diminishes the sexual impulse to nothing more than the selfish pursuit of personal pleasure. Accordingly, Scripture's condemnation of homosexual behavior is particularly stern. Dr. Rodger Magnuson does not exaggerate in the least when he concludes his recent book *Are Gay Rights Right?* with these stark words:



“Lot’s Wife Looking Back Toward the Burning City of Sodom” by Jules Laurens



“The Men of Sodom Attempting to Rape Lot’s Visitors” by Tissot

“On its face, the Biblical view of homosexual behavior could not be clearer. It is, quite simply, an ‘abomination.’ Because men turn from God to worship humanistic inventions, God gives them up to unnatural lusts that devastate them spiritually and physically. (Romans 1:18-32) With the impatience of a school teacher repeating an elementary lesson, the Apostle Paul counsels the Corinthians not to kid themselves; homosexual offenders will not inherit the kingdom of God unless they repent. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Jude paints a picture worth a thousand words; the sulfurous barrenness of the south shore of the Dead Sea, the only residue of the once flourishing Sodom and Gomorrah which provides God’s most dramatic statement on a sensate culture given to homosexuality.” (Magnussen, p. 42)

The terminology of God’s Word is unmistakably clear. There are fifteen terms used



“Lot and His Family Fleeing the Destruction of Sodom” - 19th Century Engraving

in the Bible to identify the sin of sodomy. Each stresses a particular aspect of homosexual activity which makes it detestable to God and poses unique spiritual and physical peril to its practitioners. Leviticus 18:22 labels the act of homosexual intercourse as an **“abomination.”** This is the strongest possible word to express revulsion and hatred. An **“abomination”** is absolutely intolerable. In the opening segment of his Epistle to the Romans St. Paul condemned homosexuality as **“shameful lusts”** and **“perversion.”** He scorned homosexual activity as **“unnatural,”** **“degraded”** and **“indecent.”** Such behavior is God’s punishment upon those who have rejected Him.

“Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another...Because of this God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the man also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.” (Romans 1:24,26-27)

When Lot chose amid the abundance and prosperity of the Jordan plain the text of Genesis warned: *Now the men of Sodom were wicked, and were sinning greatly against the Lord.*” (Genesis 13:13) The Hebrew word used to describe the wickedness of the Sodomites in this passage is especially powerful. It’s only other appearance in Genesis tells of the wickedness of the corrupt humanity which perished in the flood (Genesis 6:5) New Testament references to the homosexuality of Sodom and Gomorrah continue the same stern theme of judgement and destruction.

“If He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and if He rescued Lot, a righteous man who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard - if this is so, the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials, and hold the unrighteous for the day of judgement.” (2 Peter 2:6-10)

“In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire. In the very same way, these dreamers pollute their own bodies...” (Jude 7-8)

The literal Greek text of Jude seven offers this graphic description of the homosexual lust of the men of Sodom: *“Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities which practiced immorality in the same way as these and lusted after strange flesh.”*(Greek- *“sarkos heteras”*) The valiant efforts of modern advocates of homosexuality notwithstanding, it is impossible for anyone who accepts the Bible as the Word of God to evade Scripture’s condemnation of homosexuality.



***“Lot Rescued from the Sodomites”
Dutch Bible Illustration by Hoet***

Given the Bible's emphasis on the critical importance of marriage in human society, it should come as no surprise that Scripture takes a highly negative view of the dissolution of a marriage through divorce. In a culture like ours, where serial polygamy (that is, a series of marriages to one partner at a time each ending in divorce) has virtually become the norm divorce and remarriage are sensitive topics. A recent examination of the topic by the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations summed up the Bible's teaching in this way:

"1. When God instituted marriage at creation He intended that it be a lifelong union of one man and one woman. By its very nature the one flesh union of husband and wife will not permit the intrusion of a third party; therefore, what God hath joined together let no man put asunder..."

2. Divorce, destructive of what God has joined together, is always contrary to God's intention for marriage. In the beginning God made no provision for the dissolution of the marriage bond. The fall into sin, however, brought with it the forces which destroy human relationships, including marriage. The refusal of people to accept God's will for



"The Family" by Rudolf Schäfer

marriage, the 'hardness of heart' resultant upon man's sin, necessitated legal provisions permitting divorce even among God's people. But 'from the beginning' it was not so. Throughout Scripture the call to remain faithful to God's original intent is made and marriage as a life-long monogamous relationship consistently affirmed.

3. A person who divorces his/her spouse for any other cause than sexual unfaithfulness and marries another commits adultery. Anyone who marries a person so discarding his/her spouse commits adultery....

4. When a spouse commits fornication (i.e. is guilty of sexual unfaithfulness) which breaks the unity of marriage, the offended party who endures such unfaithfulness has the right, though not the command, to obtain a legal divorce and remarry....While no marriage

partner can avoid committing sins which threaten to harm the marriage relationship, only sexual unfaithfulness is regarded as a legitimate ground for divorce in God's sight. However, reconciliation must remain the goal even of those who suffer this form of abandonment on the part of their spouse. Love covers a multitude of sins, and mindful of Christ's forgiveness, Christian spouses will seek the healing of a broken marriage through the power of forgiveness. If such efforts fail, the spouse suffering such wrong may without burden of conscience obtain a divorce and remarry.

5. A spouse who has been willfully and definitively abandoned by his/her partner who refuses to be reconciled and is unwilling to fulfill the obligations of the marriage covenant despite persistent persuasion may seek a legal divorce, which in such a case constitutes a public recognition of a marriage already broken, and remarry...Following a divorce that results from willful and sustained abandonment, remarriage of the deserted spouse becomes permissible." (CTCR)



"Watching the Sunset Together" by Schäfer



“The Wedding Day” by Alexander Fick

The significance of gender is emphasized in Scripture as a crucial component in God’s design for marriage and family. Contemporary culture has demonstrated an unfortunate tendency to stress the equality of men and women by minimizing the unique significance of our maleness and femaleness. This trend has been tremendously destructive on generations of young people who have been taught to depreciate their gender identity and to view their male or female personhood as nothing more than a distinction in physical configuration. As a result they literally do not know what it means to be a man or a woman. This pattern has not achieved its desired result, namely the liberation of women. On the contrary, it has brought frustration and unhappiness to men and women alike. Its societal consequences include the weakening of marriage, more sexual promiscuity, more divorce, more homosexuality, more sexual abuse, widespread abortion and more women abandoned by the fathers of their children who are then compelled to struggle to raise a family alone as single parents.

The Bible teaches that God created man and woman equally in His divine image with uniquely different roles to play in relationship to one another. A meticulously careful balance is always maintained between equality and role distinction, thus rejecting the contemporary assumption that in order for men and women to be equal they must also be identical. Scripture further contends that a correct understanding of this equality and role distinction is of crucial significance for both individual personal fulfillment and stability throughout society. The unique gender distinction between male and female within the human species is a part of *“the very structure of created existence.”* (CTCR, *“Women in the Church,”* p. 21) To deny or defy the divine order of creation is to invite frustration, suffering and chaos in our individual lives and throughout our culture.

“God’s gift of complementary manhood and womanhood was exhilarating from the beginning (Genesis 2:23). It was precious beyond estimation. But today it is esteemed lightly, like the rainforests we need but do not love. We believe that what is at stake in human sexuality is the very fabric of life as God wills it to be for the holiness of His people and for their saving mission to the world.” (Piper/Grudem, p. 60)



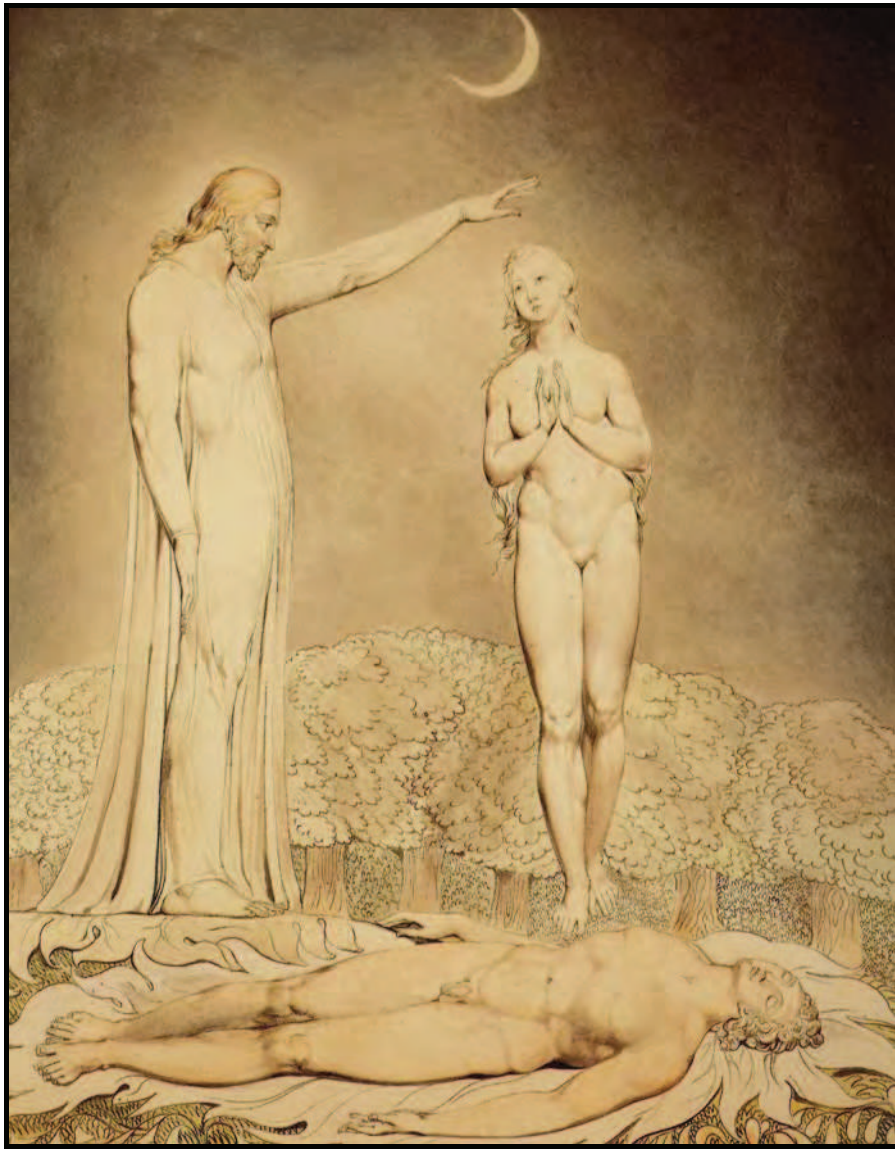
God Creating Eve for Adam” - 16th Century Bible Woodcut

Scriptural doctrine in this most significant area may be summarized under the following principles:

1. God created man and woman of equal worth and importance in His own image. The divine image, as defined in Genesis 2, consisted of the ability/responsibility to make moral choices, the capacity and the need for love, and the ability to reason and to communicate rationally. The image of God gave man and woman equal status in their relationship to their Creator (Latin - "*coram deo*"). This truth is asserted in the creation texts of Genesis and emphatically reasserted, in contradiction to the prevailing cultural chauvinism, in the New Testament,



"The Presentation of Eve to Adam" by William Blake



“The Creation of Eve From Adam” by William Blake

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in Our image, in Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him: male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:26-27)

“Do not lie with one another since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of the Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all.” (Colossians 3:1)



“Our Firstborn” by Alexander Fick

“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:26-28)

2. Man and woman were created by our loving God as the perfect companions for one another. They were to complement one another, each like their partner and yet unlike them - neither complete without the other. The text of Genesis 2 uses the phrase *“a helper suitable for him”* to express this complementarity. Dr. Kenneth Matthews explains the woman’s role as *“a helper suitable for him”* in this way:

“She is called Adam’s helper which defines the role that the woman will play...There is no sense derived from the word linguistically or from the

context of the garden narrative that the woman is a lesser person because her role differs. In the case of the Biblical model, the helper is an indispensable partner required to achieve the divine commission. "Helper," as we have seen from its Old Testament usage, means that the woman will play an integral part, in this case, in human survival and success. What man lacks, the woman accomplishes...The woman makes it possible for the man to achieve the blessing that he otherwise could not do alone. And obviously, the woman cannot achieve it apart from the man." (Matthews, p. 214)

God created man and woman to *"fit together"* in every way. The difference between man and woman is infinitely more profound than discrepancies in physical configuration and our conformity to one another far transcends the literal act of sexual intercourse. By divine design our identities as man and woman involve every dimension of who we are emotionally, psychologically, and intellectually. Gender impacts how we think, feel, perceive reality and relate to other people. German theologian Emil Brunner contended that the physical differences between man and woman were merely an outward reflection of more profound differences in our identities. They are a *"parable of psychological and spiritual differences of a more ultimate nature"* which involve the *"deepest metaphysical ground of our personality."* (Piper/Grudem, p. 34) These gender differences are deliberately complementary, each providing abilities and insights which the other lacks, designed in love by the Creator God to enhance and enrich human life as man and woman live in love with one another. When men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, follow the Creator's intent and live in accordance with God's design presented in His Word, we are most satisfied and He is most glorified.



"The Creation of Eve" by Lucas Cranach

“The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make him a helper suitable for him...So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping He took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man.’” (Genesis 2:18-22)

“In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.” (1 Corinthians 11:11)

3. In love God ordered distinct male and female roles for the man and the woman to whom He had given equal status. These roles established God’s unchanging will for the relationship of man and woman with each other. Man is to be the loving, self-sacrificing “head” (Greek - “kephale”) of the woman. Woman is to be the man’s helpmate, freely subordinating (Greek - “hupotasso”) herself to his headship as one



“Adam and Eve in Paradise” by Fidus



“The Christian Mother” by Alexander Fick

equal to another for the greater good.

“Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” (1 Corinthians 11:3)

“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.” (Ephesians 5:22-26)

“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not



“The Christian Father” by Alexander Fick

permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.” (1 Timothy 2:11-14)

“Wives, in the same way, be submissive to your husbands, so that if any of them do not believe the Word, they may be won over without any words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives...For in this way, the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah who obeyed Abraham, and called him her master.” (1 Peter 3:1-2, 5-6)

4. The essence of Biblical “*headship*” is the exercise of responsibility/authority. The concepts of authority and responsibility are always closely associated in Scripture. The proper exercise of authority from the Bible’s perspective is never the assertion of self-will in the power to command or control. The right to exercise authority comes from God and always includes a willingness to accept responsibility for the welfare of that over which authority has been granted. In this view, authority is nothing more than the power to carry out and implement responsibility and cannot be separated from it. Responsibility without authority results in impotence, frustration and failure. Authority without responsibility results in the abuse of power as a means of self-assertion, domineering and dictatorship. For believers, the exercise of authority is transformed into an opportunity to model the example of Christ in selfless service of others (Matthew 20:25-28). It is to be carried out with a Christlike attitude of self-sacrificing love, humility and obedience to the will of God (Philippians 2:5-8; Ephesians 5:25-29). John Piper offers the following definition of headship in the context of the role/relationship between men and women: “*a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to man’s differing relationships.*” (Piper/Grudem, p. 36)



“The Family on the Way to Church” by Fick

5. The male counterpart to headship in Scripture is female “*submission*” (Greek - “*hupotasso*”). As noted above submission refers to the voluntary acceptance of an assigned role or position within an ordered structure under the authority of another in service of a higher goal or purpose. It is the willingness to forego self-assertion and the insistence upon one’s own rights in deference to the leadership of another. The affirmation of that leadership and obedience to it - within the limits of conscience and primary loyalty to Christ - is clearly integral to Biblical submission (cf. 1 Peter 3:1-7). From Scripture’s perspective, submission is not a sign of weakness but of strength, and indication of profound spiritual maturity, Submission in no way implies inferiority but is inherently the action of one equal in regard to another. Dr. Susan Foh notes:



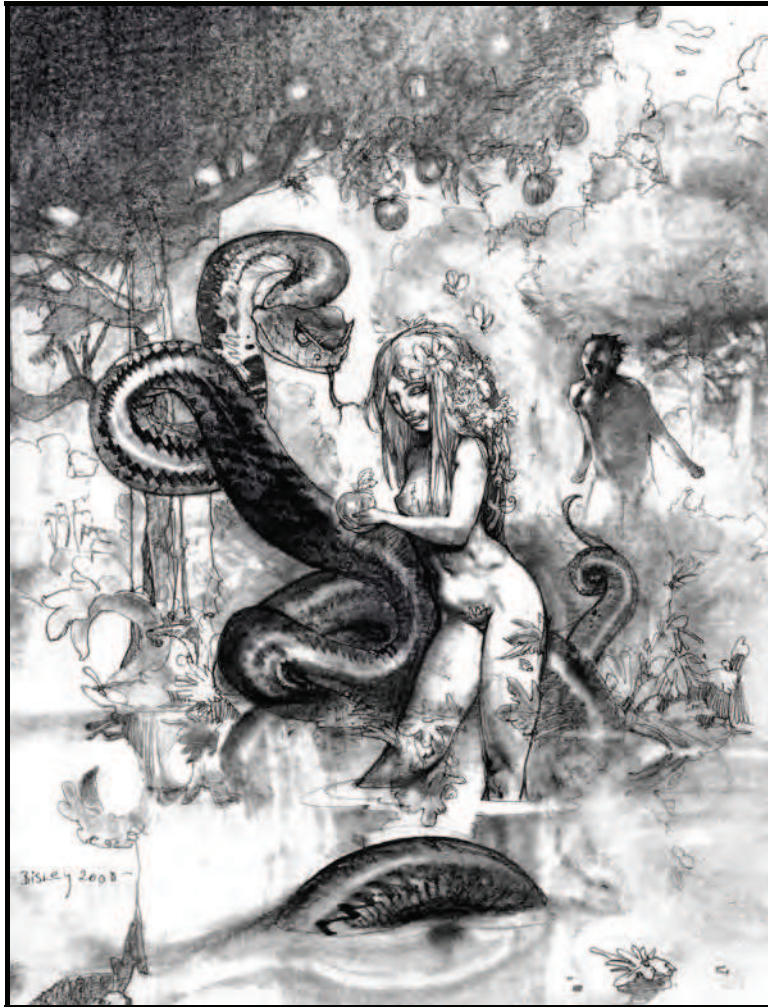
*“Satan Coveting the Love of Adam and Eve
by William Blake*



“A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.” (Proverbs 31:10-12) by Ludwig Richter

*“The submission of the wife to her husband is not that of an inferior to a superior. The woman is joint heir (with the man) of God’s promises; she, like the man, bears the image of God and as a Christian will be conformed to Christ’s image. The different roles husband and wife have are set by God’s design. That the woman and the man are equal in being is reinforced by the command to wives. Wives are to **submit themselves** (reflexive); their submission is voluntary, self-imposed. It is part of their obedience to the Lord; the Lord is the One Who commands its, not the husband.” (Foh, p. 187)*

The Bible uses the physical image of the head to illustrate the man’s role/relationship



“The Temptation of Eve” - Bible Illustration by Bishley

to the woman. Using the same type of imagery it could be said that the woman is to be the heart, that is, the loving caring center of the marriage and the family. To accomplish this role, God had endowed women with remarkable sensitivity, emotional depth and strength. Dr. Wayne Grudem offers the following clarifications of the nature of Biblical submission in a world where both headship and submission have been distorted by selfishness and sin:

“Submission does not mean putting a husband in the place of Christ... Submission does not mean that a wife should give up efforts to influence and guide her husband...Submission does not mean that a wife should give in to every demand of her husband. Submission is not based on lesser intelligence or competence...Submission does not mean being fearful or timid...Submission is not inconsistent with equality in Christ.”
(Piper/Grudem, pp. 194-196)

6. God's design for human gender roles is indicated by the manner in which man and woman were created by God in the beginning as specified in Genesis Chapter 2. This truth is clearly attested in the New Testament as Christ's inspired apostles guide and instruct the earliest Christian congregations on the basis of the creation texts. ***"The head of the woman is the man...for the man did not come from the woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man."*** (1 Corinthians 11:3,8-9) ***"I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent...For Adam was formed first, then Eve."*** (1 Timothy 2:12-13) The risks inherent in overturning the Creator's intent in this crucial area are illustrated by the fall into sin. The devil cleverly coaxed Eve to step out of her role as helpmate and to act unilaterally on behalf of mankind. ***"And Adam was not the one who was deceived, it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through the birth of the child if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety."*** (1 Timothy 2:14-15) Thus, in Lutheran theology, this role/relationship has historically been designated as an *"Order of Creation."*

7. While the Biblical role/relationship between man and woman finds its fullest expression in the close union of marriage (Cf. Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7), God



"The Fall Into Sin" - 17th Century Luther Bible Engraving
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ordered these roles for man and woman in His creative plan before He united them in marriage and before they fell into sin. Obviously gender exists apart from marriage. The man did not begin to be a man only upon his marriage to the woman nor did the woman begin to be a woman only upon her marriage to the man. Masculinity and femininity are rooted in who we are as individual persons by nature. They are not simply reflexes of the marriage relationship. Therefore, God's assigned roles apply beyond the marriage relationship to men and women in every culture and period of history and are to be expressed in ways appropriate to men and women's differing relationships throughout society.



"Confirmation Day" by Alexander Fick



“A Visit to Oma and Opa’s House” by Alexander Fick

8. The Bible teaches that the church, **“the household of God”** (1 Timothy 3:15), bears a special responsibility to reflect God’s will for man and woman to the world. In a society where the assertion of individual rights and the exercise of personal power have devastated marriage and family, God’s people are called to provide a Christ-like model of self-sacrificing love, demonstrating manhood and womanhood as the Creator designed them to be. Therefore, Christian men are to accept the responsibility/authority for the church’s public leadership and teaching, both in the pastoral office and in the governing assemblies of the congregations. Christian women are to refrain from any activity in the church which would constitute a public exercise of authority over men or which could be construed by society as a rejection

of the divinely ordained role relationship between man and woman. The repeated apostolic admonition in this regard suggests the importance of this truth (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33-38; 1 Timothy 2:9-15). The application of the headship/submission principle to the activities of women in the church is restrictive only in regard to the public exercise of authority by women over men. Women are by no means excluded from the service of the Lord but are encouraged to direct their service in a way that is in accordance with the role/relationship between men and women as set forth in creation and defined in Holy Scripture. The church must remain constantly vigilant that its doctrine and practice in this crucial and always controversial area be determined solely by the Word of God, not the ever-changing values and views of human culture. The consequences of cultural accommodation here are potentially devastating for marriage and family throughout society.

9. The headship/submission principle applies throughout our lives in all of the differing relationships that men and women have with one another. However, in the absence of specific Biblical directives like those which apply the headship/submission principle to marriage, family and the church, much must be left to conscientious Christian judgement when it comes to applying this principle in other areas.



“The Christian Mother” by Rudolf Schäfer

10. The role/relationship between man and woman has been twisted and distorted by sin. The happiness and harmony which was God’s design for man and woman has been replaced by selfishness, contention, domination and rebellion (cf. Genesis 2:16-17; 3:12,16). As Christians are restored to the image of God by faith in Christ we are enabled to live in our God-given roles for His sake (cf. Ephesians 5:21-6:9; Colossians 3:18-4:1). Christian men are called upon to recognize that in such a world the humble submission expected of the Christian woman places her in a position of vulnerability which is often abused. Therefore, the submission of the godly woman is to be received with consideration and respect.

“You shall not steal” - The seventh commandment affirms the right of private property as it prohibits the practice of stealing. The Hebrew word for ***“steal”*** in the commandment is ***“ganaf.”*** This term literally means to carry something away as if by stealth. In the context of the commandment it is appropriate to understand ***“ganaf”*** in the broadest possible sense, to refer to the appropriation of someone else’s property by an unlawful or improper means. Phillip Ryken offers this general definition: ***“Ganaf - stealing - covers all conventional types of theft: burglary (breaking into a home or building to commit theft); robbery (taking property directly from another using violence or intimidation); larceny (taking something without permission and not returning it); hijacking (using force to take goods in transit or seizing control of a bus, truck, plane, etc.); shoplifting (taking items from a store during business hours without paying for them) and pick pocketing and purse snatching. The term ganaf also covers a wide range of exotic and complex thefts...such as embezzlement (the fraudulent taking of money or other goods entrusted to one’s care). There is extortion (getting money from someone by means of threats or misuses of authority), and racketeering (obtaining money by any illegal means). (Ryken, p. 642)*** The act of stealing applies not merely to money or property but to anything of value. The employee who fails to conscientiously earn his wages or who uses company resources to pursue his own private activities is guilty of stealing. It is estimated that employee theft of time and property costs American businesses and their investors more than 200 billion dollars a year. This ***“theft surcharge,”*** as analysts often describe it has a major impact on the cost of goods and services throughout the entire economy. Martin Luther summarized the far reaching application of this commandment in his ***“Large Catechism”*** in this way:



***“Thou Shalt Not Steal” - 16th Century Luther Bible
Woodcut***

“This commandment is very far reaching as we have shown...Let everyone know then that it is his duty at the risk of God’s displeasure, not to harm his neighbor, take advantage of him, or defraud him by any faithless or underhanded business transaction. More than that, he is under obligation faithfully to protect his neighbor’s property and further his interests, especially when he takes remuneration for such services.”
(LC, 232)

The Reformer labored under no illusions as to the pervasive nature of thievery, in its endless variations, throughout the world:

“If all who are thieves, though they be unwilling to admit it, were hanged on the gallows, the world would soon be empty and there would soon be a shortage of both hangmen and gallows...Thievery is the most common craft and the largest guild on earth. If we look at mankind in all its conditions, it is nothing but a vast, wide stable full of great thieves.” (LC, 224ff.)



“Jesus and the Rich Young Man” by Hoffman



“Achan the Thief Condemned by Joshua” by J. James Tissot

Nor was Luther blind to the fact that the wealthy and powerful of this world are often the greatest and greediest thieves of all, using their powerful positions as nothing more than a means of growing ever richer and richer:

“These men are called gentlemen swindlers or big operators. Far from being pick pockets or sneak thieves who loot a cash box, they sit in office chairs and are called great lords and honorable, good citizens; and yet with great show of legality they rob and steal. Yes, we might well keep quiet here against various petty thieves in order to launch an attack against the great powerful arch-thieves who consort with lords and princes and daily plunder not only a city or two but all of Germany.”
(LC, 229ff.)

For the believer ownership of anything in this world cannot be absolute. By faith we are enabled to recognize that everything which we have is a gift to us from God. We are merely stewards, managers, of that which God has entrusted to us. In that sense, the manner in which we use our own possessions or seek to obtain the possessions of



others is a direct reflection of our attitude toward God and our relationship with Him.

“The reason that anything belongs to anyone is because it comes from God, and we do not have the right to take for ourselves what God has given to others. What the Bible means by ownership is not possessing things to use for our own purposes, but receiving things from God to use for His glory.” (Ryken, p. 651)

Scripture links this concept directly to the subject of tithing as God declares that the failure to tithe constitutes stealing from Him.

“Will a man rob God? Yet you rob Me. But you ask ‘How do we rob You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse, the whole nation of you, because you are robbing Me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I do not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out such blessing that you will not have room enough for it.” (Malachi 3:8-10)

“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” - This commandment is reinforced and applied in Leviticus 5:1 - ***“If a person sins because he does not speak up when he hears a public charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned about, he will be held responsible.”***: and Deuteronomy 19:18 -

“If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse a man of a crime, the two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the Lord before the priests and the judges who are in office at that time. The judges must make a thorough investigation and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, then to do him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from among you.”

The language of the commandment applies specifically to the testimony of a witness in the courtroom but once again, given the context of the commandments the prohibition to lying and misrepresentation of every kind. Thus Leviticus 19:11-2 places all deception in the same category as it declares: ***“Do not lie. Do not deceive one another. Do not swear falsely by My Name and so profane the Name of your God. I am the Lord.”*** The people of God were to be a nation of truth-tellers,



“The False Witnesses Offer their Testimony at the Trial of Jesus” by Tissot

reflecting the nature of the God of Truth whom they served. Through the prophet Zechariah the Lord unequivocally commanded: ***“These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgements in your courts; do not plot evil against your neighbor and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this, declares the Lord.”*** (Zechariah 8:16-17) While truth is the nature of God, falsehood and lying are the nature of the devil: ***“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language for he is a liar and the father of lies.”*** (John 8:44)

Falsehood comes in an infinite variety of forms from the most obvious to the carefully subtle. Dr. Phillip Ryken explains:

“There are many different ways to lie. Roget’s Thesaurus offers an impressive list of synonyms. A falsehood can be described as an invention, an equivocation, a falsification, a fabrication, or a



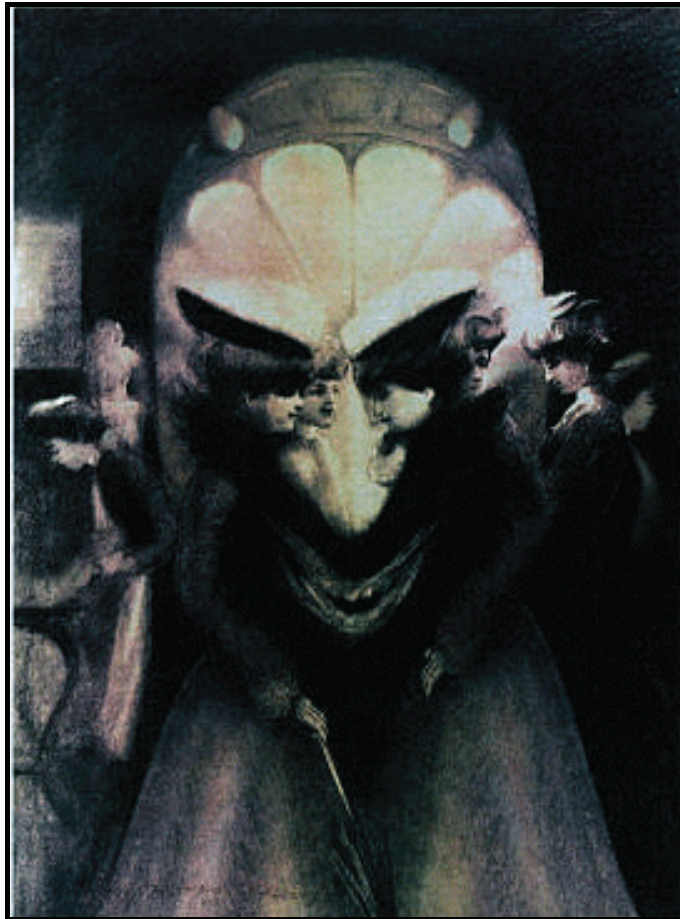
“Judas Conspiring With the Judges of the Sanhedrin to Condemn Jesus”



“Jesus Being Led Away After His Conviction on the Basis of False Testimony” by Morelli

prevarication. Dishonesty also comes in all different sizes. There are big lies - the whoppers and the grand deceptions. Then there are all the little lies we tell - the half-truths, the flatteries and the fibs. What we say may be true, as far as it goes, but we leave out the details that put us at a disadvantage. Or we say something that is technically true, yet, nevertheless, intended to deceive. We overstate our accomplishments, putting ourselves in the best possible light. At the same time, we exaggerate other people’s failings, thinking and saying the worst about others. We mislead, misquote and misinterpret, taking things out of context. In these and many other ways we exchange the truth for the lie.” (Ryken, p. 656)

The standard courtroom oath formula attempts to deal with the complexity of all this as the witness is required to swear to tell - *“the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”* The commandment places particular emphasis on two dimensions of falsehood. First, it recognizes and warns against falsehood because it is ***“against***



*“Gossip” - 19th Century Magazine Illustration
by Witherspoon*

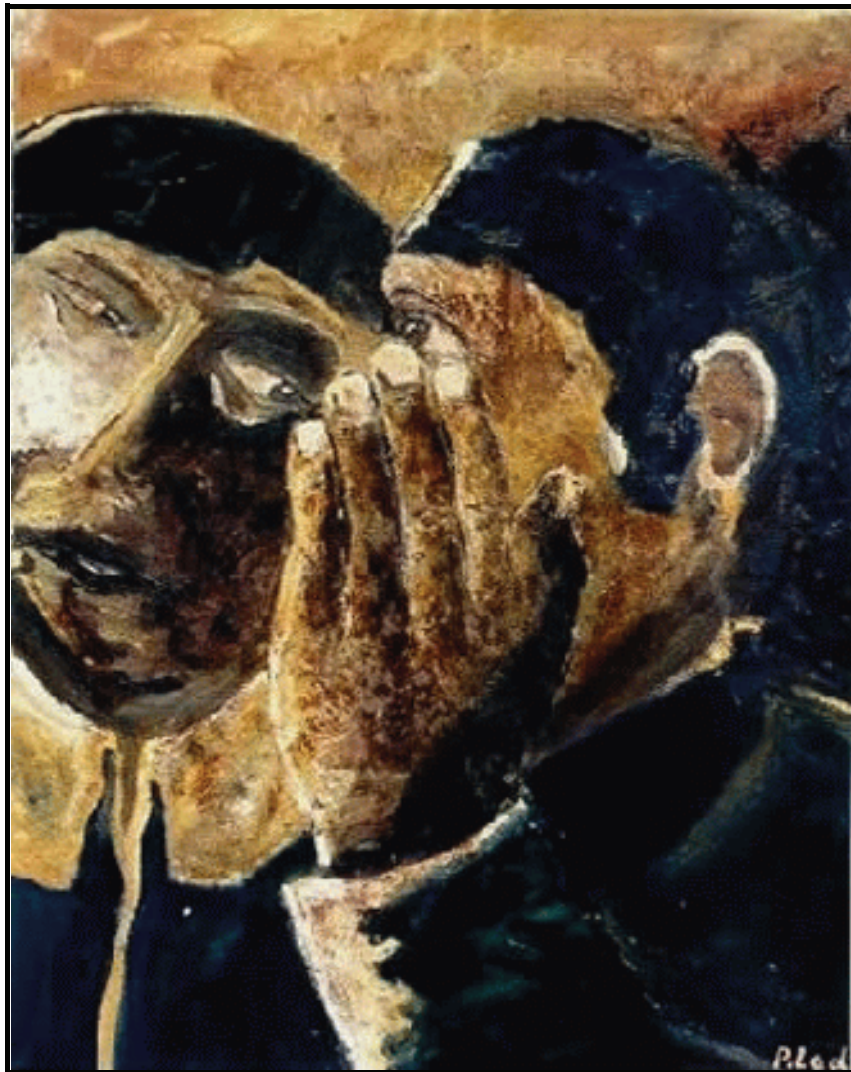
your neighbor.” Lying hurts people and destroys their reputation. Scripture says: ***“A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.”*** (Proverbs 22:1) The Bible warns repeatedly against the sin of gossip.

“When the Bible condemns gossip, it means more than just casual talk about other people’s business. Gossip is talking about people in a way that damages their reputation with others...When this is done in speech it’s called slander, when it appears in print it’s called libel...Most gossip contains a far amount of misinformation...However, even true words can violate the commandment. Sometimes what a gossip reports is true, but it is said to the wrong person for the wrong reason to the injury of others.” (Ryken, p. 657)

The Bible’s most stinging rebuke of this most common sin comes in the Epistle of James where the apostle condemns the tongue as a fire set ablaze by hell:

“Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire. It corrupts the whole person, set the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and father and with it we curse men who have been made in God’s image. Out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.” (James 3:5-10)

Martin Luther effectively described the issue in characteristically colorful language:



“Gossip” - Contemporary Bible Illustration

“Learning a bit of gossip about someone else, they spread it into every corner, relishing and delighting in it like pigs that roll in the mud and root around in it with their snouts...What is secret should be allowed to remain secret, or at any rate be reprovved in secret...For honor and good name are easily taken away, but not easily restored.” (LC, 267 ff.)

The second special emphasis of the commandment is the unique gravity of the combination of the sin of falsehood with the abuse of the sacred name of God which occurs when lying under oath. An oath is a solemn declaration which invokes the name of God to certify or affirm the truthfulness or accuracy of that which is said. The traditional standard formula in American jurisprudence involved placing the left hand of the witness upon the Bible as he raised his right hand and was confronted with the question - *“Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?”* - to which the witness was required to respond - *“I do.”*



“Thou Shalt Not Bear False Witness”

The violation of this oath is identified as “*perjury*,” a crime which entails significant penalty under the law. From the Bible’s perspective the most basic issue here is the sanctity of the Name of God. To abuse God’s Name as a cloak which covers falsehood demonstrates a damnable disrespect for the holiness and integrity of the Lord. **“Do not swear falsely by My Name and so profane the Name of your God. I am the Lord.”** (Leviticus 19:12)

The truthfulness of God is an essential component of His identity. The significance of this concept is difficult to grasp in what Chuck Colson aptly calls our “*Post Truth Culture*.” We as a society have given up on the possibility of truth and accordingly feel free to reshape and manipulate our statements of fact to suit whatever our needs may be at any given moment. This perspective is reflected in the German word for that which in English is called a “*little white lie*.” The German noun is “*Notlüge*,” that is a needed or necessary lie. Scripture’s teaching in this matter is unmistakable. The integrity of God is non-negotiable. In asserting the reliability of His promises the Apostle Paul declared: **“Let God be true, and every man a liar.”** (Romans 3:4) The prophet Isaiah affirmed the unique purity of the promised Messiah by saying - **“though He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth.”** (Isaiah 53:9) Throughout His earthly ministry Jesus repeatedly pointed to that dimension of His character as decisive: **“We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”** (John 1:14) **“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life...And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever - the Spirit of Truth.”** (John 14:6,16) In His High Priestly Prayer on the eve of His arrest and execution, Jesus asked the heavenly Father to preserve His people in the truth: **“Sanctify them by the truth, Your Word is truth.”** (John 17:17) The Apostle John taught the members of the first Christian congregations that a dedication to the truth was that which set Christians apart from the world which is captive to falsehood:

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God for many false prophets have gone out into the world...We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.” (1 John 4:1,6)

In a vain attempt to explain Himself and His ministry to a bewildered Roman



“What Is Truth” by Simon Bishley

governor, Jesus declared: ***“For this reason I was born and came into this world , to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me.”*** When Jesus offered this testimony in His charade of a trial before Pontius Pilate the cynical Roman reflected the world’s despair when he replied, ***“What is truth?”*** Paul reminded the Ephesians that if they were going to be like God then it would be necessary for their lives to be characterized by the truth: ***“You were taught...to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”*** (Ephesians 4:22, 24-25) This is a profoundly important issue. David the psalmist once posed the crucial question: ***“Lord, who may dwell in Your sanctuary? Who may live on Your holy hill?”*** The degree to which truth-telling figured in the response is instructive: ***“He who speaks the truth from his heart***

and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellow man...who keeps his oath even when it hurts...He who does these things will never be shaken.” (Psalm 15:1-5)

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” - This commandment (s) is unique in that it deals with an attitude not an action. All of the other commandments pertain to outward actions which are empirical, that is, they can be witness by others. Coveting, however, is an inward attitude of the heart. Hebrew scholar Sampson Hirsch points out that the presence of this commandment within the Decalogue demonstrates the unique character of these laws: *“As Hirsch puts it, a human legislator could ordain prohibitions against murder, adultery, abduction, theft, and false testimony, but only an omniscient God could legislate against what one might have in his heart and mind.”* (Sicker, p. 107) At the same time, the prohibitions against coveting remind us that every sinful action begins with sinful desire.

“The Ten Words deliberately descend from the sublime font of Israelite society, Yahweh, to base human motives of envy and acquisitiveness. The tenth command addresses desire as the emotional root of crime,



“The Fall of Jericho” by J. James Tissot

most obviously of adultery and theft but sometimes also of murder and false witness.”
(Propp, II, p. 180)

The sin of Achan, who disobeyed the Lord’s command that no spoils were to be taken from the capture of Canaanite Jericho, is a prime illustration of this deadly pattern at work. Achan, used the same word for his desire to possess a portion of the riches of Jericho that occurs in the commandment:

“It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them.” (Joshua 7:20-21)



“The Woman Saw that the Fruit of the Tree Was Desirable”



“King Ahab Coveting Naboth’s Vineyard” by Rooke

“*Chamad*,” the Hebrew verb in the commandment, is drawn from a root which simply means to desire, want or crave. The word is not necessarily negative, hence the commandment’s citation of examples of that which should not be coveted. The focus of the prohibition is upon the intensity and the object of the desire. In this context, coveting is a desire for that which we ought not to have. Nonetheless, the desire is so intense and compelling that one is willing to sin to possess or experience the object of his desire. The fatal pattern goes all the way back to the beginning. As Eve gazed upon the forbidden fruit in Eden it appeared to be “*desirable for gaining*” to the extent that she was willing to willfully defy and disobey God in order to achieve the object of her desire. As it was for our mother, so it remains for all of her children. The commandment expresses this concept by identifying each of the objects of covetous desire (“*house,*” “*wife,*” “*manservant,*” “*maidservant,*” “*donkey,*” “*ox,*” “*anything that belongs to your neighbor*”) as “*your neighbor’s.*” The implication is that the use of sinful or improper means would be involved in the satisfaction of that desire. In the case of the possessions cited, it would certainly not be sinful to approach one’s neighbor and offer to buy the item in question for a fair price with the

owner's consent. To covet is to want something badly enough that you are willing to sin to get it. For example, when Naboth was unwilling to sell King Ahab the vineyard which he had inherited from his father, the King's covetous desire for the property was so compelling that Jezebel arranged for Naboth to be falsely accused and murdered to obtain the property (1 Kings 21).

“When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.’” - The Children of Israel were overwhelmed by the awesome grandeur of God's physical presence upon Mount Sinai. The sounds and sights of the theophany were more than they could bear. The language here reflects the more detailed description of Chapter 19: ***“Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder.”*** (19:18-19) The language of the text which describes the



“Ahab attempting to Buy Naboth's Vineyard” by Rooke



Van Luyken inv. et fecit.

EXODI XIX.

Inter fulmineas, Cælo reboante, favillas
Et populo legem dat loquiturque Deus.
Cum cor habet durum, cum surdas subditus aures,
Quam bene tum Princeps voce tonante jubet!

*Der Himmel blitzt, und brennt, die Donner-Schrollen rollen,
Der Herr gibt sein Gesetz, Gott spricht aus schwarzer Volk.
Wann Herzen Marmor sind, wann Ohren taub seyn wollen,
So donnern Fürsten auch zu ihrem frechen Volk.*

“God Speaks to Israel at Sinai” - 16th Century Dutch Bible Engraving



“Israel Before the Lord at Sinai” by Gerome

peoples’ response is particularly intense. **“They trembled with fear”** literally describes people who are reeling in terror, staggering and falling to the ground, so frightened that they are unable to stand. Extrapolate that reality to the millions of Israelites gathered before the mountain and one can only begin to comprehend the chaos and panic of the moment. Panic is contagious and as it spread out among the multitudes at the base of the mountain it could only have grown more catastrophic. **“They stayed at a distance and said to Moses...”** - Given the sequence of the text it would appear that these events occurred after God had spoken the Ten Commandments directly to the multitude. In the aftermath of that earth and ear shattering communication the people pleaded with Moses to represent them before God hereafter. This is the first time that Israel has expressed a desire to designate Moses as their representative and leader. Up to this point Moses had been called by God as His spokesman to Israel but the people had never acted to recognize Moses’ divine call and acknowledge him as their leader sent by God. Their plaintive plea includes the promise that they will hear and heed God’s Word as it is presented to them by Moses - **“Speak to us yourself and we will listen.”** The Hebrew verb literally means to pay close attention or to listen carefully. Their promise marks an important turning point in the relationship between Moses and the Children of Israel,

no matter how haphazard their fulfillment of their promise may have been in the years to come. The people's terror was so intense that they actually feared they would not survive another encounter with the Almighty - ***"But do not have God speak to us or we will die."***

"Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.'" - Moses reassured the people that it was not God's purpose to kill them but to test and to teach them. That which God does always has a salutary purpose. In this instance that purpose was to indelibly impress upon the Israelites the majestic power and glory of God. The ***"fear of God"*** is a crucial concept in Scripture. It refers to the holy awe of the creature in the presence of the Creator. It is a sense of reverent worship which acknowledges the essential difference between the Creator and the creature and the concomitant responsibility of the creature to heed God's Word and obey His commandments. As the psalmist observed: ***"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow His precepts have good understanding. To Him belongs eternal praise."*** (Psalm 111:10) Having witnessed the majesty of God at Sinai and having heard His commandments in the thunder of His own voice, only a fool would dare to disobey Him. Accordingly, Moses explained that the result of the fear of God in their lives would be ***"to keep you from sinning."*** Martin Luther reflected this insight in *The Small Catechism*'s explanations of the Ten Commandments each of which begins with the phrase ***"We should fear and love God..."***

"The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was." - In tacit acceptance of the approach urged by the people, Moses returned to the crest of Sinai - ***"the thick darkness where God was."*** This had been the *modus operandi* prior to God's direct communication of the commandments (cf. 19:21, 24-25) and would remain so thereafter.

"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Tell the Israelites this: 'You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven: do not make any gods to be alongside Me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold.'" - Upon his return into the presence of the Lord upon the mountain Moses received a long series of statutes and ordinances designed to implement and apply the more general concepts expressed in the Decalogue. ***"After the prefatory declaration, which sets forth in ten statements the basic principles on which the deed of covenant between the Lord and Israel was founded, had been proclaimed to the latter, Moses is given the terms and details of the covenant, so that he may make them known to the people."***



“Jebul Musa - The Mountain of Moses” - Traditional Site of Mount Sinai

(Cassutto, p. 254) This segment is often called the *“Book of the Covenant.”* The role of Moses as the chosen intermediary between God and His people is signaled by the formal opening statement - *“Tell the Israelites this...”* At their own request, God will not longer address Israel directly. Instead, Moses will faithfully convey His words to them. The starting point for the law codes which follow is that which has just transpired: *“You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven.”* The fact of God’s existence, the authenticity of His power and His covenant commitment to the nation had been dramatically demonstrated before the Israelites by His appearance over the mountain. Furthermore they had heard the thunder of God’s voice as His commandments were proclaimed to them directly. The identity of Yahweh as the one true God was now undeniable. The text deliberately avoids further reference to Sinai or the mountain itself as the site of God’s appearance - *“I have spoken to you from heaven.”* The true God is necessarily transcendent, that is, He exists beyond time and space, and therefore cannot be localized in a particular place. There was nothing sacred about Mount Sinai because of what took place there and therefore Sinai never became a place of pilgrimage for pious Jews. The subsequent sanctity of the Temple sanctuary upon Mount Zion in Jerusalem



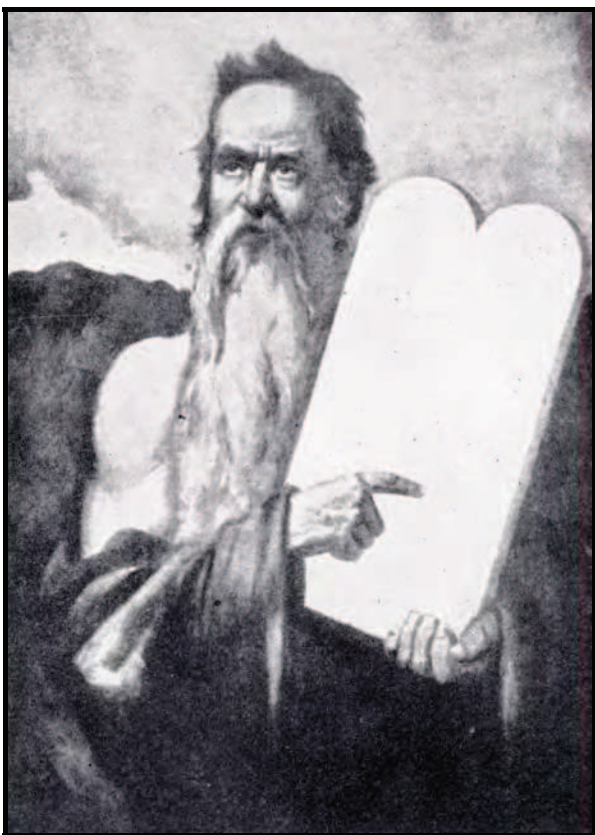
“Moses Presenting the Ten Commandments” by Martin De Vos the Elder

was the result of God’s promise of His gracious presence there in a unique way in conjunction with the Ark of the Covenant. Again there was nothing inherent in the place, and its sanctity ceased when God brought about the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians as His judgement upon an apostate nation.

“Do not make any gods to be alongside Me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold.” - When God appeared to Israel at Sinai He did not assume a physical form of any kind. Smoke and lightning, thunder and cloud, the blast of the trumpets and the sound of His voice - these were what Israel heard and saw. All of this was designed to emphasize the transcendence of the Almighty. He is not to be associated with or confined to any part of the physical universe. Rather, He remains the great ***I AM***, the only independent existence, the source of all reality. The true God cannot be reduced to categories of human comprehension. Dr. Cassutto points out the profound significance of the fact that the Lord spoke to Israel: *“not face to face, but from the mountain, which reaches to the heart of heaven, from the divine sphere, which is separated from the human plane - ‘I have talked to you’ - and you have received no form, only a voice.”* (Cassutto, p. 255) Every idol, that is, every man-made divine image, is a presumptuous attempt to bring god down to my level on my terms. Such presumption was eliminated in the worship of the true God from the

outset. There is only one God - ***“Do not make any gods to be alongside me”*** and the one God can only be properly worshiped in the manner which He Himself has deigned to establish. God initiated that worship when he spoke to them directly from the mountain top. Rabbi Ibn Ezra paraphrased the verse in this way:

“Since I spoke Myself with you face to face, without intermediary, you need not make alongside Me gods of silver and gold - (for there are many idolaters who say to this day, that their image will intercede on my behalf and help me before God) - I have no need that you should make gods of gold, and neither have you any need.” (Propp, p. 182)



“Moses the Lawgiver” by Lesser Ury

The language of the text, ***“any gods to be alongside Me”*** prohibits that which is technically referred to as *“henotheism,”* that is, the worship of one god as the primary or most powerful god while still worshipping, or at least acknowledging the possibility of other inferior god or goddesses. Scripture’s assertion of monotheism insists that there is one God and one God alone. Any and every other god or goddess is false. They are false in the sense that they are not real. They do not actually exist. All of the myriad of false deities that have existed and still persist in the superstitions of man are nothing more than figments of man’s imagination or projections of his own desires. In those rare instances when there actually is some form of supernatural power present in human idolatry, those gods are still false because they consist of nothing more than satanic or demonic manipulation or human gullibility. Mankind’s most ancient enemy has been intent on denying and defying the true

God from the beginning. There is one God and one God alone.

The mention of ***“gods of silver or gods of gold”*** is not limited to those particular forms of metal, as though idols of wood or iron might somehow be permissible.

The specific mention of **“gods of silver or gods of gold”** is clearly not limited to those particular forms of metal, as though idols of wood or iron might be permissible. Silver and gold, being the most precious of metals, from idol statues were most commonly fashioned, are cited to express the concept that no idols whatsoever, even if they were to be made of the most precious metals, would be tolerated by God.

“Even if the aim be to honor the God of Israel, and even if such precious metals as silver and gold be used, with which many other nations do honor their gods, you may not make any divine image. Even the most exquisite ornamentation cannot serve as a fitting symbol of the invisible God.” (Cassutto, p. 255)

“Make an altar of earth for Me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause My Name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you. If you make an altar of stones for Me, do not make it with dressed stones, for you will defile it if you use a tool on it.” - The emphasis upon the worship

of the true God being defined and ordered by God Himself rather than the whims of man or the imitation of neighboring pagan cultures continues in this verse. The term **“altar”** (Hebrew *“mizbeach”*) is derived from a verb which means to slaughter an animal for the purpose of sacrifice. The use of altars for sacrifice had been a core component of human religion since Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Eden (cf. Genesis 4:2-5; 8:20; 12:7; 13:4,18; 22:9; 26:25; 33:20; 35:1-7). This universal practice reflected man’s instinctive recognition that a price would have to be paid in blood, that an innocent life would have to be given, to ransom fallen humanity from the consequences of sin. These preliminary instructions for a most simple altar which deliberately avoided human craftsmanship of any kind were to be the starting point of Israel’s sacrificial system. Later, first in the tabernacle and then



“The Worship of Cain and Abel”
by Walter Crane

in the temple, more elaborate structures would be commanded and design. But here at the outset a fundamental lesson as to the nature of God pleasing worship had to be taught.

“The altar could not be something of which humans could take ownership because they shaped it and finished it with the same sorts of tools that they might use for any mundane masonry project. Likewise, it must not be fancy enough to become like or to function as an idol, a thing that human hands had made yet was revered as possessing divine qualities. This altar must be so simple, made of natural elements that were simply assembled, that no one could make the mistake of identifying it as having in itself intrinsically, numinous or theophoric character. The altar must be of the minimal sort of construction that would make it functional without becoming an object of appreciation or veneration in itself, something that in the mind of a worshiper might somehow rival or substitute for God.” (Stuart, p. 472)

The command that the altar was to be **“of earth”** would have allowed for construction



“A Canaanite Altar of Soil and Uncut Stone at Meggido”



“The Sacrifices of Cain and Abel” by Leinweber

with loose soil or mud brick. The only specification for the stones of the altar was that they were to be natural stone which had not been shaped or cut by any tool - ***“do not build it with dressed stones for you will defile it if you use a tool on it.”*** The basic concern throughout appears to be that the materials are to be natural, that which had been fashioned by God Himself rather than anything that man had made. A large altar built in precisely this manner - soil surrounded by uncut stones - has been uncovered in the ruins of Canaanite Megiddo. The various types of animal sacrifices which would be made upon these altars are mentioned in summary: ***“Your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle.”*** A ***“burnt offering”*** was a sacrifice in which the entire animal carcass was consumed by the fire. For that reason it was also called a ***“holocaust offering”*** from the Hebrew word ***“holah”*** which means to be consumed by fire. The sacrifice was given to God asking for His forgiveness, protection and care. ***“Fellowship offerings”*** (Hebrew - ***“shelamim”*** - derived from ***“shalom”***) traditionally called ***“peace offerings”*** were expressions of praise and thanksgiving to God for the peace and harmony with which He had blessed the worshiper. In this sacrifice only portions of the animal were burned upon the altar while other portions were eaten by the priests and in community meals by the family of the worshiper. Hebrew scholar Umberto Cassuto notes that the personal pronoun ***“your”*** is repeated four times in this segment stressing the fact all of these sacrifices were designed solely for the benefit of the people, not to meet some perceived need on the part of God: ***“The fourfold emphasis on the word ‘your’***



“Manoah and His Wife Offer a Burnt Offering Upon an Altar of Uncut Stone” - 19th Century Bible Illustration by Laurens

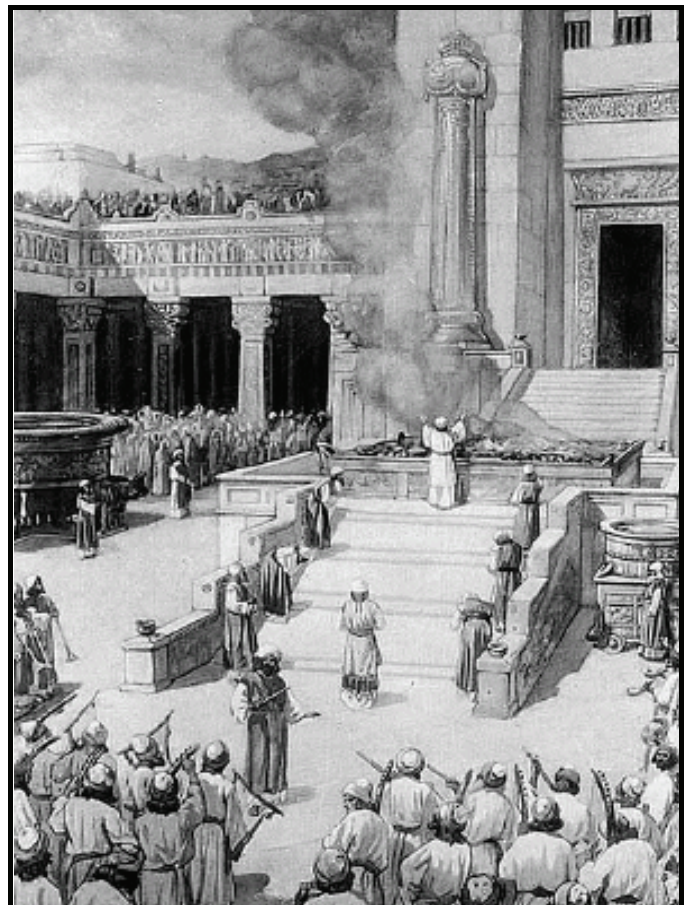
connotes, as it were, ‘Know that it is not I (God) who has need of sacrifices, but you alone require them in order to express your feelings toward Me. The sacrifices are your sacrifices.’ (Cassutto, p. 256) The Lord forcefully expressed this truth in Psalm 50 as He reminded the people of Israel that He deigned to accept their offerings for their benefit. He did not need them nor was He dependant upon them in any way.

“I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings which are ever before Me. I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are Mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is Mine and all that is in it. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or

drink the blood of goats? Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and call upon Me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you and you will honor Me.” (Psalm 50:8-15)

At the same time, the Lord promised the blessing of His presence wherever He was worshiped in accord with the instructions which He had given: ***“Wherever I cause My Name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you.”***

“And do not go up to My altar on steps lest your nakedness be exposed on it.” - The prohibition against a raised altar which would be approached by climbing a set of steps is explained by a concern that the ***“nakedness”*** (literally ***“genitalia”***) of the priests could thereby be exposed. The text does not indicate whether the inappropriate exposure would have been an affront to the glory of God, the modesty of the congregation, or both. In the more detailed instructions which would follow later this concern was dealt with by the design of special undergarments for members of the priesthood. (Exodus 28:42-43) In the aftermath of this provision, the great altar of sacrifice in the temple was designed to be elevated and approached up a flight of steps. The concern here is most probably linked to the overt, extreme sexuality of much of the Canaanite religious cults and the potential distraction from the true worship of the Lord which such exposure could have provoked within the congregation. Keil/Delitsch recalls the action of Adam and Eve in covering their nakedness in the presence of God as the first expression of shame for sin (Genesis 3:7,10-11) and suggests that the exposure of the supplicant’s nakedness before the Lord is prohibited here because it would have been blasphemous presumption of an intimacy with God which had, in fact been precluded by sin. In the absence of further definition in the text, all of these efforts at explanation must remain speculative.



“The Temple’s Altar of Sacrifice”



“The Adjudication of Tribal Judges Among the Israelites” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

Exodus Chapter 21

These are the laws you are to set before them: “If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year he shall go free without paying anything. If he comes alone, he is to go free alone; but if he has a wife when he comes, she is to go with him. If his master bears him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free. But if the servant declares, ‘I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free, then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he shall be his servant for life. If a man sells his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free as menservants do. If she does not please the master who has selected her for himself, he must let her be redeemed. He has no right to sell her to foreigners because he has broken faith with her. If he selects her for his son, he must grant her the rights of a daughter. If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing and marital rights. If he does not provide

her with these three things, she is to go free without any payment of money.

Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate. But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from My altar and put him to death.

Anyone who attacks his father or his mother must be put to death.

Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to death.

Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.

If men quarrel and one hits the other with a stone or with his fist and he does not die but is confined to bed, the one who struck the blow will not be held responsible if the other gets up and walks around outside with his staff: however, he must pay the injured man for the loss of his time and see that he is completely healed.

If a man beats his male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies as a direct result, he must be punished, but he is not to be punished if the slave gets up after a day or two, since the slave is his property.

If two men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely, but there is not serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

If a man hits a manservant or maidservant in the eye and destroys it, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the eye. And if he knocks out the tooth of a manservant or maidservant, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the tooth.

If a bull gores a man or a woman to death, the bull must be stoned to death and its meat must not be eaten. But the owner of the bull will not be held responsible. If, however, the bull has had the habit of goring and the owner has been warned but has not kept it penned up and it kills a man or woman, the bull must be stoned and the owner also must be put to death. However, if payment is demanded of him, he may redeem his life by paying whatever is demanded. This law also applies if the bull gores a son or daughter. If the bull gores a male or female slave, the owner must pay thirty shekels of silver to the master of the slave and the bull must be stoned.

If a man uncovers a pit or digs one and fails to cover it and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit must pay for the loss: he must pay its owner and the dead animal will be his.

If a man's bull injures the bull of another and it dies, they are to sell the live one

and divide both the money and the animal equally. However, if it was known that the bull had the habit of goring, yet the owner did not keep it penned up, the owner must pay, animal for animal, and the dead animal will be his.

“These are the laws you are to set before them:” - Having dealt with the fundamental principles of worship, the Book of the Covenant continued its more specific application of the Decalog with reference to other areas of the life of the Israelite nation. In the language of contemporary jurisprudence this would be called “*case law*” - designed to guide and direct the subsequent decisions of judges. In that context, John Durham suggests the translation “*guiding decisions*” rather than “*laws*” to more accurately reflect the nature of this material. These are not “*precedents*” in the modern sense of the term - that is, the record of actual decisions reached in past cases - but rather hypothetical situations used by God to assist in understanding and following His will. The text uses the phrase “*set before them*” in the sense of presenting a proposal to the people because Israel had not yet given its assent to the covenant agreement. The formal ratification of the covenant would not occur until Chapter 24.

“If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you six years. But in the seventh year he shall go free without paying anything.” - Many commentators are perplexed by the fact that the Book of the Covenant proceeds from worship directly to the subject of slavery. This progression reflects the traumatic impact of centuries of enslavement which had been experienced by the Hebrews at the hand of the Egyptians. Slavery



“Israel in Egypt” by Edward Poynter

was an important issue to the Children of Israel and the proper treatment of workers, servants and slaves was a basic concern after the mistreatment which they had endured in Egypt. Douglas K. Stuart contrasts these regulations with Israel's past experience:

“Israel’s service/slavery laws should be understood in terms of their own history of slavery in Egypt. The Egyptians made the Israelites slaves on the basis of their ethnicity, forced them to serve as slaves for life, did not compensate them properly, if at all, and worked them unbearably hard as a means of keeping them weak and/or causing at least some of them to die under the burden of their slavery (1:9-14). Against this sort of historical experience, the Bible’s laws protect all sorts of workers.”
(Stuart, p. 476)

In establishing detailed guidelines to protect the interests of the various categories of servants the Bible regularly reminds their Israelite masters - **“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today.”** (Deuteronomy 15:15) In dealing with these texts, it must be recalled that slavery in ancient Israel was very different than its modern counterparts. Slavery in the ancient world had nothing to do with race, and particularly in Israel was carefully restricted to respect the humanity of the worker as a creature fashioned in the image of God:

“Some of the misunderstanding of the biblical laws on service/slavery arises from unconscious analogy to modern Western hemisphere slavery, which involved the stealing of people of a different race from their homelands, transporting them in chains to a new land, selling them to an owner who possessed them for life without obligation to any restrictions who could resell them to someone else at will.” (Stuart, p. 475)

Translation of the broad variety of Hebrew terms used to describe the numerous different categories of workers further adds to the confusion. “*‘ebed*,” the most common of these terms can mean “*worker*”, “*employee*”, “*servant*” or “*slave*” depending on the context in which it is used. The same ambiguity is evident in the language which refers to management. The most common word, “*ba’al*”, can mean



“Ancient Mural of Egyptian Slaves at Work Under the Watchful Eye of Their Masters”

“boss”, “employer”, “master”, or “owner” depending on its context. Lest we become too critical of the ancients lack of semantic precision, imagine the confusion of someone 1,000 years from now trying to understand the nature of the relationship between a professional football player and the team which “owned” his contract and had the right to buy or sell him to or from another team depending on the needs of the team. We understand, of course, that these highly paid players are not slaves nor the property of the team which “owns” them except in regard to the team’s exclusive right to their employment as players in a particular sport.

In this segment, the application is to “*a Hebrew servant*” who agrees to work for his master/employer for a period of six years in return for a mutually agreed upon payment. Scripture reflect situations in which this payment was made at the end of

the six years, or in a lump sum payment at the beginning of the work period. Jacob experienced both in dealing with his devious father-in-law Laban (Genesis 29:18-28). In other instances payments could also have been made at regular intervals throughout the six years of labor. It should also be noted that ancient Israel virtually all businesses were based in the household of the owner. That typically meant that his employee/servants/ slaves ordinarily lived with him and his family and he provided food and lodging as a part of his responsibility to them. Accordingly, when the text says ***“If you buy a Hebrew servant”*** the payment in this purchase is most probably being made, in one way or another, to the worker himself. In this sense, these workers are what we might call *“contract laborers”* rather than slaves. In American history similar arrangements applied to those who were then identified as *“indentured servants.”* (cf. Leviticus 25:47-55; Jeremiah 34:14)

The text uses the term ***“Hebrew”*** to identify the servants in this category of laborer (cf. Deuteronomy 15:12). This label was first applied to Abraham and his family when they immigrated from Mesopotamia to Palestine. The word means *“the one from across the river,”* reflecting the Palestinian perspective that those who traveled from the northeast had crossed the great Euphrates River to enter their land. Extra-biblical evidence indicates that a variation of this label (*“habiru”*) was used in a negative sense to refer to foreigners who owned no land and often became bandits and nomads who preyed upon the established Palestinian population. The Biblical term ***“Hebrew”*** comes to be synonymous with the Children of Israel, referring only to them among the numerous descendants of Abraham who remained in the general area of Canaan. Its usage here serves to express the common heritage which fellow Israelites shared with one another which then obligated them to particular responsibilities in dealing with one another in an honorable manner. If a Gentile servant were to convert to faith in Yahweh, these provisions would then have applied to him and to his family. (cf. Ruth 1:16-22) The rabbis noted that the laws of Israel made meticulous provision for the protection of the rights of Hebrew servant/slaves:

“The Hebrew servant, Scriptures says (Lev. 25:43) must not be treated with rigor. This was held to mean that no needless work was to be imposed on him for the purpose of keeping him under discipline...Nor must he be put to bondsman’s work, that is, to any humiliating task, such as only slaves perform: and if practicable, he should be set to the same trade in which he was engaged while a freeman...The master of a Hebrew bondsman or bondmaid must place him on an equality with



“The Israelites Bring Gifts of Egyptian Gold to Moses for the Construction of the Tabernacle” - 19th Century Bible Picture

himself in meat and drink, in lodging and in bedclothes, and must act toward him in a brotherly manner, for Scripture always speaks of him as ‘thy brother.’ Hence, it was said: ‘Whoever buys a Hebrew servant buys a master for himself.’” (Jewish Encyclopedia, XI, p.404)

“He is to serve you for six years but in the seventh year he shall go free without paying anything.” - The seven year structure clearly reflects the pattern of the creation week with six days of labor followed by the Sabbath rest. Hebrew law further stipulated that the liberated servant was not to be dismissed empty-handed. God had seen to it the Israelites were given abundant provision by their former masters when He led them out of Egyptian bondage (Exodus 12:35-36). He had

caused the terrified Egyptians to be so eager to be rid of the Israelites that they had showered the riches of their land upon them to encourage them to leave. Israelite masters were to provide the same support for their former servants in the year of liberation:

“If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you for six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free. And when you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your wine press. Give to him as the Lord your God has blessed you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you. This is why I give you this command today.” (Deuteronomy 15:12-15)

Unfortunately, these benevolent provisions of the law were seldom put into practice. The Prophet Jeremiah’s stinging rebuke of his contemporaries indicates that this command was consistently abused within Israel:

“Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I made a covenant with your forefathers when I brought them out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I said, ‘Every seventh year each of you must free any fellow Hebrew who has sold himself to you. After he has served you six years you must let him go free.’ Your fathers, however, did not listen to Me or pay attention to Me.” (Jeremiah 34:12-14)

“If he comes alone, he is to go free alone; but if he has a wife when he comes she is to go with him. If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free.” - The attempt to carefully balance the rights of masters and servants continued with application to the more complicated issues of marriage and family. If the servant is unmarried the situation is simple and straightforward - ***“If he comes alone he is to go free alone.”*** The Hebrew word for ***“alone”*** literally refers to the corner of a garment. In English we use a similar idiom and would probably have said - ***“If he comes with only the clothes on his back.”*** If, however, the servant was married at the time his service began, then his wife must also be set free when his six years of service has been completed: ***“But if he has a wife when he comes, she is to go with him.”*** The situation becomes significantly more complex, however, if the slave began his service as an unmarried man, but his master later provided him

with a wife from his own household - ***“If his master give him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free.”*** - Hebrew commentator Nahum Sarna argues that this sentence refers to the practice of deliberately mating slaves for the purpose of procreation.

“In the ancient Near East it was common practice for a master to mate a slave with a foreign bondwoman solely for the purpose of siring ‘house born’ slaves.’ In such instances, no matrimonial or emotional bond was necessarily involved, and the woman and her offspring remained the property of the master.” (Sarna, p. 119)

These “*house born*” children from a Gentile mother were not subject to the six year release provision. They were permanent servants within the master’s household and were not release until the Year of Jubilee (cf. Leviticus 25). It was thus to the master’s economic advantage to facilitate such arrangements. Under these circumstances, the law provided that the Hebrew servant would still be freed, but the wife and children remained a part of the master’s household. The husband/father had a number of alternatives available to him in this situation. In the eyes of the law, by accepting his release he was no longer bound to the woman provided by his former master and could simply proceed to remarry and pursue his life as a freed man. If he wished to maintain the relationship he could attempt to earn the money to redeem his servant wife and children from his former master under the guidelines which governed the redemption of servants within Israel (cf. Leviticus 25:39-55). Finally, as the text will proceed to define, the servant also had the alternative of re-entering his master’s service on a permanent basis in order to be reunited with his family and continue to experience the security of the master’s household.

“But if the servant declares, ‘I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,’ then his master must take him before the judges. He shall then take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he shall be his servant for life.” - The inclusion of this provision suggests that it must have been fairly common for a servant/slave to feel sufficiently comfortable within the household of his master and to have formed emotional attachments with the Gentile woman to who he had been married within that household and the children whom they had together. Under such circumstances he would have been willing to forego his release to an economically and socially uncertain freedom and remain united with his family as a servant within the security



'Jacob Pledging His Love to Rachel' by William Dyce

of the household of his master.

“Then his master shall take him before the judges...” - The servant’s decision in this matter was sufficiently important that it was to be ratified by a unique public ceremony. The NIV follows rabbinic tradition in its translation of the plural Hebrew word *“elohim”* (literally *“gods”*) in this phrase as ***“judges.”*** This translation is most probably correct. The same phrase occurs again in Exodus 22:7-8 in a similar context: ***“but if the thief is not found, the owner of the house must appear before the judges to determine whether he has laid his hands on the other man’s property.”*** In Chapter 22, the verb connected to *“elohim”* is plural which would not be the case if the term were a reference to God. The formal recognition of the servant’s decision to forego his right the customary six year limitations of service was designed to protect the master should the servant subsequently change his mind while at the same time it protected the servant in that it certified that even without the six year provision he would continue to enjoy the rights and privileges of a Hebrew servant/slave. The

ceremony was to take place at the gateway of the town or village - ***“take him to the door or the doorpost”*** - the traditional place where the village elders held court, so that it might be publically certified before the entire community. The piercing of the right ear lobe was to be the mark of permanent servitude - ***“pierce his ear with an awl.”*** The piercing of the ear lobe was an action rich in symbolic meaning. It would become a permanent sign and reminder of his status. In Job 40:24, God indicates His almighty power by His ability to pierce the nose of the great Leviathon and thus force him to be His servant: ***“Can anyone capture him by his eyes, or trap him and pierce his nose?”*** The piercing of the servant’s ear represented the bond which would require him to hear and obey the commands of his master. Umberto Cassuto points out that in Babylon rebellious slaves were punished by having his ear cut off as a permanent reminder that he had failed to listen to the commands of his master. (Cassutto, p. 267) The Levitical priests were consecrated to the Lord by the application of blood to their ears and their feet to symbolized the dedication to hear God’s Word and follow in the path of His will.



“Eliezar, Abraham’s Servant/Heir Seeking a Wife for Isaac”



“Hagar, Handmaiden of Sarah, Cast Out of the Household of Abraham with Her Son Ishmael” by Demont Breton

“Then he will be his servant for life.” - The Hebrew is more emphatic. It literally says *“He will be his servant forever.”* The NIV interprets that to mean for the rest of his life. Rabbinic tradition taught that his service lasted until the next Year of Jubilee, in which all slaves were to be set free, or until the death of the master to whom he had made his commitment - ***“He will be his servant for the rest of life.”*** They understood ***“the rest of his life”*** in the phrase to refer to the life of the master. In this way, the servitude for a Hebrew automatically passing from one generation of masters to the next would have been prohibited.

“If a man sells his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free as menservants do. If she does not please the master who has selected her for himself, he must let her be redeemed. He has no right to sell her to foreigners because he has broken faith with her. If he selects her for his son, he must grant her the rights of a daughter. If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing and marital rights. If he does not provide her with these things, she is to go free, without payment of money.” - This paragraph pertains to the status of a free woman - typically a minor girl - from a poor family who was sold to a wealthy family. The circumstances in which this could occur had to be those of utter and complete desperation. The rules stipulated here are designed to safeguard the young girl’s

rights and protect her from sexual exploitation. *“In the ancient world, a father driven by poverty, might sell his daughter into a well-to-do family in order to ensure her future security. The sale presupposes marriage to the master or his son.”* (Sarna, p. 120) The Hebrew noun for such a maid servant is *“amah.”*

“Rabbinic interpretation restricted the power of the father to dispose of his daughter in this way. He could do so only so long as she was a minor, that is, below the age of twelve years and a day, and then only if he was utterly destitute. She could not sell herself into slavery, nor could she be sold by a court as an insolvent thief, as could a male, in order to make restitution for the stolen articles. Further, she could not be designated to be the wife of the master or his son without her knowledge or consent.” (Sarna, p. 120)

“She is not to go free as men servants do.” - This is not a matter of discrimination but protection. A maid servant could not be released at the end of a six year term of service for she would be destitute without legitimate means of supporting herself.



“Jacob Reunited With Esau”

“If she does not please the master who has selected her for himself, he must let her be redeemed.” - The master who entered into such an agreement and subsequently decided that he did not like the girl was not at liberty to dispose of her as he wished. Instead, he was compelled by the law to allow her to be ***“redeemed”*** by her family. The Hebrew text reads *“If she is bad in her master’s eyes.”* The language carries no sexual connotation. William Propp explains: *“Since the maid servant is not yet a wife or concubine this indicates not sexual dissatisfaction but general incompatibility... But here, the woman is, in fact, a prospective wife and so ‘bad’ might include unattractiveness.”* (Propp, p. 197) The same term is used in Genesis 28:8 to describe Isaac dislike for the wives of Esau because his son had disobeyed him and had chosen to marry

Canaanite women: ***“Esau then realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac.”***

“He has no right to sell her to foreigners because he has broken faith with her.” The girl’s father entered into the agreement with the understanding that either the master or his son would marry his daughter. Since the master is no longer willing to keep his end of the bargain he has actually ***“broken faith with her.”*** That being the case he does not have the right ***“to sell her to foreigners.”*** In this context, ***“foreigners”*** - a term which usually applied to all Gentiles - takes on the technical sense of anyone outside of the master’s household. He does not have the right to dispose of the girl simply because he has decided that for one reason or another he doesn’t like her. He must honor his agreement and she remains a part of his family with all the rights and privileges that entails.

“If he selects her for his son, he must grant her the rights of a daughter.” That is to say, the master may not simply give the Hebrew maid servant to his son as a sexual play thing. She has the same rights as any Hebrew woman and must be recognized as the boy’s wife and a daughter of the household if she is given to him.

“If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one....” - While the Bible does not approve of polygamy it does not absolutely prohibit the practice either. Polygamy is always presented in a negative light in Scripture with the painful consequences of the violation of the Creator’s design clearly displayed. Furthermore, as in this instance, Scripture regulates polygamy in such a way as to protect the wives involved so that they might not suffer unduly from changes in their status within the household, based on the fickle whims and fancies of the husband. Here the law provides that the maid servant is to enjoy the same rights as any other wife and may not be denied those rights because of her original status as a servant. If the husband remarries and the maid is displaced as the first wife of the household, the husband must continue to provide for her needs in every way - ***“food, clothing and marital rights.”*** Should he fail to do so, she is free to leave and return to her family without obligation of any kind - ***“If he does not provide her with these three things, she is to go free, without any payment of money.”*** Once again, in such an instance, the master/husband’s failure to honor his original agreement with the servant/wife’s father means that the maid servant is free to return to her family or to marry another, as she chooses without repayment of the original debt.



“God’s Curse Upon Cain for the Murder of Abel” by C.W. Dietrich

“Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate. But if a man schemes and kills another one deliberately, take him away from My altar and put him to death.” - The Book of the Covenant continues with an elaboration of three capital crimes involving the violation of the fifth, fourth and seventh commandments. The Bible is unique among all the among all the sacred texts and law codes of the ancient world in that it links the sanctity of human life to the creation of humanity in the image of God: *“And for each man too I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.”* (Genesis 9:6)

Everywhere else, murder was viewed only as an economic loss to the family or clan. Economic compensation could be offered by the guilty party as restitution for his crime. Scripture explicitly rejects this approach: *“Do not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer who deserves to die. He must surely be put to death.”* (Numbers 35:31) The Biblical prohibition of murder is repeated and emphatic (i.e. Leviticus 24:17,21; Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). The text makes the crucial distinction between

murder - deliberate, premeditated killing - and manslaughter - the incidental, accidental taking of human life. Murder must remain a capital crime while the man who has committed manslaughter - ***“if he does not do it intentionally but God lets it happen”*** - shall be given the opportunity to flee to a place of safe haven, so that the crime may be properly adjudicated. The language of the text anticipates the subsequent establishment of cities of refuge:

“The Lord said to Moses: ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them, ‘When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, select some towns to be your cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone accidentally may flee. They will be places of refuge from the avenger, so that a person accused of murder may not die before he stands trial before the assembly. These six towns you will give will be your cities of refuge. Give three on this side of Jordan and three in Canaan as cities of refuge. These six towns will be a place of refuge for Israelites, aliens and any other people living among them, so that anyone who has killed another accidentally may flee there.’” (Numbers 35:9-15; cf. Deuteronomy 4:41-43; 19:11-13)



“Flight to One of the Cities of Refuge” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

The law of asylum set forth here and formalized with the establishment of the cities of refuge was designed to regulate the widespread practice of “*blood vengeance*” or “*blood feud*” which prevailed throughout the ancient Near East and much of Israelite history. In the absence of centralized governmental authority and the consistent administration of justice by such authority, the nearest male relative - “*the avenger of blood*” (Numbers 35:19,21,27; Deuteronomy 19:6) was duty bound to seek revenge and take the life of the killer. However, in cases of inadvertent or accidental death, that vengeance could be exacted too quickly, before the facts of the case could be accurately established - “*Otherwise the avenger of blood might pursue him in a rage, and if the distance is too great overtake him and kill him, even though he is not deserving of death since he did it to his neighbor without malice aforethought.*” (Deuteronomy 19:6-7) Thus, the law of asylum was established to facilitate the application of the distinction between murder and manslaughter cited in the Book of the Covenant.

The phrase “*but God’s lets it happen*” reminds us that ultimately the sovereign Lord controls all things. These words allude to divine providence in such matters. It may not have been the killer’s intent to cause the death of his victim but the God who remains intimately involved in everything that takes place throughout His creation allowed, yes, caused this death to occur. Modern legal terminology reflects this concept in its continued use of the phrase “*an act of God.*” The point of the contemporary language has nothing to do with theology, but rather is intended to indicate the absence of any human will as a causative agent.

“*But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from My altar and put him to death.*” - The widespread custom throughout the ancient world, and extending into much of Western history, was that any criminal who was able to escape into a sacred temple was granted sanctuary and was immune from punishment because within the temple/church he lived under the protection of the god to whom that place of worship was dedicated. The application of this concept in Israel was problematic because only priests were allow to enter the holy places with both the Tabernacle and the Temple. This led to the rabbinic interpretation that the intent of this verse was to indicate that even a priest who had committed premeditated murder could be apprehended as he performed his priestly duties at the altar and taken away for execution. Be that as it may, there are only two incidents recorded in Scripture in which fugitives sought refuge by fleeing to the altar of the Lord and clutching to the horns of that altar. Both incidents took place in the transition between the reigns



“The Death of Joab” - 16th Century Bible Woodcut

of David and Solomon. The first was Solomon’s half-brother Adonijah the failure of whose abortive attempt to succeed his father sent him fleeing to the altar in the tabernacle for refuge. He was pardoned and placed upon probation. (1 Kings 1:50-53) The second was Joab, David’s foremost general who had also taken part in Adonijah’s conspiracy and was guilty of the murder of Abner and Amasa. At Solomon’s command, Joab was executed in the tabernacle as he continued to cling to the horns of the altar. (1 Kings 3:28-35) The point of the text here is that premeditated murder is such a serious crime that not even the sanctity of the Lord’s altar may become a place of sanctuary for one who is guilty of having shed innocent blood. When Solomon commanded the death of Joab upon the altar he explained:

“Do as he says. Strike him down and bury him and so clear me and my father’s house of the guilt of the innocent blood Joab shed. The Lord will repay him blood for blood because without the knowledge of my father David he attacked two men and killed them with the sword.”
(1 Kings 2:31-32)

“Anyone who attacks his father or mother must be put to death...Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.” - Verses 15 and 17 both apply to the

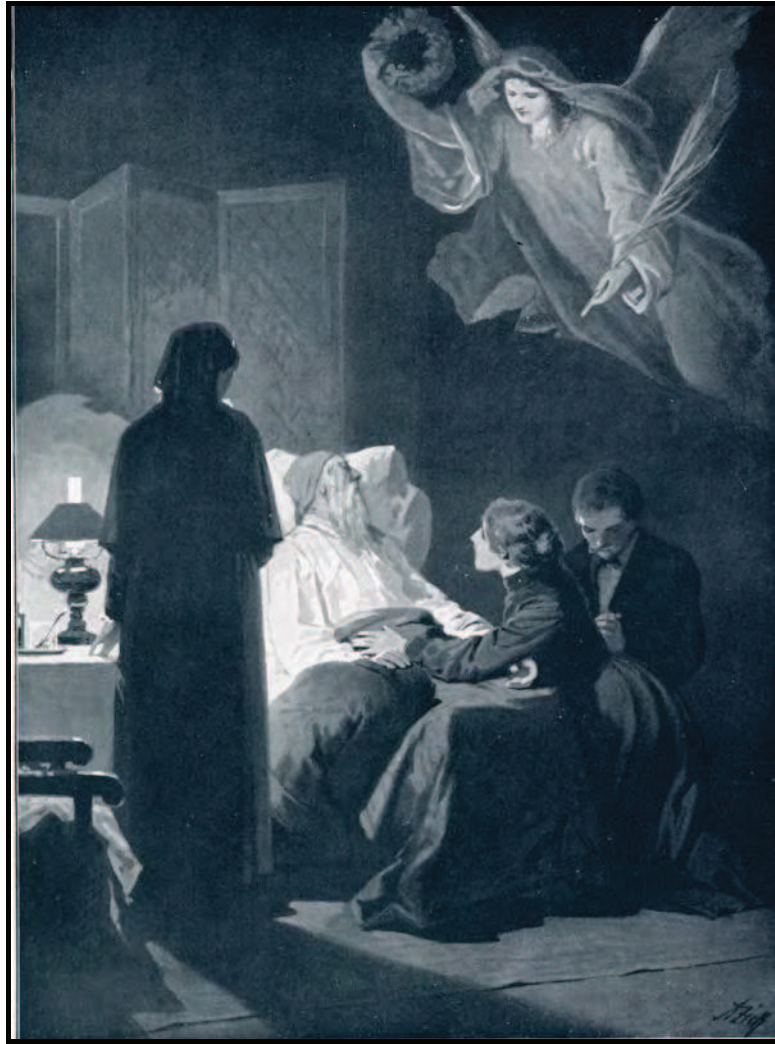
application of the 4th Commandment. The presence of these offenses among those to which capital punishment is to be applied is surprising to some modern readers. Sarna explains:

“The extreme severity with which both of these offenses are treated clearly indicates the importance that biblical religion attached to the integrity of the family as the indispensable prerequisite for a wholesome society. There is also here the unassailable conviction that the dissolution of the family unit must inevitably rend to shreds the entire social fabric.” (Sarna, p. 122)

Contemporary culture is paying an horrendous price in personal pain and social upheaval because of its refusal to recognize this fundamental truth.

Generally, the death of the victim was required - in accord with the *“lex talionis”* - for the death penalty to be applied. However, in the case of a physical assault upon one’s parents it is not necessary to actually cause their death to incur the death penalty. In this instance, an assault that was severe enough to have been life threatening is sufficient. *“In other words, so great is the reverence due one’s parents, to hit them is the equivalent of killing someone else.”* (Propp, p. 211) The Hebrew verb literally means *“to beat down”* and hence refers to the kind of physical attack designed to disable someone and leave them lying on the ground. Rabbinic interpretation reflected this sense in its application of the text only to those situations where the attack of a child upon one of his parents left them permanently injured or disabled. It is also significant to note that the protection was applied to both father and mother, which will come as a surprise to those who deride Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, as an outmoded exercise in male chauvinism. The Babylonian *“Code of Hammurapi,”* in contrast prescribes a less severe punishment only in reference to physical abuse of one’s father: *“If a child shall strike his father, they shall cut off his hand.”* (Propp, p. 212)

“Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.” - The comparable prohibition of cursing one’s parent’s reflects the perspective of a culture which took the practice of calling down divine judgement or damnation much more seriously than does our own. The Israelites had no doubt as to the reality of God or of His capacity for damnation. In their view there was no such thing as casual profanity. Anyone



“Honor thy Father and Mother” - 19th Century Engraving

who called upon God in any circumstances had best be prepared to receive a direct response. The cursing of one’s parents was not only a most flagrant demonstration of disrespect for parents it was at the same time a blasphemous misuse of the holy Name of God. This prohibition is reiterated in a series of other passages throughout the Torah: **“If anyone curses his father or mother, he must be put to death. He has cursed his father or mother and his blood will be on his own head.”** (Leviticus 20:9) The Bible recognized that effective parental responsibility and consistent discipline within the home was the basis for stability and harmony throughout the culture:

“A man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the

elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard. Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.’ (Deuteronomy 21:18-21)

Wise King Solomon made the same point even more colorfully in his book of proverbs: ***“If a man curses his father or mother his lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness.”*** (Proverbs 20:20)

“There are those who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers; those who are pure in their own eyes and yet are not cleansed of their filth...The eye that mocks a father and that scorns obedience to a mother will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures.” (Proverbs 30:11-12,17)

Our Lord also referred to this text in His criticism of the legalism of the Scribe and the Pharisees in cleverly evading their responsibility to care for their parents by using the technicalities of their man-made rules and traditions:

“Jesus replied; ‘And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’



“Jesus With His Parents in the Temple” by Rossetti

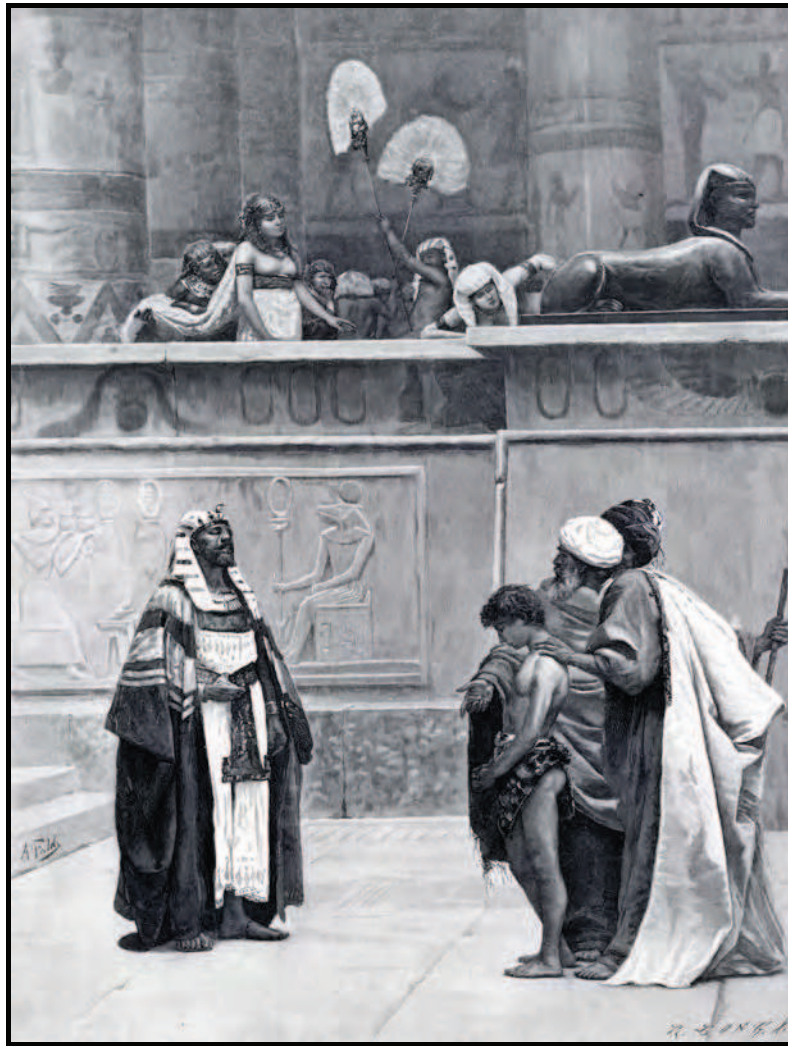


“Joseph Sold into Slavery By His Brothers” by Friedrich Overbeck

and ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death. But you say that if a man says to his father and mother, ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,’ and he is not to honor his father with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.’ (Matthew 15:3-7)

Notice the manner in which Jesus combines this precept with the Fourth Commandment itself, thereby indicating his recognition of the fact that it represents an application of the commandment. The pharisees’ refusal to accept their responsibility to love and care for the parents who had loved and cared for them constituted a serious violation of God’s law.

“Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to death.” - This prohibition applies the seventh commandment to the practice of slave trading. In rabbinic tradition slave trading has always been viewed as a basic focus of the seventh commandment. *“Our teachers taught - ‘You shall not steal.’ Scripture is speaking here about stealing people.”* (Talmud, *Sanhedrin*, 86a) The rabbis argue that the presence of this application in Exodus



“Joseph Sold to Potiphar in Egypt”

21:16 confirms the accuracy of that tradition. The prohibition is reinforced in Deuteronomy 24:7 - ***If a man be found stealing any of his brethren of the Children of Israel, and he deal with him as a slave and sell him, then that thief shall die.***” As previously noted, Israel’s national experience of slavery in Egypt left a permanent imprint of the consciousness of the people. While slavery in the convention sense was tolerated in Israel, it applied only to non-Israelites and was carefully regulated with stipulations designed to ameliorate the conditions of the slave. *“Slavery did occur in Israel, even with Yahweh’s approval, but the slaves were foreigners who were among the spoils of war or who had been obtained in a foreign country.”* (Douma, p. 287) The practice of kidnaping and enslaving free men, either Israelites or Gentiles, was strictly prohibited under penalty of death. The comprehensive nature of the prohibition is striking. God’s hatred of this practice is reflected in His pronouncement of judgement upon the Philistines who were among the most prolific slave traders in the eastern Mediterranean: *“This is what the Lord says: ‘For three sins of Gaza, even*

for four, I will not turn back My wrath. Because she took captive whole communities and sold them to Edom.” (Amos 1:6)

“If men quarrel and one hits the other with a stone or with his fist and he does not die but is confined to bed, the one who struck the blow will not be held responsible if the other gets up and walks around outside with his staff; however, he must pay the injured man for the loss of his time and see that he is completely healed.” - This segment deals with a series of situations which involve serious bodily injury that does not result in death. The word *“quarrel”* refers to a verbal argument which escalates into a physical battle. These circumstances would preclude a premeditated intent to inflict physical harm. The spontaneous nature of the brawl is further indicated by the reference to *“with a stone or with his fist.”* There are no weapons involved, other than a rock which could be snatched from the ground anywhere in the heat of temper. One party is injured but not fatally - *“one hits the other...and he does not die but is confined to bed.”* The aggressor *“will not be held responsible”* (literally - *“will go unpunished”*) *“if the other gets up and walks around with his staff.”* Rabbinic law stipulated that he who struck the blow was to be held in custody pending the victim’s full recovery. If he subsequently died, then the previously defined rules pertaining to manslaughter would apply. Assuming recovery, there would be no punishment beyond compensation for lost income and medical expenses- *“he must pay the injured man for the loss of his time and see that he is completely healed.”*

“If a man beats his male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies as a direct result, he must be punished, but he is not to be punished if the slave gets up after a day or two, since the slave is his property.” - This provision of the Torah is unique among all the law collections of the ancient Near East. No other culture had laws protecting slaves from mistreatment by their masters. The slave existed at the whim of his master. He could be beaten, maimed or killed at will. The law is all the more remarkable in that, given the terminology of the verse - *“male or female slave”* - the prohibition was specifically designed to protect non-Israelite slaves. The law recognized the right of the master to inflict physical punishment upon his slaves - *“If a man beats his male or female slave with a rod...since the slave is his property.”* The rabbis defined a *“rod”* as an instrument which *“does not normally have lethal potentiality”* (Sarna, p 124) and excluded the most vulnerable areas of the body from those places which could properly be subject to discipline. If the slave died *“as a direct result of the punishment”* the master would be subject to punishment for murder for although the slave did belong to him, that slave was, nonetheless, a human



“Moses Kills an Egyptian Taskmaster for Beating a Hebrew Slave” - Carolsfeld

being. The Hebrew phrase literally says that the dead slave *“must be avenged,”* referring to the same blood vengeance which would apply in any other murder.

“Since a slave would not possibly act as blood redeemers - or else they would have ransomed him - more likely the court and/or the community must act in their stead. Should they fail in this duty, Yahweh Himself will take vengeance upon the murderer and probably upon the entire community that shelters him.” (Propp, p. 219)

This affirmation of the value of human life irrespective of social class, economic status or national origin is without precedent or peer in the ancient world and throughout human history. It testifies mightily to the identity of the Bible as the Word of God. If the slave was permanently disabled by the beating the master would also be subject to the punishment of the law and responsible for the care of that slave for the rest of his life.

“If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is not serious injury, the men must be fined whatever the woman’s husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for

life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.” - This intriguing scenario presents a situation in which two men are fighting and a pregnant woman - either an innocent bystander or someone who actually attempts to intervene to end the fight - is injured in such way as to cause a premature birth or a miscarriage. The interpretation of the passage has become the subject of intense debate in the context of the abortion controversy. Abortion foes have used the text to prove that Scripture views the unborn child as a human life while abortion supporters have struggled mightily to disallow and disprove that usage. Strongly held views on abortion (either pro or con) notwithstanding, the meaning of the passage must be determined by its language and grammar. Nahum Sarna diplomatically notes: *“Unfortunately the Hebrew text is replete with difficulties.”* (Sarna, p. 125) The Hebrew text literally reads:

“When men strive together and they hurt a woman with child and her children come forth, but no mischief happens, he shall surely be punished as the woman’s husband shall lay upon him, the payment to be based on reckoning. But if any mischief happen, then you shall give life for life...”

The first key phrase in understanding the text is *“and her children come forth.”* The text uses the plural Hebrew noun *“yeled.”* Michael Grisati summarizes the meaning of the word in this way:

“Customary lexical sources point out that ‘yeled’ refers to living people...the nuances of this noun range from newborns (Exodus 1:17,18;3:6-9), to children who have been weaned (Genesis 21:8), to teenagers (Genesis 21:14-16), to youths (2 Kings 2:24), to young men old enough to serve in foreign courts (Daniel 1:4,10,15,17), and to descendants (Isaiah 29:23). The noun ‘yeled’ never refers elsewhere to a child unrecognizable as human or incapable of existence outside of the womb. In fact, two other Hebrew words might have been used if Moses had a miscarriage in mind.” (Grisanti, p. 183)

The latter part of Dr. Grisati’s definition becomes particularly significant in view of the common argument that this reference is actually to a miscarriage and therefore the punishments imposed cannot be applied to death or damage inflicted upon the unborn child. In that connection, the second point of contention is the verb *“come forth”* (Hebrew - *“yasa”*) This is the ordinary term used in Hebrew to describe the process

of childbirth. *“Literally, ‘let her children emerge.’ The common Hebrew stem ‘yasa’ ‘to go out, emerge’ is used of parturition.”* (Sarna, p. 125) On those rare occasions when the term is applied to a miscarriage (3 times in the OT) the text specifically indicates that to be the case. Hebrew has another verb (“*skl*”) which is normally used to describe a miscarriage. This verb carries the connotation of violence and death. It is also used in reference to children captured and carried off in war or seized by wild animals.

Finally the victim of the “*mischief*” (Hebrew- “*ason*”) is contested. This Hebrew word is applied to serious physical harm, including fatal injury, which require the care of a physician. In that connection, the term in post-biblical Hebrew refers to the healing treatment of a doctor. Those who understand the emergence of the mother to be a miscarried mass of foetal tissue insist that the damage in this instance must therefore apply only to the mother, particularly in terms of her future childbearing capacity. However, if it were the intent of the text to limit the damage to the mother that would ordinarily have been indicated by the simple inclusion of the prepositional phrase “*to her.*” In the absence of any such indication, the harm cannot rightly be restricted to the mother. *A natural reading of the passage would suggest that the ‘no harm’ or ‘harm’ applies either to the child or to the mother.”* Grisanti, p. 185) Dr. William Propp, Professor of Judaic Studies at the University of California, contends that the language of the passage is deliberately as general as possible to cover all potential outcomes:

“The text seems deliberately ambiguous. Something comes out of the pregnant woman. There are four possible outcomes: healthy mother and child, dead or injured mother and healthy child, healthy mother and dead or injured child, or, dead or injured mother and child.” (Propp, p. 222)

Taking the text on its own terms, there is no room for doubt that the Torah regarded the unborn child as a human person subject to the protections and compensations of the law. Furthermore it is clear - in the absence of any specification to the contrary - that the unborn child was considered a human person at any point in the pregnancy. *“However, Moses could be establishing a law that stands distinct from the Ancient Near East law codes of his day. Not only is there severe punishment in the wake of*



“Ezekiel Prophecying to the Elders of Israel”

unintentional mortal injury to a mother or a fetus, but even forcing an early delivery of an infant through violence, in the event that the infant lives, faces a demanding penalty.” (Grisanti, p. 186)

If either the mother or the child were killed or injured in the accident then punishment/compensation were to be assessed by the woman’s husband subject to the approval of the local court of elders. In this regard, the NIV’s translation **“and the court allows”** accurately reflects the sense of the Hebrew original *“according to reckoning.”* *“Reckoning”* specifically refers to the assessment of a group of judges within the local elders’ court.

“But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth...” - In such cases, the ancient *“lex talionis”* (Latin - *“law of the tooth”*) was to apply, that is to say, the punishment was to fit the crime. The degree of injury which the assailant had inflicted upon the mother/child was in turn to be inflicted upon the assailant. This is the first formal statement of the *“lex talionis”* principle in Scripture. Hence the entire formula is stated even though in this particular situation

a number of its stipulations would not apply. The language of the Verse is also significant as an expression of the Bible's affirmation of the identity of the unborn child as a human person. By applying the "*lex talionis*" situation in which an adult kills an unborn child Scripture is directly equating the value of the two. The adult is no more human than the child simply because of his age and size. By killing an unborn child he has taken a human life and therefore his life must be taken - "***life for life.***" This point becomes all the more emphatic when it is recognized that the God who inspired Holy Scripture chose this specific situation as the first instance in which this legal formula would formally appear in His Word. Those who would deny the humanity of the unborn child must do so in direct contradiction to the teaching of God's Word.

"If a man hits a manservant or a maidservant in the eye, and destroys it, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the eye. And if he knocks out the tooth of a manservant or maidservant, he must let the servant go free for the tooth." - These provisions express again the concept that a master's ownership of his slaves was not absolute. If a master physically abused his servants he thereby forfeited his ownership of them and they were to be set free. Obviously, the citation of eyes and teeth here are representative examples of physical abuse of any kind. These particular organs were no doubt selected because of the proximity of this text to the "*lex talionis*" in the preceding verses. "*Capable Israelite judges would have known how to extrapolate from the terms of this law to all the relevant situations to which it speaks...The law is typically paradigmatic rather than exhaustive in its description of crime and punishment.*" (Miller, p. 494)

"If a bull gores a man or a woman to death, the bull must be stoned to death and its meat must not be eaten. But the owner of the bull must not be held responsible. If, however, the bull has had a habit of goring and the owner has been warned but has not kept it penned up and it kills a man or woman, the bull must be stoned and the owner also must be put to death. However, if payment is demanded of him, he may redeem his life by paying whatever is demanded. This law also applies if the bull gores a son or daughter. If the bull gores a male or female slave, the owner must pay thirty shekels of silver to the master of the slave and the bull must be stoned." - The next segment deals with what might today be called "*reckless endangerment*" or "*negligent homicide*" in the agrarian context of ancient Palestine. Once again, the examples cited are paradigmatic not exhaustive. They could be applied in any comparable situation. The degree of punishment/compensation is



“Pharaoh Leading the Procession of the Sacred Apis Bull”

commensurate to the extent of the damage and the degree of negligence. Unlike more common sheep and goats, the bull is a powerful and often dangerous animal. *“The bull is too dangerous and unpredictable. Although he condescends to serve us, he demands our respect. He and his cousin, the wild ox, symbolized royalty and divinity throughout the ancient Near East.”* (Propp, p. 232) Cattle were extremely valuable animals, whose potential for profit outweighed the danger involved in their keeping. If the violence was unprecedented, the animal was to be killed - a considerable loss to its owner - but the owner was not to be punished beyond the loss of his animal. The beast was to be destroyed and its flesh could not be used for food. However, if ***“the bull had a habit of goring and the owner has been warned”*** then both the animal and its owner are to be held responsible and executed. Scholars note that while the law codes of Hammurabi and other ancient Mesopotamian cultures contain similar provisions, the Book of the Covenant is unique in its emphasis on the precious value of human life. Among their neighbors this issue was a matter of simple economics to be calculated in an equitable manner. For the Hebrews, however, there was a much more fundamental concern involved here.

“There are considerable differences between the Mesopotamian and biblical approaches. Eshnunna and Hammurabi interest themselves

*exclusively in the economic aspects of the case. The incident itself is treated as a relatively minor affair...By contrast, the entire treatment of the case in the Torah is grounded in religious and moral considerations...The gender of the victim is immaterial. The two Mesopotamian law collections mention only the goring of a male...The killing of a homicidal beast is ordained in Genesis 9:5-6; **“For your own life blood I will require a reckoning; I will require it of every beast...Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in His image did God make man.”** The sanctity of human life is such as to make bloodshed the consummate offense, one viewed with unspeakable horror. Both man and beast that destroy human life are thereafter tainted by bloodguilt.” (Sarna, p. 128)*

This moral dimension is further indicated in the manner of execution both the ox and its owner (in the case of negligence) are to be stoned in the presence of the entire community. Stoning was a mode of punishment reserved for the most serious of crimes. William Propp points out the particular significance of this method of execution in the biblical world:

“The messy process of stoning deliberately renders the carcass what 22:30 calls ‘torn’ so that it may not be sacrificed or eaten. Stoning, moreover, is a highly symbolic manner of killing, otherwise reserved for human malfesants. It was a way for the whole community to serve as corporate executioner by engaging, so to speak in controlled mob violence...The point may be merely to make an impression ‘a fortiori; if a beast is slain for homicide, how much more guilty is a man?...In addition, since stoning generally punishes religious offenses, the ox arguably is stoned for sacrilege, that is, insurrection against the divinely ordained hierarchy of terrestrial authority in which men are authorized to kill cattle but not vice versa...For eliminating sources of spiritual pollution, the technique of stoning has a special advantage; there is no actual contact between the executed and the executioner.” (Propp, p. 234)

All of this is carefully designed to teach and implement the unique sanctity of human life and establish guidelines by which that most fundamental value of civilized society may be applied in Israelite culture. Without the constant reinforcement of this basic truth - that all human interaction is dependent upon the recognition of the unique



“The Stoning of Stephen” by N.H. Westlake

sanctity of every human life because of its original creation in the image of God - sinful men will quickly degenerate to the level of predator and prey in their dealings with one another. The deadly logic is inescapable. If man is just another animal, why should he act differently than all the others. Only the strong can survive. The weak must be compelled to yield or be eliminated.

“If payment is demanded of him, he may redeem his life by paying whatever is demanded.” - In cases of negligent homicide the bull’s owner was permitted to avoid the death penalty by payment of a ransom price but only with the consent of the victim’s family. The amount of the ransom was to be established by the victim’s family and thus would vary from case to case. The Hebrew term used to identify the ransom payment (*“koper”*) is derived from a root which refers to ritual purification, expiation and reconciliation. A form of the same word is used to describe the *“Atonement Cover”* of the Ark of the Covenant (*“kapporet”*). Numbers 35:31 prohibits the acceptance of a ransom in place of punishment for murder: ***“Do not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer who deserves to die. He must surely be***



“The Ark of the Covenant Carried Through the Jordan” by J. James Tissot

put to death.” In this instance, however, the crime is not murder - the deliberate taking of human life - but manslaughter resulting from negligence. The essential difference between the two crimes is the absence of malicious intent in the former.

“This law also applies if a bull gores a son or daughter.” - The same principle would be used in determining punishment and compensation if the bull’s victim is a child. The implicit assumption here is that the goring results in the death of the victim. Size and/or age are irrelevant in determining human identity or worth in the eyes of God. *“If the bull gores a male or female slave, the owner must pay thirty shekels of silver to the master of the slave, and the bull must be stoned.”* Even if the victim is a slave, the bull must still be stoned to death. Slavery did not deprive the enslaved of their status as human beings created in the divine image in the eyes of God. *“In the law of the Torah, the stoning of the ox means that it was regarded as having incurred bloodguilt just as it had for killing a free person.”* (Sarna, p. 129) A compensatory fine of *“thirty shekels”* also had to be paid to the master of the slave by the owner of the bull.

“If a man uncovers a pit, or digs one and fails to cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit must pay for the loss; he must pay its owner and the dead animal will be his. If a man’s bull injures the bull of another and it dies, they are to sell the live one and divide both the money and the dead animal equally. However, if it was known that the bull had the habit of goring, yet the owner did not keep it penned up, the owner must pay, animal for animal, and the dead animal will be his.” - The previous discussion of compensation for negligence continues with specific application to issues regarding damage to livestock. The ***“pit”*** in question here is most likely a cistern used to hold water or an underground granary for the storage of grain. The uncovering of such a pit evidently refers to reopening and cleaning out one which had previously been abandoned in contrast to the excavation of a new facility. So, for example, ***“Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died, and he gave them the names his father had given them.”*** (Genesis 26:17) In either case, the man responsible of digging the pit would also be held accountable for taking appropriate precautions to prevent livestock from injury or death by installing adequate cover over the opening. Typically, such facilities had a narrow opening at the top and then broadened out underground into a bottle shape designed to hold grain or water. Depending on the nature of the terrain, such pits were often lined with stones. . It would also appear that the assumption of the text is that the pit in question was excavated on public land where the livestock of others would have had access to it. This practice was not uncommon in the ancient Near East (cf. Genesis 26:17-22) The reference to ***“an ox or a donkey”*** is the typical manner of referring to livestock in general and should not limited to these two particular animals. The guidelines governing the injury of one animal by another belonging to someone else highlight prudent precaution in a similar fashion. If the animal was known to be dangerously aggressive and its owner had made no move to safely isolate it that failure significantly increased his responsibility in the matter. However, if there was no pattern of aggressive behavior, the injury was to be regarded as a no fault accident and its losses shared equally by both parties. The dead animal remained a factor in the settlement because of the value of its meat and/or hide for use or sale. The concept of balanced and appropriate compensation remains consistent throughout this segment of the Book of the Covenant. Since human life is not involved these are simply matter of economic compensation without the concept of bloodguilt as in the preceding segment.



“Israel Encamped Before Mount Sinai”

Exodus Chapter 22

If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and for sheep for the sheep. If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed; but if it happens after sunrise, he is guilty of bloodshed. A thief must certainly make restitution, but if he has nothing, he must be sold to pay for his theft. If the stolen animal is found alive in his possession - whether ox or donkey or sheep - he must pay back double. If a man grazes his livestock in a field or vineyard and lets them stray and they graze in another man’s field, he must make restitution from the best of his own field or vineyard. If a fire breaks out and it spreads into thorn bushes so that it burns shocks of grain, or standing grain or the whole field, the one who started the fire must make restitution. If a man gives his neighbor silver or goods for safekeeping, and they are stolen from the neighbor’s house, the thief, if he is caught, must pay back double. But if the thief is not found, the owner of the house must appear before the judges to determine whether he has laid his hands on the other man’s property. In all cases of illegal possession of an ox, a donkey, a sheep, a garment, or any other lost property about which someone says, ‘This is mine.’

both parties are to bring their cases before the judges. The one whom the judge declares guilty must pay back double to his neighbor. If a man gives a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any other animal to his neighbor for safekeeping, and it dies or is injured or is taken away while no one is looking, the issue between them will be settled by the taking of an oath before the Lord that the neighbor did not lay hands on the other person's property. The owner is to accept this and no restitution is required. But if the animal was stolen from the neighbor, he must make restitution to the owner. If it was torn to pieces by a wild animal, he shall bring in the remains as evidence and he will not be required to pay for the torn animal. If a man borrows an animal from his neighbor and it is injured or dies while the owner is not present, he must make restitution. But if the owner is with the animal, the borrower will not have to pay. If the animal was hired, the money paid for the hire covers the loss. If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride price, and she shall be his wife. If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he must still pay the bride price for virgins. Do not allow a sorceress to live. Anyone who has sexual relations with an animal must be put to death. Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the Lord must be destroyed. Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him for you were aliens in Egypt. Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do, and they cry out to Me I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless. If you lend money to one of My people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest. If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to Me, I will hear, for I am compassionate. Do not blaspheme or curse the ruler of your people. Do not hold back offerings from your granaries or your vats. You must give Me the firstborn of your sons. Do the same with your cattle and your sheep. Let them stay with their mothers for seven days, and give them to Me on the eighth day. You are to be My holy people, so do not eat the meat of an animal torn by wild beasts; throw it to the dogs.

“If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it...” - The Chapter division between Chapters 21 and 22 unnaturally separates this segment from the discussion of compensation for losses involving livestock at the conclusion of Chapter 21. The text would flow more naturally if it were included in the preceding chapter. Chapter and verse divisions were not included in the Hebrew and Greek texts of Scripture until the sixteenth century. The standard divisions of current English Bibles first appeared in the Geneva Bible printed around 1560. Old Testament verse

divisions in the Geneva Bible basically followed those of the Masoretic rabbis editing of the Hebrew text during preceding centuries.

The text specifies that restitution for the stolen animal is to be significantly greater if the thief ***“slaughters it or sells it.”*** In such an instance, the thief must repay the owner ***“five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep.”*** If, however, the stolen animal(s) is recovered ***“alive in his possession”*** (vs. 4) then the restitution is only two to one - ***“he must pay back double.”*** (Vs. 4) The rationale appears to be that the thief’s action in slaughtering or selling the stolen animal suggests a deliberate pattern of wrongdoing in distinction to an impulsive action on the spur of the moment. The difference in the proportionate restitution for oxen or sheep reflects the dramatic difference in the value of these animals. The rabbis also note that the farmer must invest a considerable amount of time and effort in training the ox so that it may serve as a draft animal in the operation of the farm. The fact that the thief is not merely required to repay the stolen animal itself but four or five times that which he had stolen is both punishment and a deterrent to the repetition of the crime. If you stand to lose much more than you could gain by stealing you will be much less likely to steal. In either situation, whether the stolen animal remains in his possession or has been slaughtered, if the thief is unable to pay the required restitution he must himself be sold into slavery to provide the compensation specified by the law: ***“A thief must certainly make restitution, but if he has nothing, he must be sold to pay for his theft.”***

“If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed, but if it happens after sunrise, he is guilty of bloodshed.” - The Torah is meticulously careful in asserting both the right of the property owner to defend himself and that which is his and prohibiting the excessive use of force which results in the loss of human life. As the patriarch Job correctly observed darkness is the thief’s natural element: ***“In the dark men break into houses, but by day they shut themselves in; they want nothing to do with the light. For all of them, deep darkness is their morning, they make friends with the terrors of darkness.”*** (Job 24:16-17) If the thief is discovered breaking into the owner’s compound or home and in the confusion of the darkness is inadvertently killed as the citizen defends his family and possessions ***“the defender is not guilty of bloodshed.”*** The thief placed himself in a position of deadly peril by his own choice to invade the household by night. The prophet Jeremiah alluded to the rights of the landowner established here as he condemned the oppression prevalent in the Israel of his own day. ***“On your***



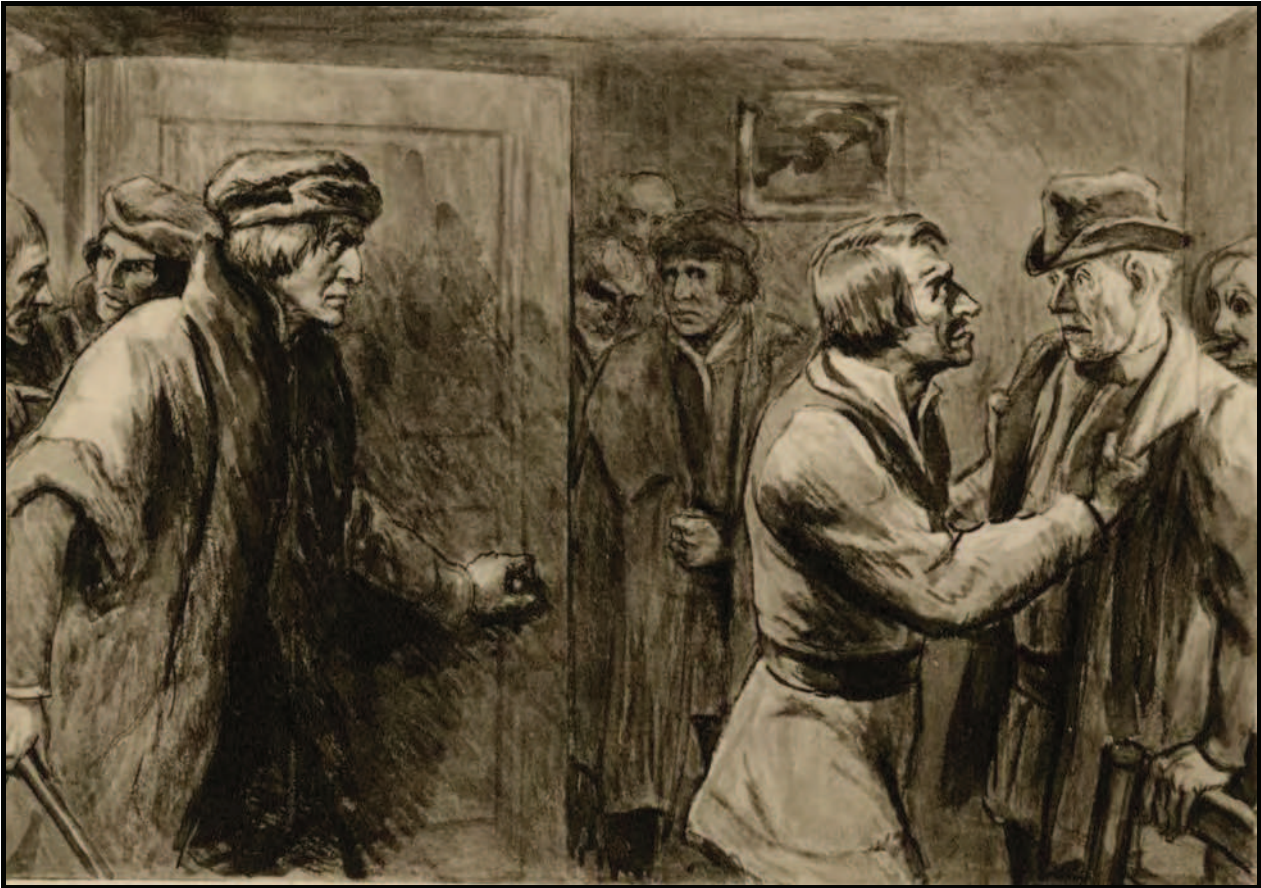
“The Thief in the Night”

clothes men find the lifeblood of the innocent poor, though you did not catch them breaking in.” (Jeremiah 2:34) However, if the theft occurred during the hours of daylight, when it would have been much easier for the defender to ascertain what was happening and respond in a more measured way - the owner’s responsibility to use restraint and apply only the minimum force necessary to prevent the theft is commensurately increased. ***“But if it happens after sunrise, he is guilty of bloodshed.”*** Scripture is fully consistent in affirming that the preservation of human life must always take precedence.

“If the break-in occurred in broad daylight, however, it is not presumed to present imminent danger to life; the use of deadly force is therefore deemed to be unwarranted and bloodguilt would ensue. Here the issue is the hierarchy of values. The biblical scale gives priority to the protection of life - even the life of the burglar - over the protection of property.” (Sarna, p. 130)

“If a man grazes his livestock in a field or vineyard or lets them stray and they graze in another man’s field, he must make restitution from the best of his own field or vineyard. If a fire breaks out and it spreads into thorn bushes so that it burns shocks of grain or standing grain or the whole field, the one who started the fire must make restitution.” - The next pair of applications apply to issues of crop damage by livestock or fire. In both instances negligence on the part of the instigator is suggested. The guilty party is required to make appropriate restitution commensurate with the damage that occurs. Since malice or premeditation was not involved there are not punitive or deterrent amounts incurred. The compensation is to equal the loss of the injured party and nothing more. The ***“thorn bushes”*** referred to in the text are the natural under brush and briars which are allowed to grow up around the borders of vineyards or fields to serve as boundaries which protect the crops. ***“Then the thornbush said to the trees, ‘If you really want to anoint me king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, then let fire come out of the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon.”*** (Judges 9:15)

“If a man gives his neighbor silver or goods for safekeeping and they are stolen from the neighbor’s house, the thief, if he is caught, must pay back double. But if the thief is not found, the owner of the house must appear before the judges to determine whether he has laid his hands on the other man’s property. In all cases of illegal possession of an ox, a donkey, a sheep, a garment, or any other lost property about which someone says, ‘This is mine,’ both parties are to bring their cases before the judges. The one whom the judges declare guilty must pay back double to his neighbor.” - In dealing with this segment of applications, the rabbis tended to distinguish between various categories of stewards who agreed to watch over their neighbor’s property and the amount of payment, if any, which they were to receive for their management. Their degree of responsibility was then directly linked to the amount of compensation received. Four categories of caretakers were enumerated: 1. The unpaid caretaker; 2. The borrower who was allowed to use the entrusted goods or animals for his own benefit; 3. The caretaker who accepted a fee for his services; and 4. The professional caretaker who managed the goods or animals of others as his major source of income. The liability of each category of caretaker increased with the compensation they had been promised for their services. If the entrusted goods were stolen and the thief was caught, then the caretaker was not held liable and the thief had to repay double the value of the stolen goods. However, if the thief is not apprehended, the steward then became the prime suspect and had to appear before the village elders or judges (Hebrew - *“elohim”*). While it is unusual for the term *“elohim”* (literally ‘gods’) to refer to men it is not unprecedented (cf.



Christ's Parable of the Unfaithful Caretaker - Luke 12:42-48

"The Unfaithful Caretaker Condemned at the Unexpected Return of His Master" - Karl Bauer

21:6). In this instance the Hebrew verb is also plural to reflect the plural form of the noun. This is not the case when the reference is to the true God. The usage of the term in reference to judges is appropriate in this instance because the elders/judges of Israel were authorized and empowered to act as God's representatives in the theocracy. Their power and wisdom came from God Himself. From this perspective, the Septuagint renders the phrase *"to the place where judgement was given in the name of God."* Moses reminded Israel of this truth repeatedly:

"So I took the leading men of your tribes, wise and respected men, and appointed them to have authority over you...And I charged your judges at that time: Hear the disputes between your brothers and judge fairly, whether the case is between brother Israelites or between one of them and an alien. Do not show partiality in judging. Hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of any man, for judgment belongs to God." (Deuteronomy 1:15-17; cf. also Deuteronomy 19:17)

Standing before the judges, the accused would affirm his innocence under a sacred oath invoking the name of God and calling down the curse of God upon himself if he was swearing falsely. The judges would then examine the evidence and adjudicate the dispute. For a culture which took the name of God and the swearing of an oath in His name much more seriously than our own this would have been an effective method of obtaining the truth. In Jerusalem - after the construction of the temple - such oaths were customarily sworn before the altar to emphasize the gravity of the oath. King Solomon referred to just such a procedure at the dedication of the temple:

“When a man wrongs his neighbor and is required to take an oath and he comes and swears the oath before Your altar in this temple, then



“Priest/Judges Settling a Dispute” - 19th Century Bible Engraving



“Solomon’s Prayer at the Dedication of the Temple” by Tissot

hear from heaven and act. Judge between Your servants, condemning the guilty, and bringing down on his head what he has done. Declare the innocent not guilty, and so establish his innocence.” (1 Kings 8:31-32)

While the ceremony conducted in the sacred precincts of the temple would certainly have been the most effective location to impress upon the participants the most solemn nature of an oath calling upon the name of God, it would have been neither practical nor possible for people to travel to Jerusalem for this ceremony from throughout the land. At the same time, the temple could not have accommodated the large number of such disputes occurring within the entire nation. In most cases outside of the capital city, the matter would have been resolved before the village elders who ordinarily served as arbiters and judges. The individual found to be the guilty party in such disputes was required to repay double the value of the items in contention.

The text goes on to apply these principles of custodial responsibility to livestock which would have been most common in the agrarian society of ancient Israel.

“If a man gives a donkey, an ox or a sheep or any other animal to his neighbor for safekeeping, and it dies or is injured or is taken away while no one is looking, the issue between them will be settled by the taking of an oath before the Lord that the neighbor did not lay hands on the other person’s property. The owner is to accept this and no restitution is required. But if the animal was stolen from the neighbor he must make restitution to the owner. If it was torn to pieces by a wild animal, he shall bring in the remains as evidence, and he will not be required to pay for the torn animal.” - The rabbis contend that in the case of livestock the custodian’s efforts for supervision and care was so great that some level of compensation would have ordinarily been received. That being the case, the custodian’s responsibility was commensurately increased. If the loss or injury of the animal was the result of an act of God, that is an unforeseeable and unpreventable natural phenomenon the manager could not be held accountable. In the absence of witnesses the matter was settled by taking ***“an oath before the Lord.”*** However, if the animal was stolen some degree of negligence is implied since it was the keeper’s job to watch over the flock or the herd. In such case the custodian was required to make restitution. If the animal was killed by a predator, and the caretaker can produce evidence to support the fact, he was not to be held accountable. This was an unforeseen peril which he could not have predicted or prevented.

“If a man borrows an animal from his neighbor and it is injured or dies while the owner is not present, he must make restitution. But if the owner is with the animal, the borrower will not have to pay. If the animal was hired, the money paid for the animal covers the loss.” - The same principles apply if the animal in question is borrowed for use by a neighbor. ***“Since the use of the object is obtained gratis, entirely for the neighbor’s benefit, his degree of responsibility and liability exceeds that in the previous cases, unless certain conditions are fulfilled.”*** (Sarna, p. 134) If the owner was actually present at the time of the loss the borrower does not bear primary responsibility since it was still the owner’s job to care for and protect his own animal. If the animal was not merely borrowed but ***“hired”*** the money paid to rent the animal constitutes the owner’s only compensation.

“If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride price, and she shall be his wife. If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he must still pay the bride price for virgins.” - Rabbi Ibn Ezra



“Absalom Consoling His Sister Tamar After Her Rape by Amnon” by A. Cabanel

explained the progression of the text in this colorful and effective manner: “*The sequence of legal topics is from the case of stolen property to that of a stolen heart.*” (Sarna, p. 134) Since the bride would leave her father’s family and become a part of her husband’s family, the custom of paying the “*bride price*” was designed to compensate her family for the loss of a valuable member of their community. At the same time, the “*bride price*” served to provide a measure of personal security to the woman in that upon the death of her father or her husband the major portion of the payment would revert to her. Modern feminists and Bible critics tend to dismiss the marriage regulations of the ancient Near East as discriminatory and demeaning. These rules, however, were designed to ensure the rights of women and protect them from abuse by male sexual predators. Promiscuous sexuality places the woman in considerably greater jeopardy than her male counterpart. Whether contemporary advocates of the “*equal necessitates identical*” view of gender like it or not the physical facts of virginity and pregnancy place women in a position of unique vulnerability in these matters. Our culture has ruthlessly attempted to redress this inherent vulnerability with the horror of abortion. As is always the case when man



“The Seduction of Dinah by Shechem” by Tissot

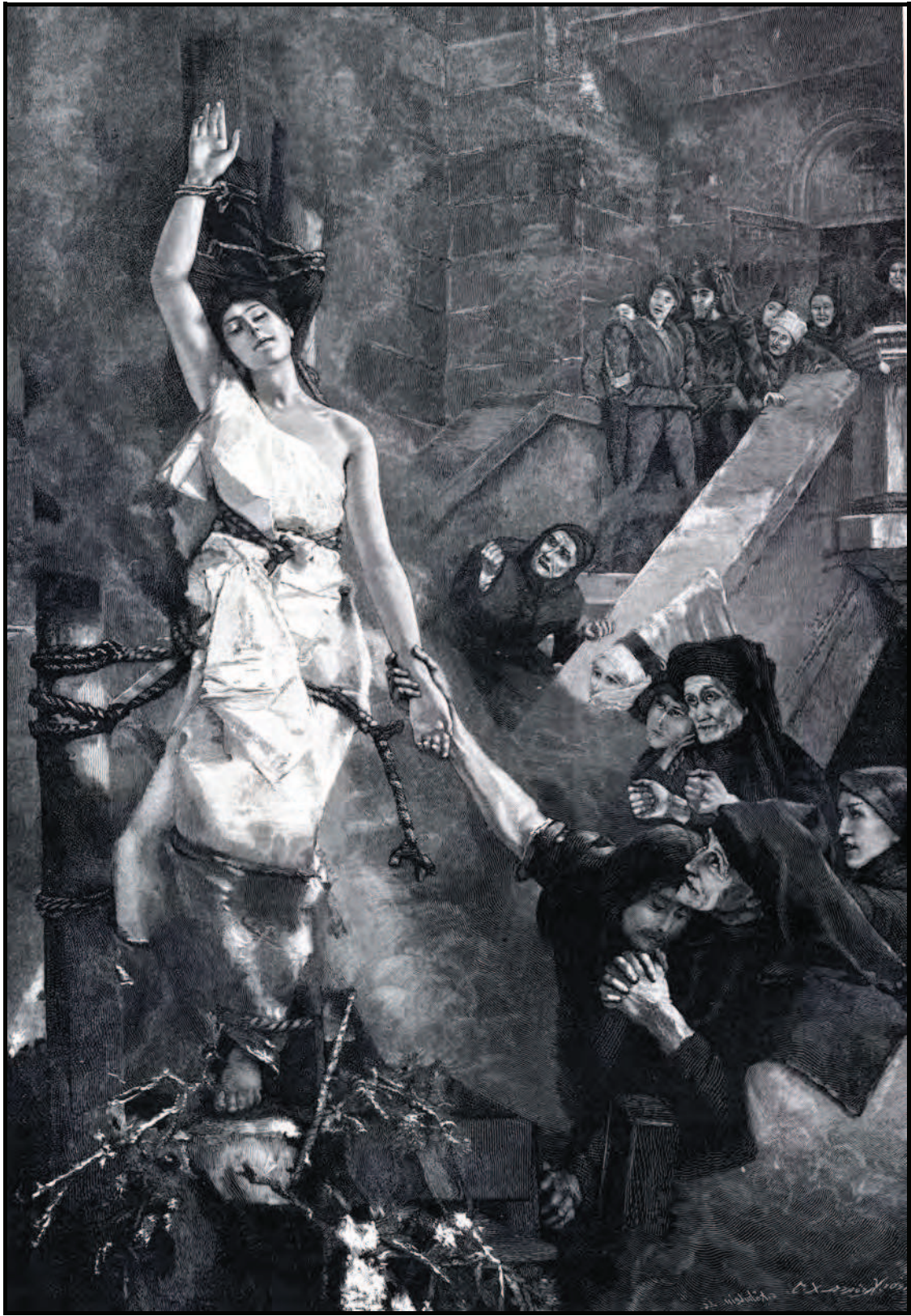
presumes to be wiser than his Creator, the consequence has been a holocaust of bloodshed and death unparalleled in the annals of humanity. Aside from the innocents who have perished in this slaughter, the greatest victims of abortion are the mothers who have perverted God’s greatest blessing to them into an unspeakable horror and contradicted the unique essence of their identity as they have become participants in the murder of their own children. The only beneficiaries of abortion - aside from the multi-million dollar industry spawned from this abomination - are males seeking an obligation free way to gratify their lusts. With the tragic irony in which Satan delights, all of this has been justified in the name of *“women’s liberation.”*

The marriage covenant as a solid life-long commitment was designed by our loving God to provide the secure context for the procreation and the nurture of children, protecting both mothers and their offspring. Dr. Douglas Stuart explains the role of

the “**bride price**” in the expression and application of these values:

“Biblically, marriage is understood to be a formal covenant, the most important of all human covenants. The sign of the covenant is sexual intercourse...Part of the utility of the bride price is that it forced the man to make a full and formal arrangement for marriage that properly involved both his interests and those of his bride to be, as well as the interests of his family and hers. The bride price requirement necessarily involved the families in substantial formal negotiations, and the price showed that something serious and important was at stake. Taking a woman to one’s self and taking away her virginity were honorable if the proper negotiations had been completed, and a proper indication of her worth had been paid to her family, and the couple were legally married. Simply having sexual relations with her, with or without her permission, devalued her and showed blatant disregard for her worth. It also showed that a person, or when the premarital sex was consensual, that the couple, viewed marriage or its covenant sign (sexual intercourse) as less than a formal, legal, lifelong contractual commitment. The betrothal/bride price system was designed to make marriage harder to come by than could be achieved on whim or quick decision, and it elevated marriage accordingly because people instinctively value what is hard and costly to get.” (Stuart, p. 510)

In this context, the man who indulged in sexual intercourse outside of marriage and the process of negotiation and covenant which led to marriage was compelled by the law to pay the bride-price nonetheless. The text uses the verb “**seduces**” which suggests preying upon the gullibility and the innocence of someone to lead them to do something which is not in their own best interest. This would suggest that the act of intercourse was consensual and not coerced. The punishments for rape were significantly more stringent (cf. Deuteronomy 22:22-29) The woman involved was “**a virgin who is not pledged to be married.**” Whether the man would be allowed/compelled to marry the girl remained completely at the discretion of the girl’s father - “**If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him.**” In any case, whether there was to be a marriage or not, the man was still compelled to pay the marriage price to the girl’s father - “**he must still pay the bride price for virgins.**” This stipulation reflected the fact that it would have been significantly more difficult



"The Burning of a Witch" - 19th Century Engraving by Albert Keller

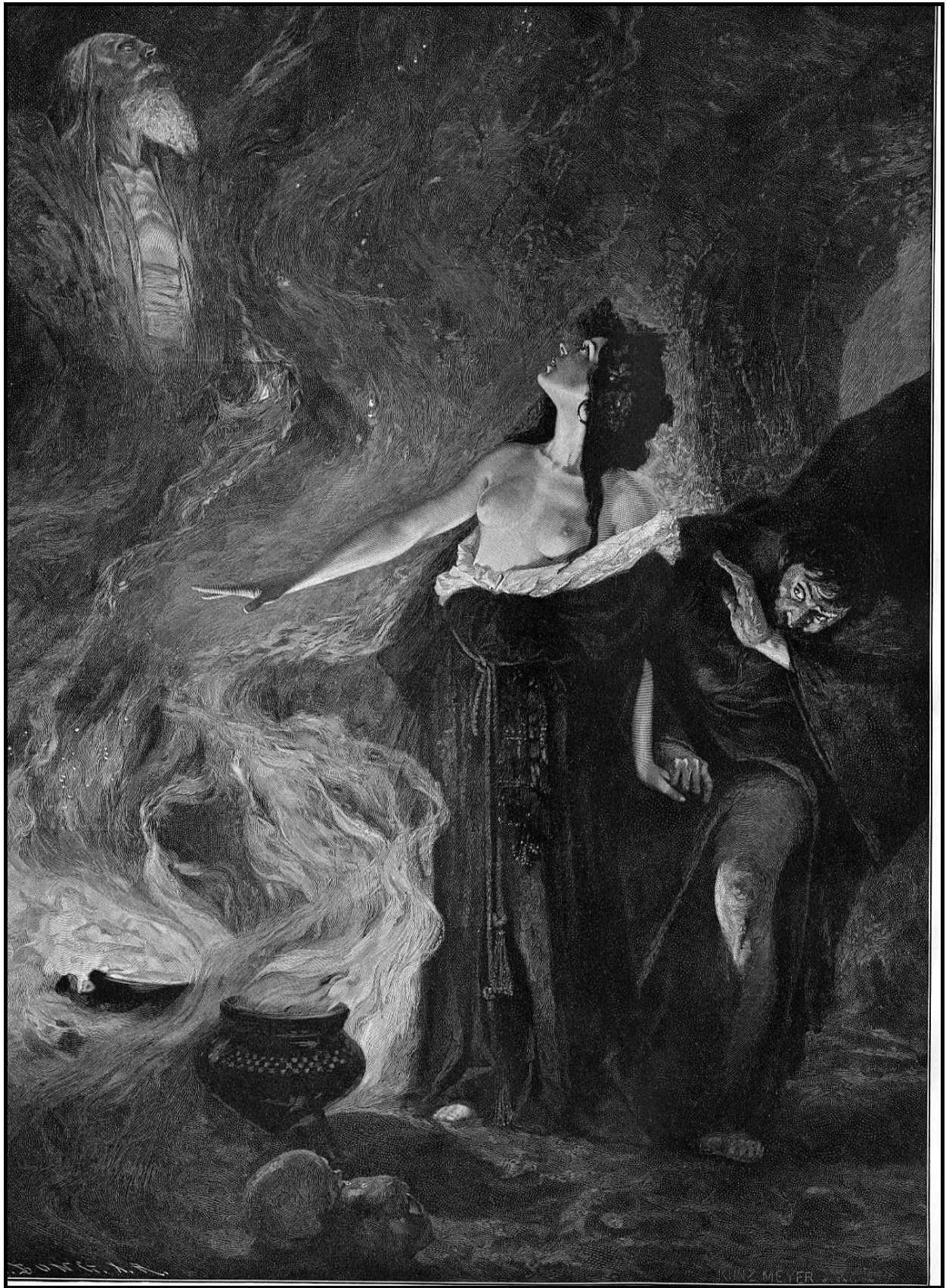
for the girl to obtain another husband since she was no longer a virgin.

The structure of the Book of the Covenant now shifts from the casuistic format which had prevailed, applying segments of the law to specific cases or particular situations, to apodictic, that is, clearly stated commands without specific application or explanation. The implication of shift is that these decrees are self-evident and well known. Therefore they do not require further explanation. *“They are standards of behavior imposed by a transcendent divine will, not salutary maxims born of human experience and wisdom.”* (Sarna, p. 135)

The first three commands in this segment impose the death penalty upon uniquely perverse religious practices which the Children of Israel would encounter among the Canaanites. Elsewhere in the Torah each of these practices is denounced as an **“abomination”** in the sight of God. (Cf. Deuteronomy 18:9-14; 13:13-15; 17:2-5; Leviticus 18:22-23) This is the strongest possible term in the Hebrew language for that which is abhorrent or detestable to God. Such things could not be tolerated under any circumstances and necessitated the imposition of the death penalty.

“Do not allow a sorceress to live.” - *“Sorcery”* or *“witchcraft”* is the attempt to utilize supernatural power from the devil. It typically includes the performance of magic through the use of incantations and spells, *“necromancy”* - the ability to communicate or command the spirits of the dead, the power to reveal or influence future events, etc. The prohibition of Deuteronomy 18:9-14 is equally categorical and considerably more specific, enumerating particular practices and declaring that these abominations are the reason for the impending destruction of the Canaanite nations by the Children of Israel:

“When you enter the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations. Let no one be found among you who consigns his son or daughter to the fire, or who is an augur, a soothsayer, a diviner, a sorcerer, one who casts spells, or one who consults ghosts or familiar spirits, or one who inquires of the dead. For anyone who does such things is abhorrent to the Lord, and it is because of these abhorrent things that the Lord your God is dispossessing them before you. You must be wholehearted with the Lord your God. Those nations that you are about to dispossess do indeed resort to soothsayers and augurs; to you,



"The Witch of Endor Calling Forth Samuel for King Saul" by Kunz Meyer

however, the Lord your God has not assigned the like.”

When the pagan sorcerer Balaam was hired by the Moabites to place a curse upon the Israelites he incredulously noted their unique avoidance of all such practices: ***“Lo, there is no sorcery in Jacob, no divination in Israel.”*** (Numbers 23:23) The most prominent exception to this consistent pattern was the visit of King Saul to the witch of Endor. The fact that the King would have resorted to such measures is used to indicate his extreme desperation and fear. (1 Samuel 28:1-25) Later, in the final days of the kingdom, witchcraft and idolatry had become prevalent throughout the land was cited as a decisive indication of the people’s total spiritual corruption:

“They forsook all the commands of the Lord their God and made for themselves two idols cast in the shape of calves, and an Asherah pole. They bowed down to all the starry hosts and they worshiped Baal. They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They practices divination and sorcery and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, provoking Him to anger.” (2 Kings 17:16-17)

Sorcery is nothing more than a refinement, yet another form of idolatry. It is based upon the conviction that there are sources of supernatural power in addition to and independent of God. What makes this particular deviation all the more dangerous is that in witchcraft and its associated practices that supernatural power is explicitly evil. Even before the Christian era the outright worship of Satan and the summoning and/or harnessing of his demons became a prominent part of this realm of darkness. Men sought to access that power, nonetheless, because of the abilities and advantages which it could allegedly provide. They reveled in the most vile and perverse sins, shaking their puny fists, as it were, in the face of God and daring Him to reveal Himself in judgement and damnation. Their infamous *“Witches’ Sabbaths”* were intended to be mockeries of the worship of God’s people. Sadly, these fools forget that Satan is the Father of the Lie and that the power and wealth which he offered them were most often nothing more than trickery and empty words as they condemned themselves to an eternity in the depths of Hell. In this context, God had warned Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, not to listen to the assurances of his court sorcerers and mediums for they were all nothing but liars: ***“So do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your interpreters of dreams, your mediums or your sorcerers who tell you, ‘You will not serve the King of Babylon.’ They prophesy lies to you that will only serve to remove you far from your lands.”*** (Jeremiah 27:9-10) St. Paul’s condemnation of the sorcerer Elymas on the island of Cyprus also emphasized the

falsehood which is characteristic of all the works of the devil:

“But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the pro-counsul from the faith. Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said: ‘You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?’” (Acts 13:8-10)

In this instance, the text refers specifically to a **“sorceress”** because those who functioned in these roles were characteristically women. Even the wicked Queen Jezebel, indulged in the black arts to enhance her power: **“How can there be peace,” Jehu replied, ‘as long as all the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Jezebel**



“The Witches' Sabbath” - 19th Century Engraving by J. Belliere



“The Witches’ Sabbath” - 1625 German Engraving

abound?” (2 Kings 9:22)

The punishment of death is most certainly not limited to women. Other passages which address these issues also include sorcerers and warlocks in the condemnation; i.e. Malachi 3:5 - ***“So I will come near to you for judgement. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers.”***

The language of the phrase - ***“Do not allow a sorceress to live.”*** is particularly stringent in order to stress the extreme severity of the offense. The Hebrew verb *“cherem”* does not merely refer to the imposition of the death penalty. This grim word is reserved for the description of total annihilation. At the time of the conquest it was used to describe the utter destruction of those Canaanite nations which posed the greatest threat to the spiritual and moral purity of Israel. When God decreed *“cherem”* the entire population, men, women and children were to be slaughtered and everything which they owned was to be destroyed. In later Judaism, this same word referred to the ultimate degree of excommunication which declared that the person had been irretrievably lost was to be completely shunned by every Jew. No contact of any kind - religious, commercial, social, even familial - was permitted. It was to be as if

the condemned individual no longer existed. That is the sense in which the word is used here. The very existence of anyone who was involved in the practice of sorcery in any way was detestable to God and could not be tolerated among the people of God. ***“Anyone who has sexual relations with an animal must be put to death.”*** - The practice of bestiality was widespread among the fertility cults of the Canaanites. Leviticus 18:23-24 includes bestiality among the vile perversions for which the Canaanites were to be ***“vomited out”*** of their homeland:



“The Worship of Baal and Molech in the Valley of Hinnon Below Jerusalem” - 17th Century Engraving

“Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion. Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled, so I punished it for its sin and the land vomited out its inhabitants....If you defile the land it will vomit you out, as it vomited out the nations that were before you.” (Leviticus 18: 23-24)

In Canaanite mythology Baal is said to have encountered the goddess Anat (Astarte) while he was chasing wild cows in a meadow. Overcome by her beauty, the god of storm and rain promised her wonderful ecstatic love if she would agree to have intercourse with him and bear him a child. In this way Baal hoped to overcome his impending death through the trickery of Mot, the god of death and the underworld. Since the goddess was incapable of bearing a child in her own form, she entered into one of the heifers in the meadow. Baal then had intercourse with the cow and she gave birth to child in the form of a mighty bull. Thus, Baal was able to return from the underworld after he had been murdered by Mot. The priests and priestesses of Baal would reenact the sexual antics of their gods and goddesses in the fertility rituals of the temples and high places. In the closely related mythology of nearby Babylon the famous hero Gilgamesh declined the seduction of Ishtar, the goddess of fertility, love and war (Astarte in the Canaanite family of gods), because of her fickle cruelty to her former lovers from a veritable menagerie of animal species. Gilgamesh narrated her amazing record of amorous conquest in this way:



Contemporary Image of Ishtar As an Amazon Warrior With Her Lover the Lion Chained by Her Side

“For Tammuz, the lover of your youth, you decreed that he should keep weeping for year after year. You loved the colorful allallu bird, but you hit him and broke his wing. He now stays in the woods, crying, ‘You broke my wing!’ You loved the lion whose strength is complete, but you dug seven and seven pits for him. You loved the horse, so trustworthy in battle; but you decreed the whip, goad and lash for him; you decreed that he should gallop seven leagues without stopping; you decreed that he should be overwrought and thirsty; you decreed endless weeping for his mother Silulu...And how about me? Will you love me and treat me just like them?” (Dalley, p. 79)

Ironically, Ishtar has become a particular heroine of modern feminists as an assertive woman of strength who was able to use and then discard males (of any species) according to her own needs.



Contemporary Image of the Goddess Ishtar With Her Tamed Lion by Selena Fenech

Our awareness of the unique depravity of Canaanite religion and worship practices has greatly improved on the basis of a vast library recently discovered in the ruins of the ancient Syrian city of Ugarit.

“The Ugaritic literature has helped to reveal the depth of depravity which characterized Canaanite religion. Being a polytheism of an extremely debased type, Canaanite cultic practice was barbarous and thoroughly licentious...The brutality, lust and abandon of Canaanite mythology was far worse than elsewhere in the Ancient Near East at this time. And the astounding characteristic of Canaanite deities, that they had no moral character whatsoever, must have brought out the worst traits in their devotees and entailed many of the most demoralizing practices of the time, such as sacred prostitution (both male,



The Canaanite Goddess Anath (Astarte) Celebrating the Destruction of Her Foes in a Sensual Dance Upon Their Skulls With Two Male Goats Canaanite Relief Plaque

female, transvestite and transgender) child sacrifice and snake worship.” (Probe, pp. 13-15)

Nowhere was the utter degradation of Canaanite religion more evident than in the prominence of bestiality in both the myth and worship of Canaan:

“Baal is the great storm god...He became the reigning king of the gods and was enthroned on a far mountain in the far northern heavens...Mot, whose name means ‘death,’ represents the god of drought and sterility. In the myth he is Baal’s chief and continual antagonist. But even Baal must yield to Mot when his time of the year comes. When Mot comes, Baal’s time is over and he is ordered to take everything connected with him down into the depths of the earth...But before Baal descends into the

earth, however, he 'Makes love to a heifer in Debir, a young cow in the fields of Shimmt. He lies with her seventy-seven times - Yea, he copulates eighty-eight times - so she conceives and bears a child.' (76; v.18-22) Anath (Astarte) is the goddess of fertility. She is considered a divine prostitute. She is represented as a naked woman in the prime of life, standing on a lion with a lily in one hand and a serpent or two in the other. Often, two rams are present dancing with her to portray her sexual vigor. The female organs are always accentuated. It is important to bear in mind that these 'myths' were ritually enacted. Therefore, we can assume that ritual bestiality was

practiced by the priesthood, and temple prostitution was practiced by the adherents (priestesses) of the Anath fertility cult. Cyrus Gordan has written: 'That it was no crime for men to copulate with animals in Ugarit is indicated by the fact that Baal impregnated a heifer, a myth enacted ritually by reputable priests. Moreover, the Bible tells us that the Hebrews' pagan neighbors practiced bestiality (Leviticus 18:24) as we now know to be literally true from the Ugaritic documents.' (Probe, pp. 15-16)



Astarte the Canaanite Goddess of Fertility, Love and War - the Female Counterpart of Baal by 19th Century British Artist Gabriel Rossetti

Modern women remain fascinated by the fertility goddesses of the ancients and link their revival to the liberation of women. They manage to ignore the bloody chaos and destruction which was a core component in the fertility cults - including human sacrifice - and focus on the unrestricted sensuality of the goddess and her worship. The resuscitation of these twisted sex goddesses by modern feminism similarly reflects and furthers the moral degradation of contemporary culture. One current feminist website disdainfully dismisses Biblical condemnations of the bizarre rites of Astarte as typical male insecurity and offers this gushing prayer to the ancient consort of Baal: "Great bountiful goddess of antiquity, your



*Contemporary Depiction of the Goddess Astarte as a Pregnant Woman
About to Give Birth in the Embrace of Her Animal Lovers*

Your sacred fires are again lighted. Your name is again spoken with reverent awe. The high places are no longer abandoned. Your sacred altars are again tended. Earth is reawakening to your voice." (Spiral Goddess, p. 2) In a similar site featuring contemporary feminist art, Astarte is depicted as a pregnant woman about to give birth sprawling naked in the embrace of the animals whom she loves beneath the cycles of the moon which denote fertility. A Greek heavy metal rock band, whose grotesque albums are best sellers here in the US have named themselves after the Canaanite goddess of sexuality and warfare. One of "Astarte's" hit songs, "Demonized" laments the fact that Christianity has given their namesake a bad rap. Astarte serves as the epitome of absolute freedom, unrestricted sensuality and self-indulgence - so long suppressed by the male God of Christianity and his chauvinist laws. The song's lyrics - gratefully obscured by the thunderous cacophony of the racket which passes for music in the realm of heavy metal declares the girls' allegiance to the ancient goddess



“Demonized! Fire in her eyes - Her beauty hides the signs - She devil female disguise - Innocence has died. Born of fire - spawn of evil - dwelt down into her mind -nothing sacred from her treason - all is lost from her denial. Demonized into your soul - sacrifice to things unknown - demonized from the spirits of hell - suffering that will never be ended.”

The ancient perversions live on among us still as our own culture becomes ever more morally degraded and spiritually corrupt.

In the context of this bizarre mythology, widely reflected in pagan worship and sorcery, it should come as no surprise that a categorical prohibition of bestiality would

be included among prohibitions which pertain to idolatry and witchcraft. The link had been clearly established both in Canaan and surrounding cultures. *“These despicable practices were sometimes connected with magic and there are many references to them in pagan mythology. In Ugaritic poetry it is narrated that Baal had intercourse with a cow in order to escape the death that awaited him as a result of the devices of Mot, the king of the netherworld; and in the Epic of Gilgamesh there are references to the relations of the goddess Ishtar with various animals.”* (Cassutto, p. 290)

The unusually comprehensive language of the text - *“Anyone who has sexual relations with an animal must be put to death.”* is consistent with parallel passages throughout the Torah. The Hebrew term translated as *“anyone”* in the NIV is *“kol”* which literally means *“all.”* The same word also occurs in parallel texts: *“Do not have sexual relations with any beast and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to any animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion.”* (Leviticus 18:23); *“If a woman approaches any beast to have sexual relations with it, kill both the woman and the animal. They must be put to death, their blood will be on their own heads.”* (Leviticus 20:16); *“Cursed is the man who has sexual relations with any animal.”* (Deuteronomy 27:21) The frequency of these texts reflects the prevalence of these practices in conjunction with fertility rites throughout the region. The specifically all-inclusive language of the texts further reflects the strange fact that some of the regional law codes permitted sexual activity with particular animal species while prohibiting it with others. Thus, for example, Hittite law prohibited intercourse with cows, sheep, pigs, dogs and oxen, but inexplicably approved intercourse with horses and mules. (Propp, p. 257)



Contemporary Image of the Fertility Goddess Astarte as a Pregnant Woman Surrounded by Her Animal Friends

For the Israelite, bestiality was not merely unacceptable because of its dominant link to idol worship. This perversion of human sexuality was essentially a rejection of the order of creation which had been ordained and established by God in the beginning. Sexuality cannot be reduced to the mere pursuit of the appropriate physical stimulation for personal pleasure. Rather, the Creator God designed sexuality as the means of procreation and commanded that every species was to reproduce **“according to its kind.”** (Genesis 1:20-25) For human beings, uniquely fashioned in the image and likeness of God, sexuality was inseparably co allegiance to the ancient goddess: nected to the capacity and need for love which was the central component of the divine image (Genesis 2:18-25). Bestiality is the most blatant way to deny and defy the intent of the Creator in these matters. Not only does the person who indulges in such things thereby literally reduce himself the level of a beast, but at the same time



“Astarte/Ishtar - Goddess of love and sexuality, female allurement and primal creatrix. Associated with the stars, Moon and Sun as well as the earth, she is also an ancient Mother Goddess archetype” - From a Wicca Website

he rejects and contradicts the very purpose for which humanity was created by God. From this perspective, there was a great deal more at stake here than association in the perverse practices of idolaters.

With this succinct condemnation, the Book of the Covenant makes it unmistakably clear that in Israel every form of such perversion under any circumstances is an intolerable abomination in the sight of God which must be punished by immediate execution.

“Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the Lord must be destroyed.” - The final prohibition in this triad of capital crimes pertains to the overt worship of idols in the form of sacrifices. The more general prohibition of idolatry in the Decalogue (Exodus 20:3) is specifically applied in this instance to the offering of sacrifice. Virtually every religion in the ancient Near East involved the offering of sacrifices in one form or another. The term used in this phrase is derived from a root which means “*to slaughter*.” The particular type of sacrifice which this word described was the ritual slaughter of the offering part of which were presented to the god upon the altar while the rest of the carcass became a ceremonial feast for the supplicant who in this way was permitted to fellowship with the deity. Monotheism cannot indulge in the easy-going tolerance of other religious systems. If there is actually only one God, thru whom alone life and salvation may be obtained, then every other deity is necessarily false and the worship of such false gods could only result in death and damnation. The text again uses the term “*chrerem*” - total annihilation - to describe the execution of those guilty of idolatry. The common feature which unites each of the three crimes against which the most severe penalty was invoked is that they all pertained to the worship of false gods, thru sorcery, the vile sexual practices of the Canaanite fertility cults, or sacrificial offerings. The application of the death sentence indicates the unique gravity of such offenses and the danger which they posed to the survival of Israel as the covenant people of God.

“Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him for you were aliens in Egypt. Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to Me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless. If you lend



“Come Unto Me all Ye That Are Weak and Heavy Laden” by A. Dietrich

money to one of My people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest. If you take you neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. When he cries out to Me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.” - The focus shifts in Verse 21 to a series of laws dealing with the social responsibilities of the Israelites to the poor and the disadvantaged. *“Concern for the underprivileged and humanitarian sensitivity are reflected throughout the Old Testament, in very major dimension of its teaching.”* (Durham, p. 328) The Bible’s repeated assertion of such concern is unique in that Scripture stresses that care for those in need it is not merely to be an expression of humanitarian kindness and generosity. Instead, within Israel generosity and mercy are to be primarily an application of the nature of God which is to be reflected by the conduct of His people. *“Their calling was to a higher standard which reflected His own compassion for all.”* (Stuart, p. 515)

“The seminal importance of these laws in the religion of Israel is apparent from their frequent reiteration in the biblical literature, as well as by the twin motives that actuate them: Israel’s empathetic regard for the disadvantaged of society should be stimulated by her own historical

experience (vs. 20); God’s concern arises out of His essential nature, His intolerance of injustice, and His compassionate qualities (vss. 22-23, 26).” (Sarna, p. 137)

Jesus would subsequently express precisely the same perspective when He foretold that on the day of judgement deeds of kindness would serve as the evidence which indicated the presence or the absence of faith:

“For I was hungry you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited Me in. I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, and I was in prison and you came to visit Me. Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink? When did we see You a stranger and invite You in, or needing clothes and clothe



“The Good Samaritan” by Carolsfeld

you. When did we see You sick or in prison and go to visit You? Then the King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.' (Matthew 26:35-30)

Moses uses four representative categories to summarize those who are needy and disadvantaged within society: *“an alien,” “a widow or an orphan,”* and *“one of My people among you who is needy.”* As is the case throughout the applications of the Book of the Covenant, these groups are not designed to be exclusive but typical. The categories cited represent all those who are vulnerable or in need of assistance in any and every way throughout the culture.

“These are not intended to be an exhaustive list of certain categories of people. Instead, they are intended to be evocative of the entire range of disadvantaged, unprotected, and easily mistreated individuals and groups in ancient times...any or all unprotected people.” (Stuart, p. 515)

The law need not be designed to protect the rich and powerful - they are perfectly capable of taking care of themselves.

The word *“alien”* (literally - *“stranger”*) refers to one who is a foreign born permanent resident among the Israelites. He is neither a native born son of Israel nor a temporary visitor. He lacked the societal benefits of family or clan and was often viewed as an outsider or an interloper even though he was actually a permanent resident. He would therefore have been particularly vulnerable to discrimination or exploitation. The Lord's reminder of Israel's status in Egypt is consistent with the use of this particular term. The Jews dwelt in the land of Egypt for 430 years. The government was able to enslave them because they were still regarded as outsiders. No doubt the favored status which they had enjoyed under Joseph had caused resentment among the native population. When their patron and protector was gone they became an easy target for a pharaoh *“who knew not Joseph”* to gain for himself a huge new labor force while making a policy decision which would have been politically popular with his people. Traditional rabbinic interpretation applied the first verb - *“mistreat”* to verbal or emotional abuse, while the second *“oppress”* was understood as a reference to economical exploitation. This is the same term which was used to describe Israel's plight in Exodus 1:11, in this way setting the stage for

the reminder of their own days as aliens in a foreign land which will serve as the context of this admonition. In the context of Israel's Egyptian experience this command may appear to be superfluous. If there was any nation which should have been sensitive to the predicament of aliens it should have been Israel. However, given the sinful nature of every fallen descendant of Adam and Eve, this warning was sadly necessary.

“Because every member of the Israelite nation hearing these words for the first time had been in the situation of aliens in Egypt only months prior, it might be assumed that they would all automatically loathe any form of discrimination against aliens and would seek naturally to avoid the sorts of practices of which they themselves had painfully been victims. The Law assumes nothing of the sort. Knowing human nature, God explicitly warned His people not to do what might come naturally for them - seeking to enjoy the experience of lording it over someone else for once. Discrimination against non-citizens was so common in the ancient world, and the tendency to hypocrisy so natural for human beings, that Israel had to be warned against both at once in this law. They could not rightly engage in what they so roundly condemned when it was done to them, and they could not fall into the easy patterns of the culture of which they were a part, but they had to break with temptation and tradition and act differently from others if they were to be God's covenant people.” (Stuart, p. 516)



*“The Oppression of Israel in Egypt”
1920's Children's Bible Illustration*

“Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan...” - The structure of Israelite society was strongly family oriented. The responsibilities of the male head of the household (husband/father) were critically

important. The premature death of the head of the household often left widows and orphans in a position of particular vulnerability. They were at the mercy of their extended families and if that family failed to carry out its responsibility their circumstance could quickly become dire. The story of Ruth and Naomi indicates the overwhelming challenges which often confronted widows in Israelite culture. The plight of widows and orphans is often presented in Scripture as representative of those who are poor and defenseless throughout Scripture. The willingness of man to take advantage of their situation is the epitome of sinful selfishness. God repeatedly presents Himself as their defender and advocate. Proverbs 23:10 goes so far as to call the Lord the **“Kinsman”** of orphans - **“Do not encroach upon the field of the orphans, for they have a mighty Kinsman and He will surely take up their cause with you.”** Scripture warns over and over again that God’s wrath is particularly provoked by the injustice inflicted upon widows and orphans.

“The Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow.” (Deuteronomy 10:17-18)

“And you sent widows away empty-handed and broke the strength of the fatherless. That is why snares are all around you.” (Job 22:9)

“Men move boundary stones, they pasture flocks they have stolen. They drive away the orphan’s donkey, and take the widow’s ox in pledge...The fatherless child is snatched from the breast; the infant of the poor is seized for a debt...They prey on the barren and childless woman, and to widows show no kindness. But God drags away the mighty by His power.” (Job 24:2-3,9,21-22)

“Sing to God. Praise His name. Extol Him who rides on the clouds - His name is the Lord and rejoice before Him. A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows is God in His holy dwelling.” (Psalm 68:4-5)

“May his days be few; may another take his place of leadership. May

his children be fatherless and his wife a widow. May his children be wandering beggars; may they be driven from their ruined homes...May no one extend kindness to him or take pity on his fatherless children. May his descendants be cut off, their names blotted out from the next generation.” (Psalm 109:8-10,13)

“The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but He frustrates the ways of the wicked.” (Psalm 146:9)

“Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless. Plead the case of the widows.” (Isaiah 1:17)

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of one another.’” (Zechariah 7:9-10)



*“Ruth and Naomi in the Household of Boaz”
by T. M. Rooke*

“So I will come near to you for judgement. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers, and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and defraud aliens of justice, but do not fear Me.” says the Lord.” (Malachi 3:5-6)

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this; to look after widows and orphans in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” (James 1:27)

In contrast, the willingness to care for widows and orphans was perceived in Scripture



19th Century Bible Illustration by Herbert Granville Fell

to be a primary hallmark of piety and love for God. So the patriarch Job characterized his life as a believer in this way:

“Whoever heard me spoke well of me, and those who saw me commended me, because I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him. The man who was dying blessed me, I made the widow’s heart sing...I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger.” (Job 11-16)

The verb “*take advantage of*” means to exploit the weakness of another or to abuse

such a person because he is unable to defend himself or resist you. *“The absence of a human protector should not delude the unscrupulous or the society that tolerates them. God Himself champions the cause of the downtrodden.”* (Sarna, p. 138)

“If you do, and they cry out to Me, I will certainly hear their cry.” - The language of the text continues to parallel that of the opening chapter of Exodus and God’s deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. God declared to Moses at the burning bush: ***“I have indeed seen the misery of My people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.”*** (Exodus 3:7) The Lord warned that if the rich and powerful of Israel oppress widows and orphans in the same way that they themselves had been oppressed, His judgement will come upon them just as it came upon the Egyptians. The curse formula which follows the command in this instance is indicative of the seriousness with which God viewed this matter.

“Here God warned that social injustice could result in the unleashing of the covenant curses (the full listings of which are still to come in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-33) with the net effect of a general rejection of Israel and its consignment to destruction as a political entity.” (Stuart, p. 517)

“My anger will be aroused.” - The Hebrew text which describes God’s response to the outcry of oppressed widows and orphans is dramatically graphic, literally - *“my nose will flare.”* The image is that of fury so overwhelming that it causes a physical reaction in a flushed face and flaring nostrils as the man begins to hyperventilate in fury. David used the same imagery in his description of God’s response to his own cry for help: ***“The earth trembled and quaked and the foundations of the mountains shook; they trembled because He was angry. Smoke rose from His nostrils; consuming fire came from His mouth, burning coals blazed out of it.”*** (Psalm 18:7-8) In a similar manner, the prophet Ezekiel described the anger of God as blazing fire pouring out of His nostrils: ***“I will pour out My wrath upon you and breathe out My fiery anger against you.”*** (Ezekiel 21:31) The imagery of the text is designed to terrify those who would dare to deny the compassion of God for these most vulnerable members of society.

“And I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.” - The dual formula which appears here is typical of the



“My Sword Devours Flesh, the Blood of the Slain” by Jose Villegas

covenant curses of the Torah. The threat of the sword refers to the destruction of warfare (cf. Exodus 17:13; Leviticus 26:6; Deuteronomy 32:24; 2 Samuel 1:12; 2:26) The same language is used in a similar context in Leviticus 26:24 ***“And I will bring the sword upon you to avenge the breaking of the covenant.”*** The dire threat of divine vengeance upon the oppressor when the Lord draws His sword is made brutally and inescapably and clear in Deuteronomy 32:

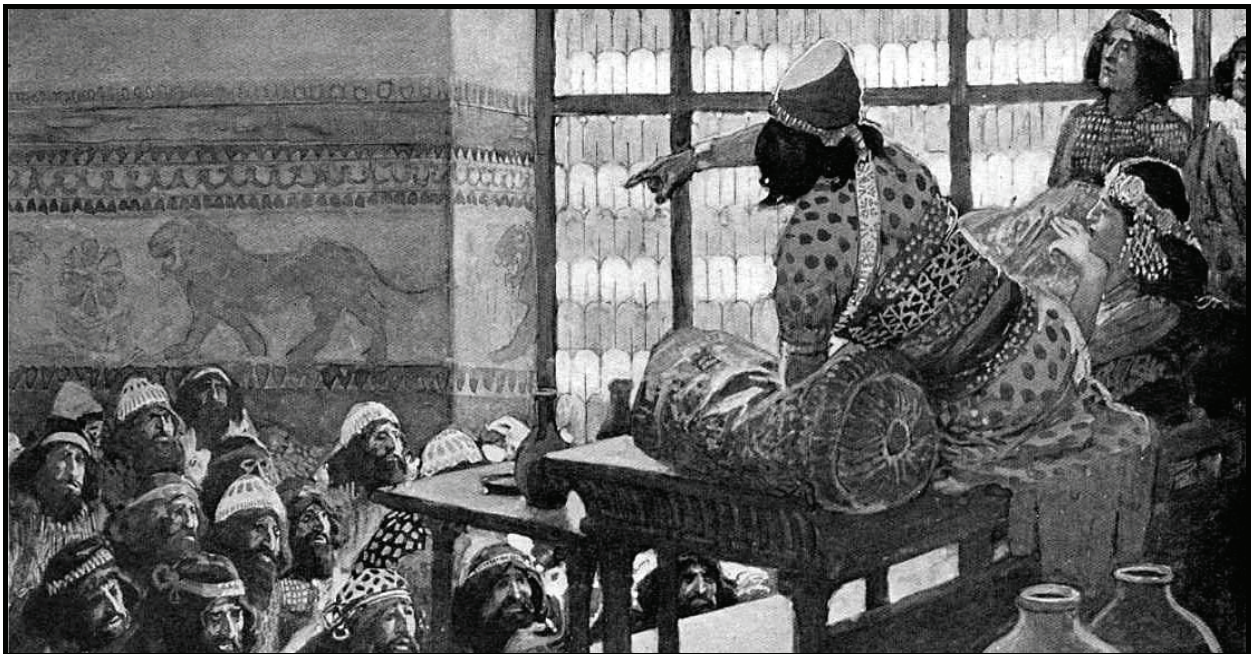
“When I sharpen My flashing sword and My hand grasps it in judgment, I will take vengeance on My adversaries and repay those who hate Me. I will make My arrows drunk with blood while My sword devours flesh: the blood of the slain and the captives, the heads of the enemy leaders. Rejoice O nations with His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants; He will take vengeance on His enemies and make atonement for His land and people.” (Deuteronomy 32:41-43)

The simple reality is that social inequity creates the kind of social instability that often leads to warfare and conquest. A society wracked by internal dissension invites

external aggression. *“The threat implied here is that god would allow Israel’s enemies to attack and exterminate them if they did not uphold social justice.”* (Stuart, p. 517)

God’s judgements are never arbitrary. The punishment always fits the crime. Measure for measure God will inflict upon the oppressor that which he has inflicted upon others. Those who oppress widows and orphans will find that their wives become widows and their children are reduced to the status of orphans. This is the *“lex talionis”* (an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth) applied to the circumstances of this particular situation. ***“Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the Lord will take up their case and will plunder those who plunder them.”*** (Proverbs 22:22-23) The Canaanite king Adoni-Bezek ruefully acknowledged the justice of this system when the victorious men of Judah inflicted upon him the same humiliating disfigurement which he had previously inflicted upon all of the monarch whom he had defeated: ***“Then Adoni-Bezek said, ‘Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off have picked up scraps under my table. Now God has paid me back for what I did to them.’”*** (Judges 1:7)

“If you lend money to one of My people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest.” - This provision is design to protect the poor from economic exploitation within the community of Israel. This is the first in a series



“Defeated Kings Groveling for Scraps from the Table of Adoni-Bezek” by J. James Tissot

of such regulations in the Old Testament:

“If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident so that he can continue to live among you. Do not take interest of any kind from him but fear your God, so that your countryman can continue to live among you. You must not lend him money at interest or sell him food at a profit. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God.” (Leviticus 25:35-38)

“Do not charge your brother interest, whether on money or food or anything that may earn interest. You may charge a foreigner interest but not a brother Israelite, so that the Lord your God may bless you in everything you put your hand to in the land you are entering to possess.” (Deuteronomy 23:19-20)



“Usury” by Albrecht Dürer

The basic concern expressed in all of these texts is that one who loans or advances money to another Israelite, particularly one who is poor or needy, do so not as a businessman but as a fellow member of the household of God. Such transactions were not to be motivated by a desire for profit but as an expression of compassion and concern among God’s people. The Hebrew term for ***“interest”*** (*“nasek”*) which occurs in this text literally means *“to bite”* - referring specifically to the bite of a serpent. Rabbi Rashi explained the appropriateness of the word’s etymology in reference to interest payments in this way: *“It is like a snake bite that makes a slight imperceptible wound in one’s foot, which suddenly erupts and swells the entire body up to the head.”*



“If a Man is Righteous He Will Not Loan Money on Interest”
- Ezekiel 18:1,8

So is interest imperceptible, not noticed until the interest mounts and eliminates much of one’s wealth.” (Propp, p. 260) The truth of this insight has been forgotten in our credit based culture all the way from individual consumers who manage to carelessly achieve a standard of living far above the actual income by the flagrant abuse of loans and credit cards to the highest levels of government where inconceivable deficits are routinely approved by irresponsible politicians who give no thought to how these massive debts plus accrued interest will ever be repaid by future generations.

Commentators have made numerous attempts to evade the clear meaning of these texts and limit their application only to excessive rates of interest or only to loans made to those who were desperately poor. However, the wording of these verses and the parallel passages elsewhere are unmistakably clear.

“Borrowing and lending are common practices in almost any society:

they are not, in themselves, forbidden in this law...It was the charging of interest that was expressly prohibited...The wording of Verse 25 ('lend... to one of My people... who is needy') might seem at first glance only to prohibit lending at interest to the poor, allowing the charging of interest to those who can afford to pay it and merely prohibiting charging interest to those who are too indigent to add it to the repayment of their loans. But this is not the intent, as is shown in the parallels in Leviticus 25:36-37 and Deuteronomy 23:19-20. Any charging of interest by Israelite to Israelite was usury (the charging of excessive interest) because zero interest was to be the norm for loan transactions. The law cites the example of charging interest to the needy not because it was the only circumstance under which charging interest was forbidden but because it was an example of an illegal action which was especially unfair and exploitive." (Stuart, p. 518)

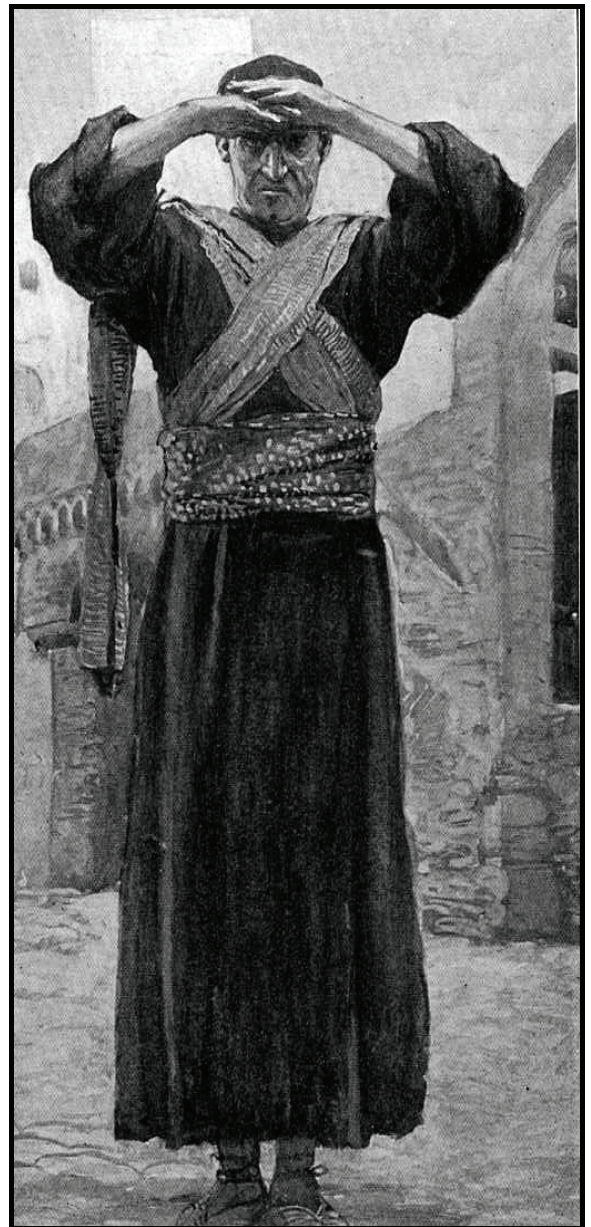


“Nehemiah Surveys the Ruins of Jerusalem” by Tissot

The fact that any interest charges were prohibited within Israel is indicated by the experience of Nehemiah, late in the Old Testament era, when the combination of a famine, high taxes, and the charging of interest to one another for loans and mortgages brought about an economic crisis for the Jewish remnant which had returned to Palestine. Nehemiah, as God's prophet, denounced the latter as a departure from the Word of God and specifically condemned the practice of one Jew charging another even as little as 1% interest as excessive and ungodly:

“What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let the exacting of usury stop. Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses and also the usury you are charging them - the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine and oil.” (Nehemiah 5:11)

The prophet Ezekiel used the charging of interest within Israel as a prime example of the spiritual corruption of the Israelite nation. Ezekiel 18 includes a passionate denunciation of these ***“abominations”*** within the covenant community of God's people:



“The Prophet Ezekiel” by Tissot

“If a man is righteous, he will do what is just and right...He will not exploit anyone, or fail to return something that is given as security for a loan. He will not rob anyone, but will give food to the hungry and cover the naked with clothes. Nor will he lend money on interest or take back more goods than loaned...Such a man is righteous and will certainly live, says the Lord God...If a man has a son who... exploits the poor and the needy and fails to return something given as security for a loan...who lends money at interest and takes back more goods than

loaned - will such a man live? He will not live. Because he does all these abominations he must die, and be punished for his wrong.
(Ezekiel 18: 5-10,12-13)

The same perspective is expressed in Psalm where David includes the refusal to charge interest among the characteristics of the righteous man: ***“You don’t take interest on money you loan or take a bribe against an innocent person.”*** (Psalm 15:15) *The Jewish Encyclopedia* summarizes the teaching of the Old Testament as it was understood within Judaism in this way:

“In modern language, the term ‘usury’ denotes a rate of interest greater than that which the law or public opinion permits; but the Biblical law, in all dealings among Israelites, forbids all ‘increase’ of the debt by reason of lapse of time or forbearance, be the rate of interest high or low, while it does not impose any limit in dealing between Israelites and Gentiles.”(JE, XII, p.388)

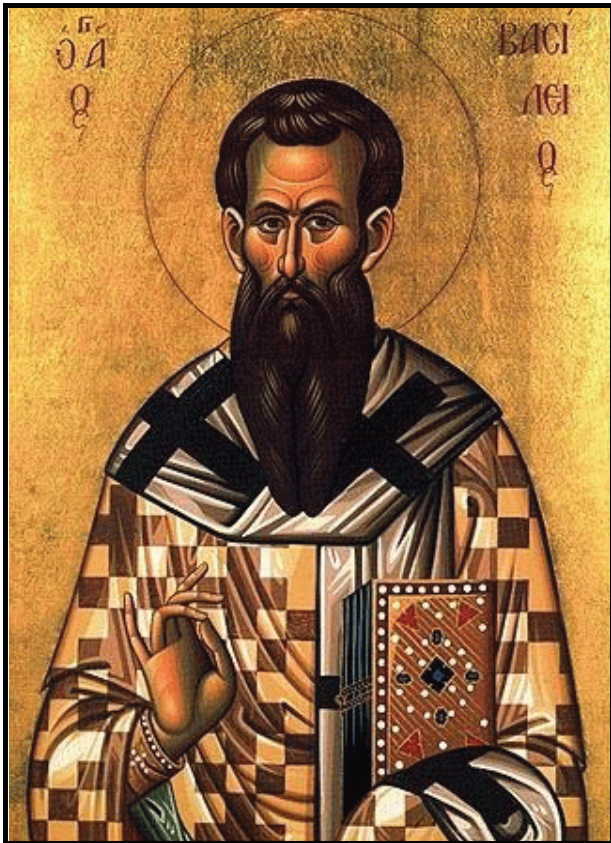
“Do not be like a money lender ; charge him no interest.” - This is the only reference to money lenders, that is, those whose profession was loaning money and whose livelihood depended upon the interest charged for those loans, in the laws of the Torah. In light of the prohibition of interest within Israel that is not surprising. The term is used here in a disdainful, contemptuous manner to refer to the members of a largely corrupt profession which thrived among the Gentiles by preying upon the desperation of others. Their interest rates were wildly exorbitant. *“In the ancient Near East, interest rates ranged from 20 per cent to 50 per cent, with the norm being 20 per cent for silver and 33 1/3 per cent for grain.”* (Propp, p. 260) The people of God were instructed to avoid such things and thereby distinguish themselves from the pagan nations all around them. Their motives in dealing with one another were to be mutual concern and support rather than greed.

The New Testament does not address the topics of charging interest or usury as moral concerns. The debate among Christians as to the appropriateness of the practice has continued nonetheless. Two oblique references in the Gospel of Luke have been cited on either side of the argument. In His *“Sermon on the Plain”* Jesus illustrated the manner in which we are to love our enemies with this example:

“And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great and you will be sons of the Most High because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.” (Luke 6:33-35)

This text is often been used by interest opponents who contend that the phrase ***“to get anything back”*** refers to charging interest. However, given the context of the passage, commentators are virtually unanimous in concluding that Jesus is referring to a willingness to forego repayment of the entire loan, both the principal and any interest that may have been charged. This is not a prohibition of usury but an admonition to Christlike, self-sacrificing generosity. The second Lucan text is the Parable of the Unjust Manager (Luke 19:11-27). This passage is quoted as a reference to charging interest which not only fails to condemn the practice but even seems to commend it. The master denounced the servant who buried his money by saying: ***“Why then didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back I could have collected it with interest?”*** (Vs. 23) While the apparent commendation of interest is intriguing, it must also be noted that these words are spoken by a less than admirable character. At the same time, we should recall that in dealing with parables it is always perilous to focus on the secondary details of the story rather than the point of comparison which the parable was designed to teach.

Despite the absence of conclusive direction from the New Testament, however, the tendency of Christian theologians was to view usury with considerable skepticism. One early example of that perspective was *“The Apocalypse of Peter,”* written among Jewish Christians at the end of the apostolic era. This brief series of visions, purportedly received by the Apostle Peter, focused on graphic descriptions of heaven and hell. *“The Apocalypse”* included usurers among the inhabitants of Hell: ***“And in another great lake, full of pitch and blood and mire bubbling up, there stood men and women up to their knees; and these were the usurers and those who take interest on interest.”*** (ANF, 9, p.146) The issue did not become a topic of widespread discussion within the church until the middle of the 4th century, a period of major economic and political disruption throughout the Roman world. At that time, prominent church fathers like Basil the Great, bishop of Caesarea, took up the question with a vengeance. They forcefully denounced the practice of charging interest as a blatant contradiction of Christian charity and a vicious means of



Icon of St. Basil the Great

victimizing the poor. They proclaimed that usury was prohibited by both the Old and New Testaments. In a sermon on Psalm 14, Basil demonstrated the dramatic rhetoric which was employed to describe the selfish greed of the wealthy and the devastating impact of usury upon the poor:

“In depicting the character of the perfect man, of him, that is, who is ordained to ascend to the life of everlasting peace, the prophet reckons among his noble deeds his never having given his money upon usury. This particular sin is condemned by many passages of Scripture. Ezekiel reckons taking interest and usury among the greatest of crimes...For in truth it is the last pitch of inhumanity that one man, in need of the bare necessities of life, should be compelled to borrow, and another, not satisfied with the principal, should seek to make gain and profit for himself out of the calamities of the poor...But what of the money lover? He sees before him a

man under stress of necessity bent to the ground in supplication. He sees him hesitating at no act, no words of humiliation. He sees him suffering undeserved misfortune, but he is merciless. He does not even acknowledge that the suppliant is a fellow creature. He does not give in to his entreaties. He stands stiff and sour. He is moved by no prayers; his resolution is broken by no tears. He persists in his refusal, swearing that he himself has no money and calling down God’s judgement upon his own head if he is lying, swearing that he is himself on the lookout for a friend to furnish him a loan. He backs his lies with oaths and further reduces his own stature by adding perjury to his inhumanity. Then the suppliant mentions interest and utters the word collateral. All is changed. The frown is relaxed, as with a genial smile the man suddenly remembers their old family connections...He fawns on the wretched victim and induces him to swallow the bait. Then he binds him with written security, adds loss of liberty to the trouble of his pressing poverty and is off...The poor man came seeking an ally and he found a foe. He was looking for medicine, and he lighted on poison...Just as well might a physician go to his patients, and instead of restoring them to health, rob them of the little strength they have left. This is the way

in which you try to profit by the misery of the wretched...What you are doing causes you to descend to the lowest depths of inhumanity. You are making your profit out of misfortune; you are levying a tax upon tears. You are strangling the naked. You are dealing blows on the starving... Therefore, from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away and do not give your money upon usury, and so depart with good hope to your Lord; in Him you will receive the interest of your good deeds.” (NPNF, 8, p.xlvii)

The Church’s opposition to usury gradually solidified over the centuries which followed. That movement culminated in a formal decree of the Lateran Council in 1179 which declared that “*manifest usurers*” were to be expelled from the Church:

“So almost in every place the crime of usury has become so prevalent that many people give up all other business and become usurers, as if it were lawful, regarding not its prohibition in both Testaments, we ordain that manifest usurers shall not be admitted to communion, nor, if they die in their sins, be admitted to Christian burial, and that no priest shall accept their alms.” (Thoma, p. 6)

From that point forward the matter was settled until the time of the Reformation. By the sixteenth century Europe’s economy was rapidly shifting from the traditional Medieval system based upon land and produce to the beginnings of modern capitalism based on money and trade. Investment and interest were key components of the new system. Great banking houses like the infamous Fuggers of Augsburg arose and spearheaded the transition pressuring the church to re-examine it’s traditional opposition to interest payments. A gradual redefinition of usury occurred over the years which followed. The traditional broad condemnation of all interest charges shifted to a more limited rejection of interest charges that were excessive, deliberately designed to take unfair advantage of the desperation of the borrower, or interest charges that were disproportionate to the risk assumed by the lender.

Martin Luther was generally opposed to usury. He perceived the practice to be a way of victimizing the most vulnerable members of society, the poor and the needy.



“The Grain Usurer” by Daniel Hopfer, 1524 - This Reformation Era Woodcut is a Bitter Satire on the New Capitalists, in this Instance a Grain Speculator, Who Allowed the Common People to Struggle and Starve While They Hoarded Grain Waiting for Prices to Rise. Note the Demons Clustered around the Grain Usurer’s Head at the Left Side of the Image, while the Hand of God blesses the Merchant who is Less Concerned About Profit and Willing to Feed the Hungry on the Right Side. The Engraving Cites Proverbs 11:26.

Luther freely acknowledged that he was no economist but spoke only as a biblical theologian. He believed that Christians had a responsibility to provide and care for one another out of love for Christ without the expectation of personal profit. He was accordingly wary of the new capitalism and the greedy oppression of the poor which often accompanied it. Ultimately, however, Luther concluded that usury and the regulation of interest charges were a secular matter to be resolved and regulated by the government as a part of its supervision of the nation’s economic system. The reformer remained troubled by the great wealth and flagrant materialism of the new merchant class and their mutually profitable alliances with the old aristocracy of both church and state. He feared that the avaricious self-interest of the rulers would prevent them from carrying out their God-given role of administering justice and preventing the exploitation of those who were poor and powerless.

“Some time ago people would sing: ‘The merchant has become a



“The Distribution of Alms to the Starving Poor Outside the Church While the Merchants Feast at Their Banquet Table” - Petraca - 1520

nobleman.’ But now the nobles and the princes become merchants. It was not yet twenty years ago that one would say that to take ten guilders on a hundred was usury. Now the big fellows exact twenty or thirty per cent, and some of them get forty to sixty per cent a year. The devil is in that game. Consequently when one asks the emperor and princes for help, they can do nothing for they themselves are immersed in the whole scheme. The law has been violated and corrupted. We should be glad to approve of a rate of six per cent, and we would be satisfied if even seven or eight per cent interest were charged on loans.” (Schwiebert, p. 452)

Given the fact that the ban on usury originated in the Torah and was rigorously enforced throughout the Old Testament era, it is ironic that the Jews became to the money lenders of Europe well into the modern era. The prohibition of interest was restricted to transactions between Israelites, while dealings with Gentiles were specifically exempted - **“You may charge a foreigner interest, but not a brother Israelite.”** (Deuteronomy 23:20) As Christian rejection of usury solidified, a rejection stemming originally from the Old Testament prohibitions, the rulers of



“The Peasant and the Nobleman at the Usurer’s Counter” Petrus Christus - 1520

Europe turned to the Jews whose communities were scattered throughout the continent, to provide the capital needed for commerce and government.

“Christian rulers gradually saw the advantage of having a class of men like the Jews who could supply capital for their use without being liable to excommunication, and the money trade of western Europe by this means fell into the hands of the Jews. They were freed from all competition and could therefore charge very high interest, and indeed were obliged to do so, owing to the insecure tenure of their property.”
(*Jewish Encyclopedia*, XII, p.390)

These Jewish usurers were bitterly resented by the populace and frequently blamed the economic distress which afflicted so many. The Jews were stereotyped as greedy monsters who would stop at nothing to enrich themselves at the expense of others. William Shakespeare’s Shylock, the villainous Jewish moneylender in *The Merchant of Venice*, is typical of the popular image. This resentment played a major role in the anti-Semitism which has flourished down into the modern era.

“If you take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else would he sleep in? If he cries out to Me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.” - The text goes on to address the issue of collateral. The extreme poverty of the borrower is indicated by the fact that the only **“pledge”** that he has to offer for his loan are the clothes on his back. The **“cloak”** (Hebrew - *“salmah”*) was a large piece of cloth wrapped around the body. For the poor this outer robe also served as a blanket at night as they slept outside. It may well have been their only possession. The Talmud correctly applies this verse as a prohibition of taking any



19th Century Depiction of the Evil Shylock as the Classic Jewish Moneylender

collateral from widows, orphans or the needy which would deprive them of the basic necessities of life. The prophet Amos referred to this practice of abusing the poor in his denunciation of Israel's corruption:

“This is what the Lord says: ‘For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back My wrath. They sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane My holy Name. They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines.’” (Amos 2:6-8)

The parallel text in Deuteronomy expands the instruction to remind the lender that he is not to humiliate or embarrass the borrower in securing collateral for the loan:

“When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, do not go into his house to get what he is offering as a pledge. Stay outside and let the man to whom you are making the loan come out to you. If the man is poor, do not go to sleep with his pledge in your possession. Return his cloak to him by sunset so that he may sleep in it. Then he will thank you and it will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the Lord your God.” (Deuteronomy 24:10-13)

Commentator Nahum Sarna offers intriguing archaeological confirmation of this practice in ancient Israel:

“An interesting light is shed on this custom by a 7th century B.C.E. Hebrew inscription from an Israelite fortress uncovered near Yavneh-yam. It registers the complaint of an agricultural laborer that the officer in charge was holding his garment pending satisfaction of a disputed claim that the worker had not fulfilled his obligations.” (Sarna, p. 139)

Once again the Lord indicates that the conduct of His people toward one another is to reflect the nature of God Himself. He promises to hear the complaint of the poor because He is ***“compassionate.”*** He therefore expects that same attitude to be demonstrated by the lender. ***“Compassionate”*** is a term that describes one of the



“The Compassionate Christ” by Ploekhorst

essential attributes of God. It occurs thirteen times, usually in conjunction with gracious or merciful. The term literally means *“to suffer with”* and indicates a profound sense of sympathy which is expressed in the willingness to offer assistance, aid and support.

“Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people.” - The subject appears to shift abruptly from commands designed to protect the poor to the unrelated sin of blasphemy. Judaic tradition explains the sequence of the text as a logical progression from a series of warnings to the wealthy not to oppress the poor to a warning directed to the poor themselves. When those who are poor are forced to endure hardship and oppression they may be tempted to cry out in their desperation and rage to utter curses against God. This perspective is reflected in the bitter advice of Job’s wife, who in the midst of his misfortune urged her husband to ***“Curse God and die!”*** (Job 2:9) The language of this verse is also closely reflected in the warning of Isaiah 8:21 - ***“Distressed and hungry they will roam through the land; when they are***



“Stoning the Blasphemer” by William Blake

are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God.” Cursing God and the king was the crime of which Naboth was falsely accused so that wicked King Ahab could procure the vineyard which he coveted . Jezebel advised her husband - ***“But seat two scoundrels opposite him and testify that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death.”*** (1 Kings 21:10)

“Blasphemy” is any verbal expression which demonstrates contempt for God or belittles Him. This could include everything from careless or trivial misuse of God’s Name to actually reviling God or pronouncing a curse upon Him. The command reflects the insight that the manner in which we speak not only expresses our thinking/attitude but influences our thinking/attitude. For example, the extremely careless use of the Name of God in contemporary society reflects our lack of reverence and respect for Him. But at the same time, the frivolous manner in which God’s name is abused further diminishes and trivializes our attitudes toward Him. This offense was viewed very seriously in Israel and was punishable by death.

Leviticus 24 reports an episode in which an Egyptian/Israelite ***“blasphemed the Name with a curse.”*** Moses sought instruction from the Lord as to the appropriate punishment. God’s answer was that this crime deserved the most severe punishment:

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Take the blasphemer outside the camp. All those who heard him are to lay their hands on his head, and the entire assembly is to stone him. Say to the Israelites, if anyone curses his God, he will be held responsible; anyone who blasphemes the Name of the Lord must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him. Whether an alien, or native born, when he blasphemes the Name he must be put to death.’ (Leviticus 24:13-16)



“Stoning the Blasphemer” - 16th Century Bible Woodcut

The command against blasphemy is combined with a prohibition of cursing ***“the ruler of your people.”*** This linkage is used by Bible critics to prove that the Israelites shared their pagan neighbor’s belief in the deity of their kings. This condescending conclusion is completely unwarranted. The Hebrew term used in this phrase is ***“nasi.”*** This very general term can be used in reference to any government leader from local village elders to tribal chieftains. In the period of the judges it was used to describe the leader whom God raised up to deliver His people and after the establishment of the monarchy it was one of the labels which identified the king. In this instance, however, such developments were still in the far distant future. The ***“ruler,”*** whomever he may be within whatever system of government happened to be in place at the time, was God’s chosen instrument to maintain peace and order. As such he was to be respected and obeyed (cf. Romans 13:1-3). Thus, ***“to curse the ruler of your people”*** would have been an act of flagrant disobedience to God

and disrespect for His Word. The verb **“curse”** is particularly strong. It literally means to call down death, destruction and damnation. With that in mind, the cursing of a leader would be significantly more serious than the mere expression of disagreement or dislike as the parallel passages cited above have indicated.

“The ‘nasi’ is not the king but an administrative leader elected by the assembly and believed therein also to have been elected by Yahweh...To curse a leader is to attempt the negation of a blessing of Yahweh, thus an act of disrespect for the divine authority by which the covenant came to be.” (Durham, p. 329)

“Do not hold back offerings from your grainaries or your vats.” - The verb in this phrase means *“to put off”* or *“to delay.”* The offerings of God’s people should be the eager expression of their love and devotion to the Lord. By means of those offerings, believers indicate that they recognize God as the source of all of their blessings. The delay of those offerings, on the other hand, would suggest a reluctance which negates the very purpose for which the gifts were to be given. The offering which is given begrudgingly or in minimum compliance with a legal requirement demonstrates disrespect rather than love and suggests that the giver regards that which he must give as his own rather than a blessing from a gracious God. This concept remains fundamental to the stewardship of God’s people in every time and place. The language of the text in regard to the particular offerings to be given is ambiguous. The Hebrew phrase literally reads - *“your fullness and your dripping.”* *“Fullness”* is also used in Deuteronomy 22:9 to refer to the sowing of seed and **“the fruit (fullness) of the vineyard”** while in Numbers 18:27 it refers to **“juice from the winepress.”** The second noun, *“dripping,”* is equally obscure. The Hebrew word is derived from *“dima”* which means *“teardrop.”* The Arabic derivative describes the juice which oozes from the grapes on the vine and *“tears of the vine”* is an Arabic idiom for the sweetest of wines. So the commentators debate whether the reference is to grain and wine, as indicated by the NIV, to wine and olive oil, or simply to wine. In any case, the words are a reference to the abundant fruits of the harvest, either particular parts of it or all of it, and the point is clear. God gave you that harvest and your offerings from it should be given eagerly, joyfully and in a timely fashion. *“The prohibition is against a token offering from a bounteous crop, a legalistic expression of the obligation as opposed to a joyous offering in thanksgiving.” (Durham, p.330)* In this way, the command sets the stage for that which follows in regard to the



“Jephthah’s Daughter Rushing Out to Hail the Victorious Return of Her Father” by Jean Paul Laurens

offerings of the first fruits. Our gifts to God are to be given spontaneously, without hesitation or regret. ***“Each man should give what he has decided in heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7)*** Douglas Stuart makes this uncomfortably accurate application to contemporary circumstances: ***“Just as people today tend to make religious and charitable offerings from what they regard as their discretionary (leftover) income rather than even placing such giving in the same category as mortgage or car payments - let alone giving them the highest priority of all.”*** (Stuart, p. 521)

“You must give Me the firstborn of your sons. Do the same with your cattle and your sheep. Let them stay with their mothers for seven days, but give them to Me on the eighth day.” - The stewardship emphasis of eager, willing response to the blessings of God with joyful offerings continues in this segment regarding offerings of the firstborn. Viewed in isolation this verse might appear to suggest a literal requirement of the blood sacrifice of human infants. Exodus 13, however, had



*“God’s Intervention to Stop the Sacrifice of Isaac”
by Fritz von Uhde*

explicitly instructed that while **“you are to give over to the Lord the first offspring of every womb”** (Verse 12) , their first born sons were to be redeemed by the sacrifice of another animal in their place - **“Redeem every first born among your sons.”** (Verse 13). This was to serve as a commemoration of the deliverance of the firstborn sons of Israel from the final plague which struck down their Egyptian counterparts: **“When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to the Lord the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.”** (vvs. 15-16) Later, the dedication of the Levites as priests was linked to the dedication of the first born to God and they became the substitutes for the redemption of the nation’s firstborn at the time the priesthood was first established (Numbers 3:11-13; 39-51) Bible critics who subdivide the Torah into a patchwork of sources from various authors often advance

the bizarre contention that this verse represents one strand of Israelite tradition which did practice infant sacrifices. They cite Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22) and Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter (Judges 11) in support of their position. The fact of the matter, however, is that Abraham did not actually sacrifice Isaac and that Jephthah's action is presented as a tragedy caused by his own rash egotism which God neither commanded nor condoned. Unless one is willing to consign Scripture to the status of a man-made concoction of often contradictory fables and traditions crudely combined in such a way that they often contradict one another, the suggestion that Yahweh could ever have commanded child sacrifice becomes impossible. Certainly, the abomination of infant sacrifice was practiced by Israelites who had chosen to imitate the pagan idolatry of their Canaanite neighbors despite the stern warnings of Moses (cf. Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:29-31; 18:9-13). Ahaz and Manasseh, two of the most evil kings of Judah, both sacrificed their own sons to these pagan idols:

“Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years.. Unlike his father David he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God. He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hill tops and under every spreading tree.” (2 Kings 16:2-4; 17:16-17)

“Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years. ...He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he also erected altars to Baal and made as Asherah pole, as Ahab king of Israel had done. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them...He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced sorcery and divination, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, provoking Him to anger.” (2 Kings 21:1-6; cf. 3:26-27)

Despite the apparent prevalence of child sacrifice even on the highest levels of Israelite society, the prophetic denunciations of such perversions left no doubt as to the Lord's view of this bloody business.



***“The Canaanite Idol Molech”
18th Century Bible Engraving***

“The people of Judah have done evil in My sight, declares the Lord. They have set up their detestable idols in the house that bears My Name and have defiled it. They have built high places of Topheth in the Valley on Ben Hinnon to burn their sons and daughters in the fire - something I did not command, nor did it enter My mind. So beware, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when people will no longer call it Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnon, but the Valley of Slaughter, for they will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room. Then the carcasses of this people will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away.” (Jeremiah 7:30-33; cf. 19:5; 32:35)

When the prophet Isaiah foretold the destruction of the king of Judah and his realm he used the grim image of the fiery belly of Molech into which so many helpless children had been cast in the Valley of Topheth outside of Jerusalem: ***“Topheth has long been prepared; it has been made ready for the king. Its fire pit has been made deep and wide, with an abundance of fire and wood; the breath of the Lord like a stream of burning sulphur, sets it ablaze.”*** (Isaiah 30:33)

The bloody worship of this false god was the epitome of the corrupt and wickedness into which the people of Judah had descended, as the prophet denounced the apostate nation with biting sarcasm:

“But you come here, you sons of a sorceress, you offspring of adulterers and prostitutes!...Are you not a brood of rebels and the offspring of liars? You burn with lust among the oaks, and under every spreading tree; you sacrifice your children in the ravines and under the overhanging crags. The idols among the smooth stones of the ravines are your portion; they, they are your lot...You went to Molech with olive oil and increased your perfumes...When you cry out

for help, let your collection idols save you!” (Isaiah 57:3-6,9,13)

Ezekiel’s haunting portrayal of the helpless babies, kicking and screaming as they were thrust into the flames, demonstrated the heartless depths of depravity into which harlot Israel had descended:

“And you took your sons and daughters whom you bore to Me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was your prostitution not enough? You slaughtered My children and sacrificed them to the idols. In all your detestable practices and your prostitution you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, kicking about in your blood.” (Ezekiel 16:20-22)

That Israel could ever have indulged in such detestable things is cited by the prophet as a conclusive indication of the hardness of heart which was God’s judgement upon



“Molech Devourer of Children”

His rebellious people:

“I let them become defiled through their gifts - the sacrifice of every firstborn - that I might fill them with horror so that they would know that I am the Lord...Therefore, say to the House of Israel: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Will you defile yourselves the way your fathers did and lust after their vile images. When you offer your gifts - the sacrifice of your sons in the fire - you continue to defile yourself with all your idols to this day.’” (Ezekiel 20:26,,30-31; cf. 23:36-41)

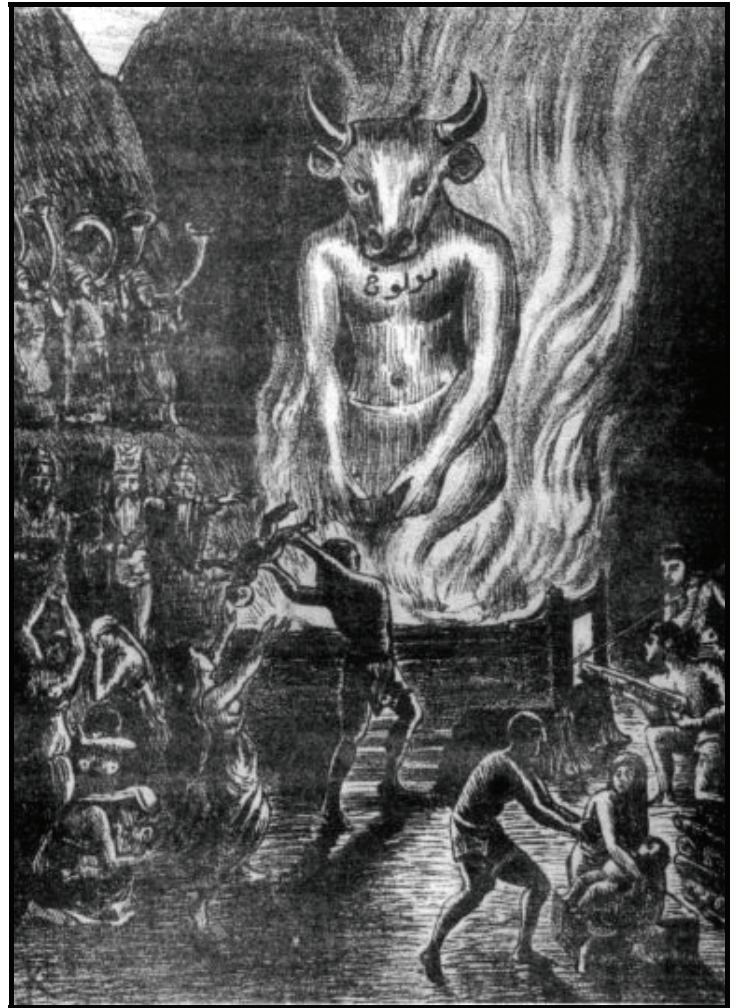
This deadly spiritual corruption was the result of the original failure of the Israelites to purify the land of Canaan at the time of the conquest. They failed to obey the command of the Lord and their descendants paid a bitter price for their disobedience:

“They did not destroy the peoples as the Lord commanded them, but they mingled with the nations and adopted their customs. They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed



their sons and daughters to demons. They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was desecrated by their blood. They defiled themselves by what they did; by their deeds they prostituted themselves.” (Psalm 106:34-39)

The prevalence of child sacrifice in Canaanite religion as described in Scripture has been repeatedly validated by archaeological discoveries at Carthaginian colonies throughout the Mediterranean world. The Carthaginians were a seafaring Canaanite people originally from Phoenicia. They later came to bear the name of their largest trading colony, the city of Carthage on the coast of North Africa. Recent excavations of a temple site at Carthage uncovered the skeletal remains of over 20,000 newborn and aborted babies, along with a host of other sacrificial animals in a temple pit. In another Carthaginian settlement at Pozo Moro on the coast of Spain the ruins of a large crematorium has been found showing reliefs of horned monsters - very similar to the Bible's Molech - devouring the bodies of a child and a pig. The Carthaginian word for sacrifice was “*molk*” - which demonstrates a striking similarity to the name of the Canaanite idol Molech. The two major trading cities from which the Phoenicians sailed were Tyre and Sidon. The Roman historian Quintus Curtius reports that when Tyre was besieged by the armies of Alexander the Great, the citizens of the beleaguered city debated whether to revive the ancient custom of their people and sacrifice their infant children to the gods. Around 100 A.D. a native Phoenician scholar named Philo of Byblos told of a Canaanite myth which he had uncovered among the ancient writings of his people. This legend may well have provided the foundation for the child sacrifice which



“The Israelites Sacrificing Their Children to Molech at Topheth in the Valley of Hinnon



“Anath - Canaanite Goddess of Love and War Destroying Her Foes” by Vallejo

prevailed throughout the Canaanite lands:

“At the occurrence of a fatal plague, the god Baal, offered his only son as a burnt offering to his father El, the god of the heavens whom he had previously murdered...Among ancient peoples in critically dangerous situations it was customary for the rulers of the city or the nation, rather than lose everyone, to provide the dearest of their own children as a propitiatory sacrifice to the avenging deities. The children thus given up were slaughtered according to a secret ritual. Now Baal had an only son by a local bride named Anath...When war’s gravest dangers gripped the land, Baal dressed his son in royal attire, prepared an altar and sacrificed him.” (Propp, p. 269)

Baal was the infamous Canaanite God of rain and the storm. Anath, goddess of sensuality and war, was both his sister and one of his three wives. The grotesque character of Anath indicates the unique depravity of Canaanite religion:

“Anat is the sister and the consort of the god Baal...Her fierce temper is directed against gods and mortals alike, and with her thirst for violence and her macabre trappings - a necklace of human heads and a belt of human hands - she has been compared to the Hindu goddess Kali...She was also a death goddess ...Her breastplate became a garment worn during animal sacrifices decorated with severed penises, representing both types of death men experience, loss of erection and the ending of their lives..Anath was a famous warrior and powerful protector, as sort of ‘ultimate woman’...She was worshiped by many Israelites, who considered their God her consort.” (“Baal Cycle” p.3)

The content of this bizarre mythology matches the royal infanticide practiced both by kings of Judah and their Canaanite neighbors. It is clear that the biblical prophets were not merely indulging in polemic excesses as they condemned the brutality of Canaanite child sacrifice and its pernicious influence upon Israel. In the context of Scripture’s continual denunciation of the Molech cult and the severe judgement of



“Anath the Destroyer” - The Feminist 2009 Goddess Calendar

God upon every nation which indulged in it, including His own, it is clear that for anyone who takes the Bible seriously as the Word of God, the suggestion that God could have commanded the sacrifice of human children is completely impossible. The command of this verse must also be understood within the immediate context of the Book of Exodus and the redemption process outlined for the firstborn sons of Israel in Chapter 13.

The consistent emphasis throughout the Torah that the gifts consecrated to God were to be the first born or the first fruits serves to emphasize that God was not to be given the leftovers. That which was sacrificed to Him came first as an expression of the priority of the covenant in the lives of His people and at the same time and indication of their faith and trust that God would provide for their needs.

“Let them stay with their mothers for seven days but give them to Me on the eighth day.” - The provision that the newborn were to remain with their mothers for seven days and then presented to the Lord on the eighth day has been explained in a variety of ways. Nahum Sarna argues that the provision was humanitarian, designed to minimize the trauma of separation between the mother and her offspring. At the same time, the week long delay allowed time for the newborn to become independently viable and reveal any deformity or defect which would render it unsuitable for presentation to the Lord. The rabbis subsequently ruled that the animal had to be set aside for the Lord on the eighth day but because of practical considerations could be brought for sacrifice at any point during the first year. The eighth day requirement here also establishes a parallel to the circumcision on the eighth day of every male Hebrew (Genesis 17:12). Circumcision was the physical mark of the covenant. The removal of the foreskin indicated the dedication of that life to the God of Abraham.

“You are to be My holy people. So do not eat the meat of an animal torn by wild beasts; throw it to the dogs.” - Israel was a nation set apart for the Lord. That holiness was to be reflected in the unique dietary standards which the Lord would establish. The prohibition of the eating of carrion here anticipates those regulations. Such meat cannot be “*kosher*.” This rule will be repeated in Leviticus (7:24; 17:15; 22:8). *“Israel may not eat torn meat because that would make them scavengers, tainted by bloodshed and unworthy of the divine presence...One may consume meat only after draining the spurting blood into a bowl and offering a portion to Yahweh, which is not possible unless the kill is fresh.”* (Propp, p. 272)



"Israel Before Sinai" - 12th Century Bible Illumination

Exodus Chapter 23

Do not spread false reports. Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness. Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, and do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit. If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it. Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. Having nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or an honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see, and do not twist the words of the righteous.. Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt. For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get

food from it, and the wild animals may eat what they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well, may be refreshed. Be careful to do everything I have said to you. Do not invoke the names of other gods; do not let them be heard on your lips. Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to Me. Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days eat bread made without yeast as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt. No one is to appear before me empty-handed. Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field. Celebrate the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather your crops from the field. Three times a year, all the men are to appear before the Sovereign Lord. Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to Me with anything containing yeast. The fat of My festival offerings must not be kept until morning. Bring the best of the fruits of your soil to the House of the Lord your God. Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk. See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since My Name is in him. If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you. My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. Do not bow down before their gods or worship them or follow their practices. You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces. Worship the Lord your God and His blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you, and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span. I will send My terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make your enemies turn their backs and run. I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way. But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land. I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the River. I will hand over to you the people who live in the land and you will drive them out before you. Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. Do not let them live in your land, or they will cause you to sin against Me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you.

“Do not spread false reports. Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness.” - The Book of the Covenant continued with a series of five prohibitions which forbid behavior in the courts of law which would jeopardize the integrity of the justice system. These specifications and applications flow from the Eighth Commandment (Exodus 20:13) Authentic justice was a fundamental concern in the system of government which God bestowed upon His people. Their society was to reflect the perfect justice and righteousness of the God who had called them to be His own people. The warnings and prohibitions of the Book of the Covenant indicate a realistic awareness of the fragility of justice within any human society. As a consequence of sin, injustice and unfairness permeate the dealings of men. The rich and the powerful become adept in perverting the system to their own advantage. Their wealth and influence easily become the means of oppressing the poor and the powerless. Justice is traditionally depicted as a blindfolded maiden with scales in one hand and a sword in the other, crushing the wicked serpent beneath her heel. But while Lady Justice is theoretically blind, treating all who stand before her in the same way, the leverage of money and connections has always had an insidious way of inducing her to peek out from behind her blindfold so that her scales may be tipped in favor of those who can repay her. Leviticus 19:15 strongly affirmed the impartiality of authentic justice: ***“Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great; but judge your neighbor fairly.”***



“Lady Justice”

The first warning in this series pertains to the repetition of unfounded or unsubstantiated rumor. The NIV’s ***“Do not spread false reports.”*** fails to reflect the sense of the Hebrew text which reads - *“You are not to pass on a report without foundation.”* The Hebrew term more accurately refers to that which is empty groundless, or unfounded. Nahum Sarna correctly describes the intent of the command

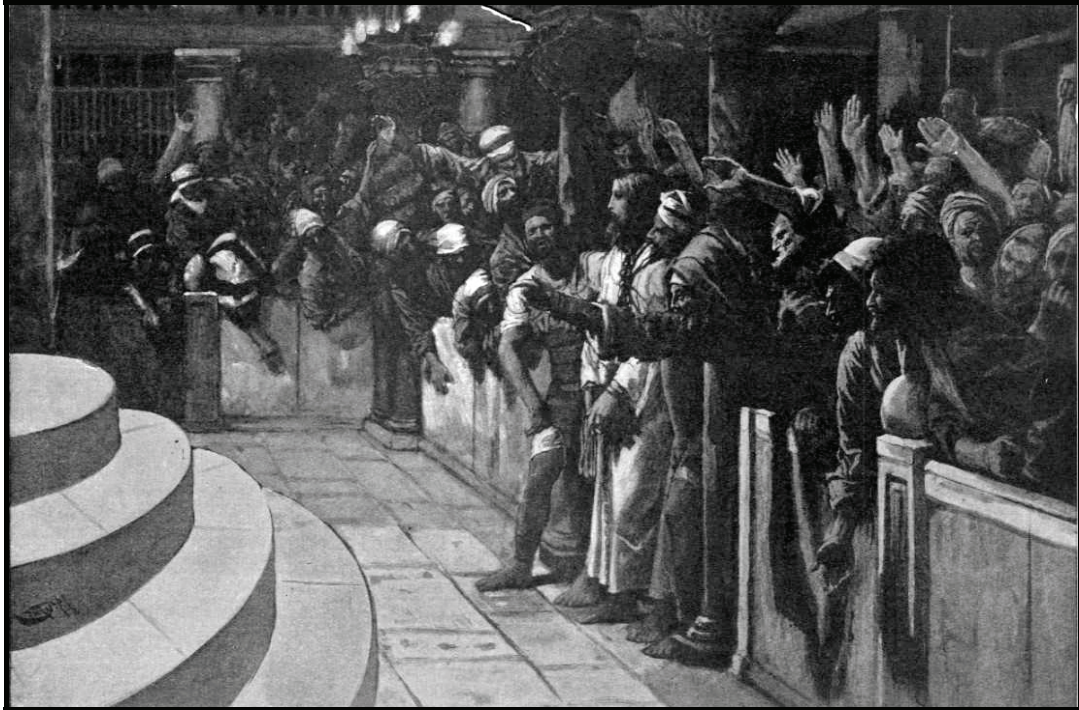
in this way: *“Giving unfounded, hearsay testimony in judicial proceedings is prohibited and inadmissible.”* (Sarna, p. 142) If justice is to be obtained, the standard must be - to use the traditional formula of our courts - *“the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”* The verb **“spread”** suggests a malicious desire to gossip or speak evil of another without concern for the accuracy of that which is being said. Even in an ordinary social context the Bible instructs us to protect the reputation of others: ***“A man who lacks judgement derides his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his tongue. A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.”*** (Proverbs 11:12-13) Our verbal responsibility to our neighbor, in the well chosen words of the Catechism is *“defend him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.”* That concern becomes all the more urgent in court where, as noted above, truth is the essential prerequisite of justice.

“Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness.” - Collusion on the part of a witness with one of the parties in a dispute for a fraudulent or deceitful purpose is also forbidden. The Hebrew phrase more colorfully reads - *“Put not your hand with*

the wicked to be a witness of violence.” The language reflects the English idiom *“to lend a hand”* as an expression of aid or assistance. The Hebrew word *“violence”* conveys the sense of a strong destructive force which leads to acts of lawlessness, ruin and oppression. The same term is used in God’s condemnation of the devastation which the Babylonians had inflicted upon the once beautiful land of Lebanon: ***“The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will terrify you. For you have shed man’s blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.”*** (Habakkuk 2:17) Moses chose this



“Ahab Confronting Naboth” by T.M. Rooke



“The False Witnesses Before Caiaphas” by Tissot

emphatic word to characterize the chaos and death which filled the earth on the eve of the great Flood: ***“Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and full of violence.”*** (Genesis 6:11) To give false testimony in support of an unjust cause for personal advantage perverts the justice system and enables the wicked to prevail. The use of the term is most appropriate in this context because when the justice system fails in its responsibility to restrain crime and protect the innocent the result is upheaval and violence throughout society. The perjury of the false witnesses in the trial of Naboth and the trial of Christ are classic examples of such collusion:

“In those letters she (Jezebel) wrote: ‘Proclaim a day of fasting a seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. But seat two scoundrels opposite him and have him testify that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death.’” (I Kings 21:9-10)

“The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put Him to death. But they could not find any though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward and declared, ‘This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.’ Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, ‘Are you going to answer? What is this

testimony that these men are bringing against you?’ But Jesus remained silent.” (Matthew 26:59-63)

“Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd.” - Social pressure and the desire to conform to the will of the majority also pose significant threats to righteousness and justice. *“The temptation being warned against here is that of being swayed in any action that would be wrong by fear of looking foolish, incorrect, odd, or dishonest because of fear of taking a position different from that taken by everyone - or virtually everyone else.”* (Stuart, p. 524) That which is right and just cannot be decided upon the basis of popular opinion. Moral truth is determined by the absolute standard of the Word of God. Unlike the ever changing standards of men, God’s truth, like the God/Man who personified it, is ***“the same yesterday, today and forever.”*** (Hebrews 13:8) Faithfulness to God and His Word require the courageous willingness to stand alone against the crowd. Nor can a faithful witness in court allow himself to be swayed by the tides of popular opinion. He must testify accurately and objectively based upon the facts no matter how unwilling the crowd may be to listen to the truth. Such integrity is a rare and a precious thing in a world



“Caiaphas Accusing Christ Before Pilate” by Mukasz

which has largely given up on the possibility of truth. Most people would agree with the cynical despair of Pontius Pilate, the governor who presided over the trial of our Lord. He was a sophisticated man of the world who had risen to power within the greatest empire known to history. Jesus affirmed during his interrogation in the judge's chambers that He had come into this world to testify to the Truth. The Roman dismissed His claim with the cynical question *“What is truth?”* (John 18:38) *“Siding with the crowd”* - for fear of political reprisals from the leaders of the Sanhedrin - led Pilate to pervert justice and condemn a man whom he knew to be innocent. The rabbis implemented the concern of the phrase by requiring only a simple majority for acquittal but a two thirds majority for conviction.



“Quod Est Veritas?” by Gay Nikolay

“And do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit.” - The sword of justice cuts both ways. Justice must be impartial. It cannot be affected by the influence of the powerful or the tides of popular opinion. But at the same time, justice cannot be affected by sympathy for *“a poor man in his lawsuit.”* As previously noted (cf. p. 965) Leviticus 19:15 expressed the same balanced warning against partiality to either the rich or the poor. In a similar admonition in Deuteronomy 1:17 God reminded Moses that ultimately *“judgement belongs to God”* and may not be tampered with or distorted by man: *“Do not show partiality in judging; hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of any man for judgement belongs to God.”* The Torah regularly enjoins compassion and generosity toward those who are poor and downtrodden. However, that compassion cannot be allowed to the justice system administered in the courts.

“Even out of compassion for an indigent person, you are forbidden to pervert judgement...When you sit in the seat of judgement, and you have to adjudicate between a poor man and a rich man, needless to say, you



“The Sermon on the Mount” by Gebhard

are forbidden to turn aside from the path of justice for the benefit of the rich man, but know that you are forbidden to deviate from the way of justice even in the interests of the poor man. Everywhere and at all times ‘justice and only justice you shall follow.’” (Cassutto, p. 297)

The basic point of this segment is clear - true justice requires complete objectivity.

“If you come across your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it.” - The theme of justice continues in this segment. Fair and equitable treatment is to apply not only to your friends but also to your enemy and those who hate you. Hostility or vindictive emotion may not be allowed to overcome our commitment to justice and humanity. Solomon offered the same advice in Proverbs: ***“If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this you will heap burning coals on his head and the Lord will reward you.”*** (Proverbs 25:21) Jesus carried this precept to the next level in His Sermon on the Mount, with the reminder that by so doing you would reflect the impartial love of God:

“You have heard it said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43-47)

Rabbinic tradition includes four categories of people within the term “*enemy*:” “*a Gentile idolater, a lapsed convert to Judaism, a Jewish apostate, and a Jew who exhibits animosity toward another.*” (Sarna, p. 142)

The casuistic manner in which the point is made, using particular cases, actual everyday situations, serves as a reminder that justice and righteousness are not merely abstract concepts to be considered hypothetically. Justice - or injustice - is lived out every day in the way that we relate to the people around us. The illustrations of the errant ox or the fallen donkey are drawn from the daily routine of life in the agrarian



“The Good Samaritan” by Fritz von Uhde

culture of ancient Palestine. The world would view such generosity as impractical and contrary to my own self-interest. From a selfish (or realistic!) perspective, as the old proverb advises, “*The enemy of my enemy is my friend.*” Anything that would weaken or harm someone who hates me and seeks to oppose me is logically in my own best interest. It should be noted that the precept does not merely request generosity and active assistance to one’s enemies. Such assistance is required. In both phrases, the Hebrew verbs translated as “*be sure*” are imperatives. These are commands, not suggestions. The text makes the obvious assumption that such generous assistance would be extended to a friend or neighbor. The surprising assertion is that we are to treat our enemies in the same way that we would treat our friends. Our Lord’s parable of the Good Samaritan makes much the same point, broadening the concept of “*your neighbor*” to include all whom we might ordinarily consider rivals or enemies (cf. Luke 10:25-37)



“The Good Samaritan” by Carolsfeld



“The Judgement of Solomon” by Raphael

“Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits.” - This prohibition completes the previous instruction of vs. 3 which had forbidden favoritism toward the poor. While the earlier verses had been focused on witnesses and testimony, the emphasis here appears to be focused on the role of the judge. The thrust of the command is the same. Just as one’s sympathy for the poor must not be allowed to skew the justice system in their favor, so also the vulnerability of the poor must not be allowed to deny them justice. The Hebrew verb translated as ***“deny”*** literally means to push something out of the way with your hand. One’s economic standing or stature in the community should have nothing to do with their standing before the court. Such factors should have no impact, either positively or negatively. Those who come before the bar of justice must all be viewed on exactly the same basis. One might be tempted to view this perspective as hopeless idealism. However it should be noted that this segment does not prescribe a human remedy or punishment. It is God Himself who is the guarantor of justice - ***“I will not acquit the guilty.”***

“Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty.” - The restatement of the instructions which opened the chapter continue from a judge’s perspective with the prohibition of trumped up charges without basis in fact, or the conviction of an innocent defendant based upon such false charges. The command pays particular attention to capital



“Ecce Homo” by Antonio Ciseri

cases and the imposition of the death penalty. In this context, the NIV effectively renders a Hebrew verb which literally means “to stay far away from” as **“have nothing to do with.”**

Justice must be based upon objective reality, that is, facts. Truth, in the traditional sense of the term, is another word for this concept. Modern man tends to prefer his own subjective versions of truth. This preference is immensely popular in that it provides each individual with unlimited flexibility and control. Subjective truth is whatever I want it to be. I am in charge and there is no standard beyond my own preferences or opinions. In our judicial system this completely subjective view of truth has enabled judges to endlessly redefine our constitution and our laws to suit their own fancies. Justice among us has become whatever the current political fad wants it to be. In direct contrast to this view, the insistence of Scripture is that justice must be true, that is, based upon objective reality. Judicial decisions or decrees which

deviate from truth, the actual facts of the case or the moral standards of God's Word are necessarily unjust. A judge may not indulge his own preferences or opinions. The courts should never be allowed to abuse justice as a means of implementing the judge's own social agenda. He is bound by the facts and by the law - applied in the same impartial manner to all.

The paragraph concludes with the assurance that a concern for justice and a reluctance to impose the death penalty upon a potentially innocent man - ***“do not put an innocent or honest person to death”*** - will not result in the guilty evaded the punishment which they rightly deserve. God Himself will see to it that the guilty are appropriately punished - ***“for I will not acquit the guilty.”*** The first person personal pronoun ***“I”*** is particularly emphatic, emphasizing God's personal commitment to guarantee that no one will escape the requirements of His perfect justice. The Hebrew phrase literally reads - ***“I will not make the wicked righteous”*** suggesting an eschatological component to this assurance. It may be possible to abuse and deceive human courts. But each and every human being will one day stand before the judgement seat of God. On that day the wicked will receive exactly what they deserve in the eternal torments of hell.

“Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous.” - Bribery is perhaps the most flagrant and the most common perversion of the justice system. In describing the perfect justice of God, the prophet Moses declared: ***“For the Lord your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.”*** (Deuteronomy 10:17) The text is sadly explicit in describing the impact of bribery on the justice system - ***“for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous.”*** Virtually the same language is repeated in Deuteronomy 16:19. It is interesting to note that throughout the Israelite theocracy the judges were never paid by the civil authorities, nor even the king. The administration justice was perceived to be a religious function and the salaries of judges were paid out of the funds of the tabernacle and later the temple. To make the point more explicitly, in Israel the judges worked directly for God, who was the source of all justice and righteousness. The prevalence of bribery in Israel is indicated by the frequency with which it is denounced throughout Scripture. ***“A bribe is a charm to the one who gives it; wherever he turns, he succeeds...A wicked man accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the course of justice.”*** (Proverbs 17:8,23); ***“A gift given in secret soothes anger, and a bribe concealed in a cloak pacifies great wrath. When justice is done it brings joy to the righteous, but***



“Judas Attempting to Return the Thirty Pieces of Silver” by Edward Armitage

*terror to the evildoers.” (Proverbs 21:14-15) “Cursed is the man who accepts a bribe to kill an innocent man. Then all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’” (Deuteronomy 27:25) “Now let the fear of the Lord be upon you. Judge carefully for with the Lord our God there is no injustice, or partiality, or bribery.” (2 Chronicles 19:8) “He who is blameless and who does what is righteous...who keeps his oath even when it hurts; who lends without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent.” (Psalm 15:1,4-5) “Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow’s case does not come before them.” (Isaiah 1:23) “He who walks righteously and speaks what is right, who rejects gain from extortion and keeps his hand from accepting bribes.” (Isaiah 33:15) “You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts.” (Amos 5:12) “Both hands are skilled in doing evil; the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes, and the powerful dictate what they desire - they all conspire together.” (Micah 7:3) The pernicious effect of bribery on the integrity of the justice system is graphically describes in the words of the text - **“for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous.”** The payment of the bribe perverts and reverse the manner in which justice must function. *“The power of a bribe to make someone ignore evidence is here compared to the causation of blindness, and to speak a lie is here compared to a speech defect making it impossible for one to say what he wants**

and should say. Bribery, in effect, cripples the normal, proper way of doing things and substitutes a perverted way.” (Stuart, p. 528) Nowhere is the truth of the New Testament’s assertion that **“the love of money is a root of all evil”** (1 Timothy 6:10) more clearly demonstrated than in bribery. The gravity of the prohibition is further indicated by its application within historic Judaism:

“Rabbinic bribery legislation extended the crime to ‘verbal bribery’; even a perfunctory courtesy proffered by a litigant to a judge immediately disqualifies the latter. A judge who accepts a bribe in violation of the Biblical prohibition is subject to the penalty of flogging.”
(Sarna, p. 141)

“Do not oppress an alien. You yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt.” - This Verse repeats the general admonition of 22:20 with specific reference to the conduct of judges. An **“alien”** is a non-Israelite visitor who is temporarily living among the Children of Israel, just as the Israelites sojourned in the land of Egypt in the days of Joseph. Accordingly, the text reminds the Israelites - **“You yourselves know how it feels to be aliens”** (literally - “you are familiar with the spirit of the alien”).



“Jacob’s Arrival in Egypt” - by E. J. Poynter

“For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.” - The general theme of concern for the most vulnerable members of society continues in these verses as the focus shifts from the justice system to regulations concerning the Sabbath cycle in agriculture and seasonal festivals. The seven year cycle presented here follows the weekly pattern which culminates in the observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest set apart for God on the seventh day. This provision is repeated in Leviticus 25:1-7, 18-22 where the connection to the Sabbath Day is stated more explicitly in conjunction with the establishment of the Year of Jubilee after seven sabbaths of years.

“The Lord said to Moses on Mount Sinai, ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them; ‘When you enter the land I’m going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the Lord. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself, or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you - for yourself, your manservant, your maidservant and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land...Follow My decrees, and be careful to obey My laws and you will live safely in the land. Then the land will yield its fruit and you will live there in safety. You may ask, ‘What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?’ I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. While you plant during the eighth year you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.”

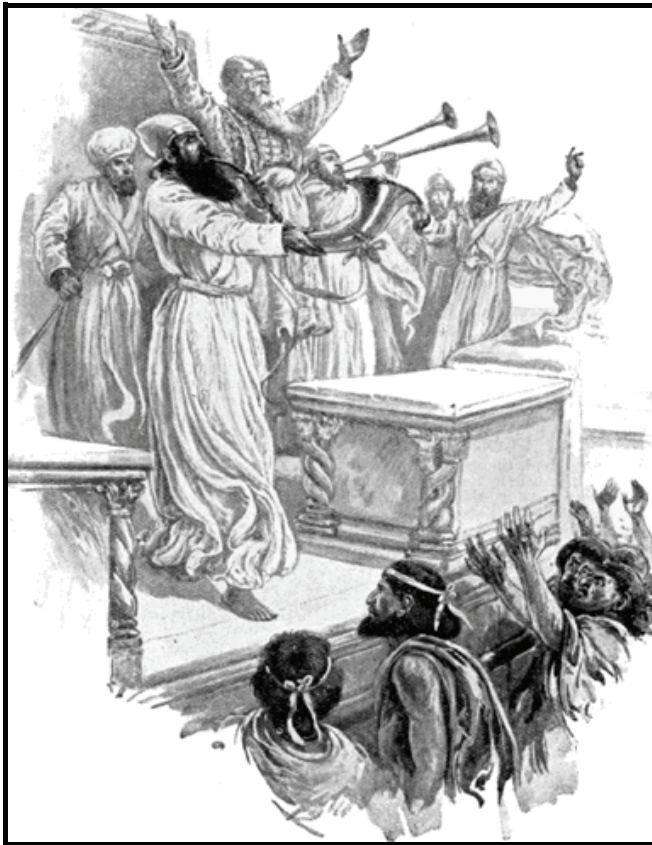
Deuteronomy 15 further includes the cancelling of debts and the freeing of Hebrew slaves as part of the observance of the sabbatical year. This regulation not only served as a conservationist measure to allow the land to replenish itself, but also reminded Israel that the land in which they dwelt was a sacred gift from God to be hallowed by



“A Contemporary Rabbi Announcing the Beginning of the Sabbatical Year”

the unique manner in which God had entrusted it to them. At the same time, the miraculous plenty of the harvest in the sixth year would impress upon the people their dependence upon the Lord and the gracious manner in which He provided for all of their needs. Douglas Stuart explained the role of the Sabbath cycle in the life of Israel in this manner:

“By the system of Sabbaths and annual festivals, God established for His people regular covenant reminders of their relationship to Him as His worshiping people; the weekly Sabbath worship routine would provide reminder-renewal every seventh day; the annual routine would provide three reminder renewals coinciding with the natural agricultural times of rest and rejoicing with a focus on worship. In addition to these, there was to be every seven years a special concern for the land, the animals and people and every fifty years a major realignment of financial, land, personal and social relationships (the Jubilee Year - Lev. 25:27; Numbers 36) intended to keep the Israelites from losing touch with their



“The High Priest Proclaiming the Year of Jubilee” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

basic values and social structures.” (Stuart, p. 530)

“Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well may be refreshed.” This repetition of the Third Commandment stresses its humanitarian effect on workers and beasts of burden, thereby continuing the theme of this segment of the Book of the Covenant as an expression of concern for the vulnerable and underprivileged. The Third Commandment had linked the observance of the Sabbath on the seventh day to the activity of God in creation. God’s people were to reflect that which He had done in their own lives, thereby acknowledging Him as their Creator and their Lord. The same is true here as the imposition of a sabbatical year upon the agricultural cycle makes the point in reference to the land. All

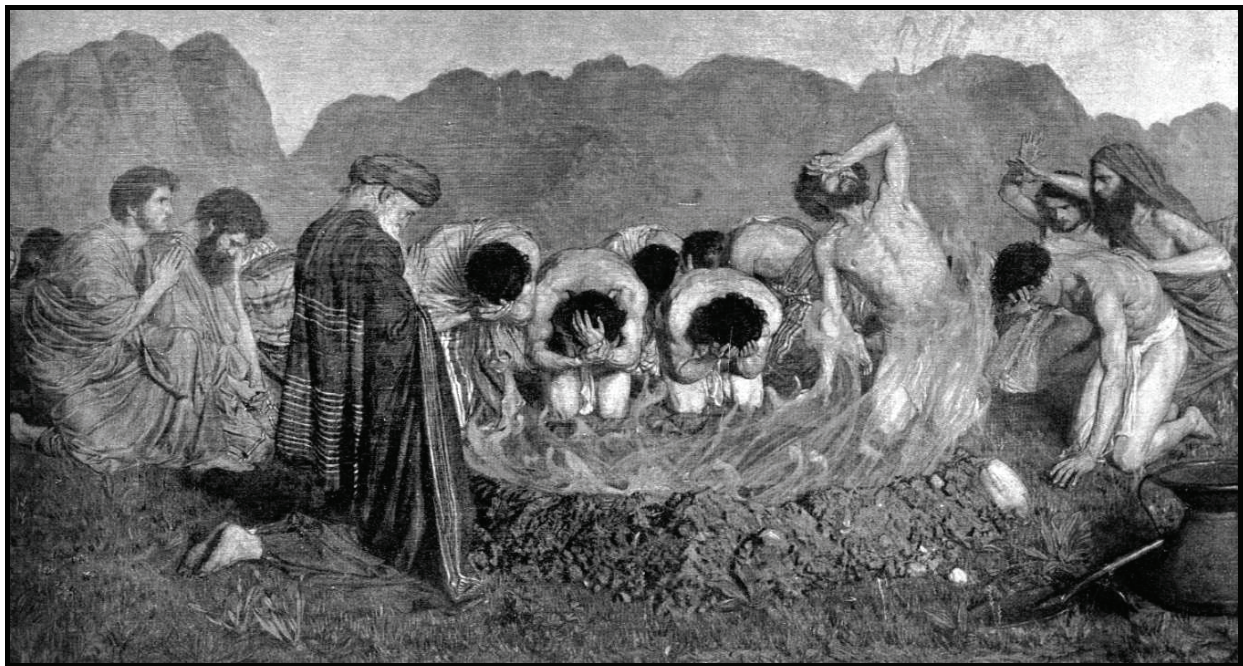
of the other nations worshiped the forces of nature. Israel worshiped a transcendent God who was not part of nature but its Creator.

“Thereby you will imitate the ways in which the Lord your God works, and you will bear constant witness to the fact that He alone created the whole world in all its parts, and that He is not to be identified with any portion of the world or with any of the forces of nature, but He transcends the sphere of nature.” (Cassutto, p. 246)

The pattern of allowing the land to lie fallow every seven years would replenish and enrich the nitrogen content of the ground as natural grasses grew over that which was ordinarily cultivated ground. Unlike the Jubilee Year command which was to be observed throughout Israel simultaneously, the seven year sabbatical does not include a similar specification. Given the fact that Israel conquered the land of Canaan over a period of years, it is most likely that the sabbatical years did not happen at the same time throughout the country or even throughout a particular region. This would have

been of great benefit to the indigent poor, enabling them to find sustenance from whatever farms nearby were observing the sabbatical year at a particular time. It should also be noted that the sabbatical requirement apply to livestock whose care and provision could not practically have been interrupted in the same fashion. The seventh year would thus become a time set apart for God, a time when labor, while not eliminated, was significantly diminished, thereby providing unique opportunities for reflection and worship. Both the people of God and the land which He had given them were to rest during the sabbatical year.

“Be careful to do everything that I have said to you. Do not invoke the names of other gods; do not let them be heard on your lips.” - Having reiterated the third commandment in conjunction with the observance of a sabbatical year, God proceeded to also remind the Israelites of the first commandment’s assertion of absolute monotheism with its concomitant absolute obedience to the Word of the one God. Cassutto argues that the placement of this reminder comes as a result of the repeated admonitions to practice hospitality and justice toward the ***“aliens”*** who lived among the Children of Israel in the preceding verses. That acceptance was not to be extended to their religions. Accordingly, Cassutto renders the Hebrew text - *“And in all things that I have said to you take heed, and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let them be heard out of your mouth.”* (Cassutto, p. 302) Israel dare not allow herself



“Elijah and the Prophets of Baal” by Albert Moore

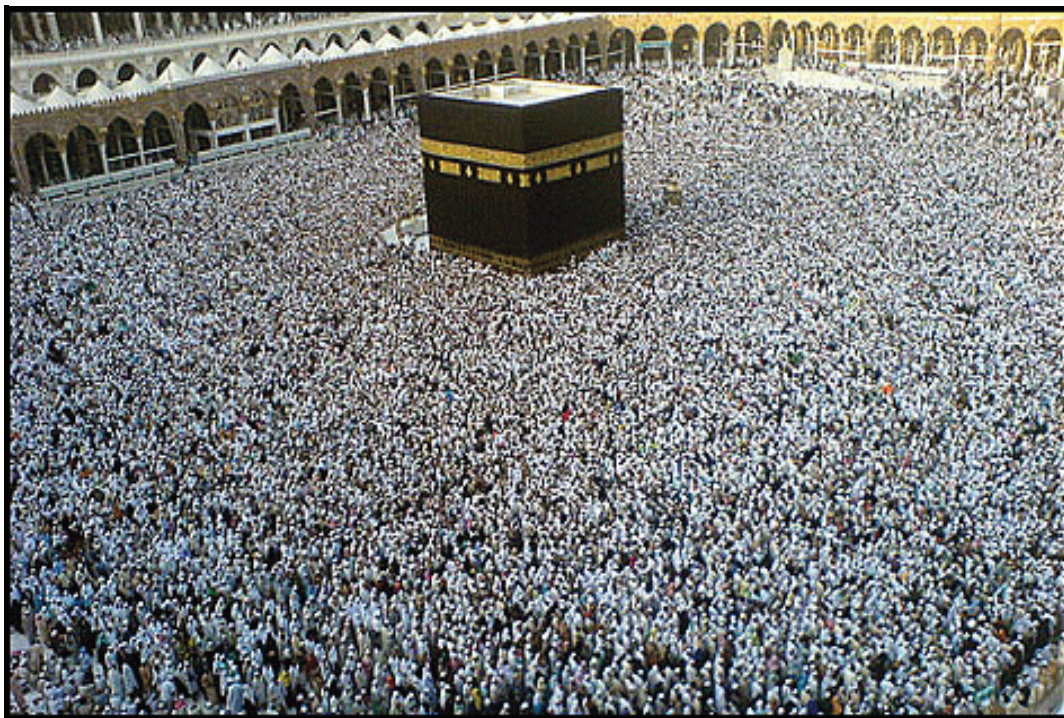


“Elijah on Mount Carmel” by Shields

to be influenced by the idolatrous beliefs of the foreigners within her midst or the pagan neighbors which surrounded her. Even to the extent of casual conversation, the people of God were to have nothing whatsoever to do with damnable falsehood which denied the one truth of the one God. Throughout its history Israel was poisoned by syncretism, that is the attempt to combine faith in Yahweh with the worship of Canaanite idols. That impossible effort to have it both ways would ultimately lead to the downfall and destruction of the nation. With these stern words God forewarned His people not to be influenced by idolatry in any way, nor allow themselves to become comfortable with the idolatry which thoroughly permeated their world. The difference between the worship of Yahweh and that of any other god was - and is - the difference between life and death. At the end of the conquest, Joshua had warned the people that an unequivocal choice had to be made: ***“Now fear the Lord and serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the river and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”*** (Joshua 24:14-15) Centuries later, the prophet Elijah stood alone as he presented the same challenge to the nation. He called down fire from heaven while 950 prophets of Baal and Asherah impotently implored their idols to act: ***“Elijah went before the people and said, ‘How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, then follow Him; but if Baal is God follow him.’”*** (1 Kings 18:21) These stern warnings went unheeded while Israel

while Israel continued to blend and bend into the pagan cultures on every side. The balance between freedom of conscience - which acknowledges the right of every man to hold to his own beliefs - and an authentic commitment to truth - which recognizes that all religions are not and cannot be equally valid - has always been precarious. Commitment to truth has tended to result in persecution and suppression while tolerance has tended to result universalism or fideism. Both sinful extremes must be avoided by the combination of humility and conviction outlined in this text.

“Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to Me. Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt.” Three primary festivals, geared to the cycle of the agricultural seasons, defined the structure of the annual Israelite worship calendar. The first coincided with the barley harvest in the early spring, the second the summer harvest of wheat and other cereal grains, and the third the fall ingathering of the fruit from the vineyards and orchards. Unlike Canaanite celebrations designed to placate gods and goddesses which personified various natural forces and focused on magical fertility re-enactments and rites, the biblical feasts acknowledged the gracious bounty of God and commemorated the history of His grace throughout the life of the nation. The verb ***“to celebrate a festival”*** translates the Hebrew term ***“haghah”*** which refers to



“The Kaaba in Mecca Encircled by Thousands of Muslim Pilgrims”

a pilgrimage or journey. It is used here because each of these festivals included the obligation to travel to the tabernacle or later the temple to ***“appear before the Sovereign Lord”*** (vs. 17, cf. 15) The Hebrew verb is derived from a root which meant *“to go round, encircle, dance a sacred dance with circular movement.”* (Cassutto, p. 302) The contemporary Arabic word *“hajj,”* used to describe the pilgrimage to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina is drawn from the same word. The Muslim *“hajj”* culminates with a circular procession around the sacred *“Kaaba,”* the black shrine in the heart of Mecca. The Hebrew also suggests the pilgrimage nature of these three festivals in the idiom which introduces the segment - ***“Three times a year.”*** The original actually reads *“three feet a year”* in reference to the travel of the pilgrims to the tabernacle/temple. The more detailed instructions of Deuteronomy 16 specify that everyone capable of doing so was to make the journey:

“And rejoice before the Lord your God at the place He will choose as a dwelling for His Name - you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, the Levites in your towns and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows living among you.” (Deuteronomy 16:11)

Where that was not feasible the minimum requirement was that every family be represented by the male head of the household - ***“Three times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign Lord.”*** (Vs.17) The Lord assured His people that their land would remain safe under His protection and would not be plundered by their enemies while they made the festival pilgrimages to worship Him:

“Three times a year all your men are to appear before the Sovereign Lord, the God of Israel. I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your territory, and no one will covet your land when you go up three times each year to appear before the Lord your God.” (Exodus 34:23-24)

The extent to which this command was observed varied widely throughout Israelite history. Even while the nation remained intact within the Promised Land only the faithful remnant obeyed the Lord’s instruction. So, for example, Hannah and Elkannah, the parents of Samuel, would make the journey to Shiloh the site of the tabernacle, ***“year by year”*** to worship the Lord (1 Samuel 1:1-17) The Book of Psalms designates Psalms 120 - 134 as *“Songs of Ascent,”* sung by the festival pilgrims as they climbed the hills toward the temple mount in Jerusalem. Luke 24:41



“The Child Jesus and His Family Approaching Jerusalem on a Passover Pilgrimage” by Gerhard Fugel

informs us that Mary and Joseph traveled to Jerusalem annually for the Feast of the Passover. The Book of Acts reports that on the occasion of Pentecost **“God fearing Jews from every nation under heaven”** had gathered in Jerusalem for the Festival of Harvest. The incredulous reaction of the crowds to the miracle of tongues provides a detailed description of the extent of the diaspora which had been re-gathered for the ancient pilgrim feast:

“Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia. Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs - we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” (Acts 2:8-12)

The division of the Kingdom after the death of Solomon and the establishment of rival sanctuaries at Bethel and Dan by Jeroboam fragmented the pilgrimages. The dispersion of the people throughout the ancient world, first by the Assyrians and later by the Babylonians, made it impossible, even after the reconstruction of the temple, for the great majority of Jews to continue the pilgrimages. Synagogues had largely replaced the temple as the focus of Judaism long before the final destruction of the

Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70. Nonetheless, despite great distances and ever changing political circumstances, massive numbers of pilgrims continued to obey the command of God, throughout the era of the second temple. In his classic three volume study of ancient Judaism, George Foot Moore describes the observance of the pilgrimage feasts during the transition from temple to synagogue in this way:

“The wide dispersion of the Jews had long since made obsolete the ancient laws which required the appearance of all males with an offering three times in the year. Even for dwellers of the remoter parts of Palestine this must have been impossible. But at these festivals multitudes from near and far streamed to Jerusalem. The concourse, especially at Passover, was enormous. Many residents of the remoter regions made the long journey but once in their lives, while others, not at all, but in the pilgrims from all lands the whole Jewish nation was ideally gathered at the feast, while those who remained at home, while those who remained at home, through the festival services of the synagogue, participated in spirit in the celebration.” (Moore, II, p. 12)



“Passover Pilgrims Entering Jerusalem”

Passover was always the most popular of the three annual feasts. Philo of Alexandria, a prominent Jewish philosopher of the first century A.D. tells of the multitudes which came from across the world to commemorate the ancient deliverance from Egypt. Some came by land and others by sea, from east, west, north and south. Josephus reports that for the Passover of 66 A.D. 255,600 Passover lambs were sacrificed from which he extrapolates that nearly 3,000,000 pilgrims had journeyed to Jerusalem that year. Such numbers exceed comprehension and indeed rabbinic tradition describes the ability of Jerusalem and her surrounding villages to accommodate these pilgrim

multitudes as the result of miraculous divine intervention.

The three annual feasts are introduced in a general way here since the opportunity to actually celebrate them remained in the distant future. Additional details concerning each of the festivals would subsequently be provided as the time for Israel's entry into the land of promise grew nearer (cf. Exodus 34:18-26; Leviticus 23:1-44; Numbers 28-29; Deuteronomy 16: 1-17).

“Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt. No one is to appear before Me empty handed.” -

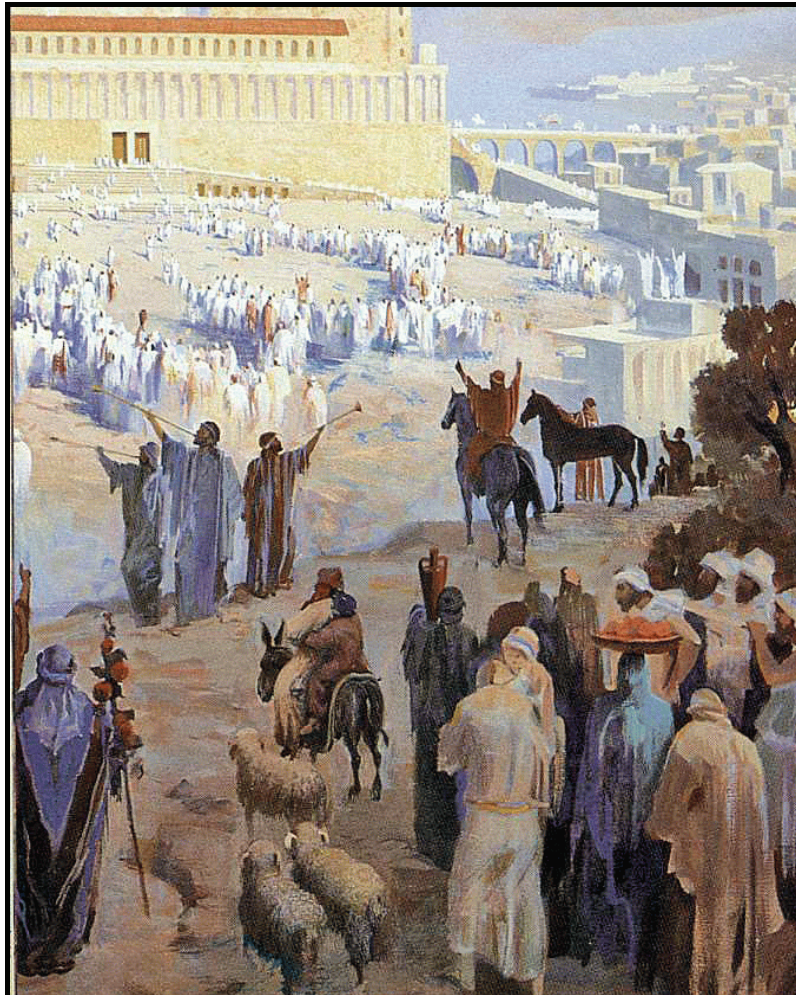
The Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Passover had been established on the night of the final plague of Egypt as God struck down the first born son of every household whose doorposts and lintel had not been marked

with the blood of a lamb. The original account of these events is recorded in Exodus 11 - 13. The text refers to that institution in the phrase ***“as I commanded you.”*** This is not new information but the restatement of a previous command in the context of the three annual feasts. Thus, the details of the Passover meal itself need not be reiterated here. The focus is on a correlation to the first harvest of the year. *“The festivals of Israel were never solely agricultural feasts. The Lord was not only the Provider of the harvest, He was also the God of history, and His saving provision for Israel is celebrated as well.”* ((Mackay, p. 404) The Hebrew month of Abib comes in the spring, during the current months of March and April. The Hebrew word *“abib”* means to be green or tender, referring the ripening of the barley crop which had been sown during the winter. This month was later renamed as *“Nisan”* during the Babylonian captivity. The seven day observance of the festival - ***“for seven days eat bread made without yeast”*** - also served to link the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the weekly Sabbath. The pilgrimage component of the observance is re-emphasized



***“The Passover of the Angel of Death”
by Rudolf Schäfer***

in the concluding admonition the ***“No one is to appear before Me empty handed.”*** ***“To appear before Me”*** is the customary way to describe a visit to the tabernacle or the temple, as the places where God had promised to dwell among His people in a unique manner. That presence was demonstrated by the visible manifestation of the ***“shekinah”*** - the fire cloud which rested over the sacred Ark of the Covenant within the Holy of Holies. The pilgrims who came before the presence of God in the Holy Place were to bring with them the appropriate offerings and sacrifices. By rabbinic definition these included a burnt offering, a festal offering and the offering of rejoicing. The specific nature of these offerings varied with the festival and the economic situation of the pilgrim. Portions of these offerings were given to the priests and others used by the families of the pilgrims for the festival meals. In the case of Passover, the primary animal sacrifice would have been the first-born lamb to be used in the ***“seder”*** meal (Cf. Exodus 34:18-20)



“Pilgrims Bearing the Firstfruits to the Temple”

“Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your fields.” - The Feast of Harvest was the second of Israel’s three great pilgrim feasts. It was also known as the ***“Feast of Weeks”*** (Hebrew - *“Shavuot”* - Deuteronomy 16:10) or the ***“Day of the First Fruits.”*** (Numbers 28:26) Greek speaking Jews later identified the festival as *“Pentecoste”* (*“the fiftieth”*) because it took place on ***“the day after the seventh week”*** (Leviticus 23:15-16), that is, fifty days from the day after the Sabbath of Passover. The English name *“Pentecost”* is derived from this Greek title. The Holy Spirit was poured out upon the apostles gathered in Jerusalem upon this day (Acts 2:1-13). In the Christian Church Year Pentecost is observed on the seventh Sunday after Easter. As a result of this connection, the rabbis, have traditionally viewed the Feast of Weeks as the culmination and conclusion of the Passover celebration. The Feast of Unleavened Bread marked the beginning of the harvest season with the ingathering of the first crop, the winter barley, while the Feast of Weeks celebrated the conclusion of the harvest with the ripening of the wheat. The link between the two feasts is further indicated by the fact that they are both seven days long. The end of the Festival of Weeks is noted by a distinct observance on the eighth day called *“Atzeret”* (*“concluding celebration”*). Within the Hebrew calendar, this festival is observed around the sixth of Sivan (May/June) depending of the same lunar cycle which had determined the timing of Passover. In the history of Israel, Passover recalled the deliverance from bondage in Egypt. The Feast of Weeks was associated with God’s establishment of His covenant with the nation at Mount Sinai and the gift of the Torah as the foundation of the covenant. Nahum Sarna traces the background of this tradition as follows:

“The association of Shavuot with the establishment of the covenant between God and Israel, although not explicit in the Bible, is exceedingly ancient. Exodus 19:1 has the Israelites arriving at Sinai on the new moon of the third month after the Exodus, that is, in the month of Sivan. A report in 2 Chronicles 15:10-13 tells that King Asa of Judah (913-873 B.C.E.) called a great assembly of the people “in the third month” for a national ceremony of covenant renewal. The pilgrimage festival of Shavuot, falling in that month, would have been the most likely occasion for that ceremony. The Jewish sectarian community at Qumran by the Dead Sea (destroyed by the Romans ca. 70 C.E.) annually held a “covenant feast” on Shavuot, doubtless following an ancient and widespread tradition. The Book of Jubilees 6:17 (2nd Century B.C.E.) explicitly identifies Shavuot with the giving of the Torah, although on a differing date from the one accepted by normative Judaism.” (Sarna, p. 145)

Dr. Sarna's reference to the apocryphal Book of Jubilees provides an intriguing glimpse into Judaism's perspective on this festival near the end of the inter-testamental period. Jubilees was written about just before 100 B.C. It clearly combines the giving of the Law at Sinai with the harvest dimension of the feast. It further contends that the Israel's Feast of Weeks was the restoration of an annual celebration which began with the creation of the universe.

“Therefore, it is ordained and written in the heavenly tablets that they (Israel) should observe the Feast of Shavuot in this month, once per year, in order to renew the covenant in all respects, year by year. And all of this feast was celebrated in heaven from the day of creation until the days of Noah, twenty-six jubilees and five weeks of years. And Noah and his children kept it for seven jubilees and one week of years until the day of the death of Noah. And from the day of the death of Noah, his sons corrupted it until the days of Abraham, and they ate blood. But Abraham alone kept it. And Isaac and Jacob his sons kept it until your days; but in your days, the Children of Israel forgot it until you renewed it for them on this mountain. And you, command the Children of Israel so that they might keep this feast in all their generations as a commandment to them. One day per year in this month they shall celebrate the feast, for it is the feast of Shavuot and it is the feast of the first fruits. This feast is twofold and of two natures. Just as it is written and engraving concerning it, observe it. This is because I have written it in the book of the first law, which I wrote for you so that you might observe it in each of its appointed times, one day per year. And I have told you its sacrificial offering, so that the Children of Israel might remember them and observe them in their generations in this month one day each year.” (Jubilees 6:17-22)

The purpose of the Harvest Festival was to acknowledge God as the source of the harvest bounty and celebrate His goodness by offering to Him the firstfruits of the harvest. The rituals for the feast are described in detail in Leviticus 23:15-22 and Deuteronomy 26:1-11. This festival is a celebration of the richness of the land of Promise which God had bestowed upon His chosen people. By setting apart the firstfruits of the harvest and then presenting those offerings at the temple which God had set apart as His dwelling place, the people were confessing the intrinsic holiness of the land which their God had given them in fulfillment of His covenant. Deuteronomy specified seven particular crops as manifestations of the land's unique

abundance:

“For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land - a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing.” (Deuteronomy 8:7-9)

Traditionally all seven of these species were included in the Shavuot offerings at the temple, seven representing the perfect abundance of the land of promise. They were placed in a basket and carried into the Court of the Priests before the Altar of Sacrifice upon the shoulder of the pilgrim. There they would be “waved,” that is, raised and lowed, before the Lord. The basket would then be placed at the base of the altar and the suppliant would prostrate himself upon the pavement in prayer, thanking God for the abundance of the harvest. When the various crops began to ripen, the farmer would mark the earliest bud or bloom as the firstfruit by tying it with a reed. Thus the firstfruits offering could be literal rather than merely symbolic. The firstfruits offering was called “*bikkurim*” in Hebrew. Rabbi Chaim Richman describes the festive pilgrims’ journey to the Temple:

“Streams of pilgrims made their way to Jerusalem from towns and villages throughout the land. Many families traveled by foot, with little children in tow; some rode camels and donkeys; and some even rode in wagons and chariots. As they trekked through the gold and green fields ripe with the bountiful harvest, the land was literally teeming with excitement and anticipation. In each district along the route, all pilgrims from the outlying villages and towns gathered



“The Feast of Shavuot”



“King Agrippa as a Shavout Pilgrim”

together in the city of the local Assembly Head, who was responsible for the pilgrimage. There, the pilgrims spent the night sleeping in the streets under the open sky...They were awakened at dawn as the first rays of sunlight began to illuminate the sky; by the cry of the overseer: “Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the Lord our God.” (Jeremiah 31:6) They resumed their journey to Jerusalem in a large entourage - “In the multitude of people is the king’s honor” (Proverbs 14:28) and as the caravans of people drew near to the holy Temple, an ox whose horns were overlaid with gold was led before them, the music of flutes accompanying them, and they sang: “I was glad when they said unto me, ‘Let us go into the House of the Lord.’” (Psalm 122:1) Near the outskirts of the city, a delegation was sent ahead to the holy Temple to announce their arrival. All the assistant priests, Levites, and the officers of the Temple would go out to greet them, and all the cities tradespeople would cease work to stand and greet them as they entered the gates of the city. As the entourage entered the city, the pilgrims joyously sang: ‘Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem!’ (Psalm 122:2)...By bringing the firstfruits to the Temple, the entire nation expressed

heartfelt gratitude for God’s bounty; by presenting them to Him, a circle was closed as nature’s yield was returned to its origin.” (Richman, pp. 84-85)

The importance of the festival with the national consciousness of Israel is illustrated by the fact that King Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, would join the pilgrims in presenting their baskets of produce before the altar in the Temple. The

Mishnah reports that the King would stand amid all of the commoners with his basket upon his shoulder, awaiting his turn to make his offering to the Lord. The rabbis use the episode to illustrate the fact that the festival served to unite all of God's people as one despite their social or economic standing.

In addition to the presentation of the offering of the seven species, Shavuot included a sacrifice that was unique in all the rituals of the Temple. The instructions for this offering were given in Leviticus 23:

“Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord. From wherever you live bring two loaves made of two tenths of an ephah of fine flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of the first fruits to the Lord.” (Leviticus 23:17)

The unique feature of this Shavuot offering was the yeast. This was the only time when leaven was ever permitted within the Temple. The contrast between the unleavened bread of Passover and the leavened bread of Shavuot was intended to express the difference between the status of the Israelites in Egypt and in the Promised Land. In Egypt they were impoverished slaves who had only the scraps that fell from their masters' tables. In the Promised Land they were surrounded by the abundance of God. They had been given a homeland ***“flowing with milk and honey.”*** The Shavuot pilgrims were instructed to recall that contrast as they stood before the altar. They were to recite these words:

“My father was a wandering Aramean and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. They we cried out to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that You, O Lord, have given me.” (Deuteronomy 26:5-9)

In modern Judaism the *“milk and honey”* of the Promised Land is recalled by the eating of cheese cakes and dairy products as a part of the celebration of Shavuot. The association of this festival is further reinforced by the rabbinic tradition that King

David, the ruler under whom Israel first became the undisputed sovereign of the entire land of promise, was born and died during the Festival of Weeks.



“The Presentation of the Shavuot Loaves As a Wave Offering Before the Altar”

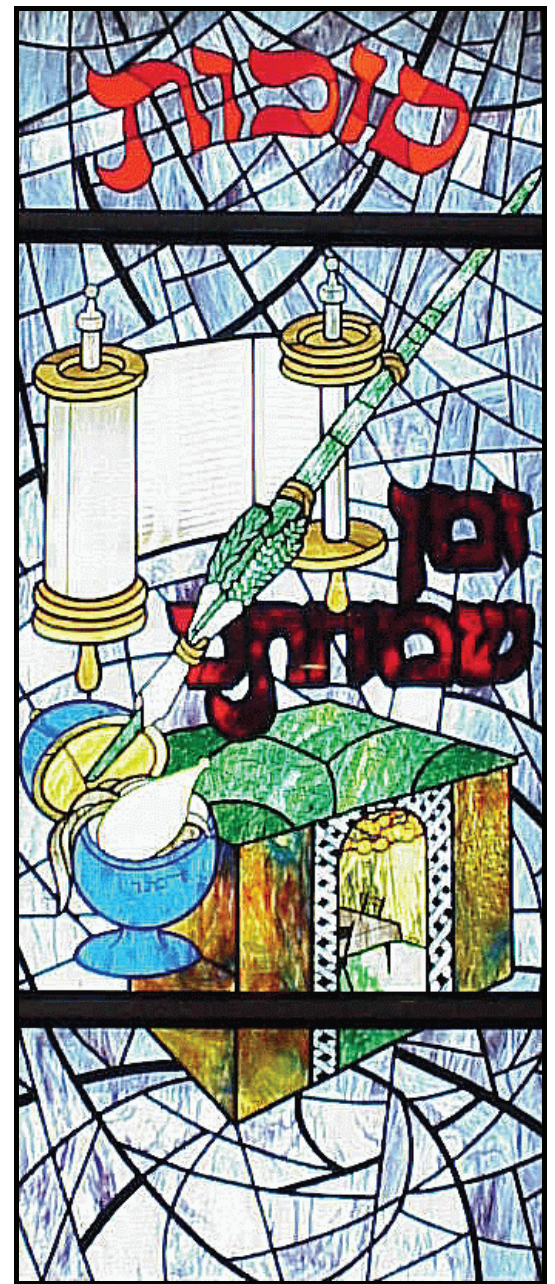
Following the Roman destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in A.D. 70 the themes of Shavuot necessarily shifted away from the firstfruits of an abundant harvest to the celebration of the gift of the Torah and the establishment of the national covenant at Sinai. *“The traditional festival of Pentecost as the birthday of Torah - the time our law was given - when Israel became a constitutional body and a distinguished people, remained the sole celebration after the exile.”* (JE, IX, p. 593) In some branches of Judaism it became customary to remain awake throughout the night on the eve of the festival reading selected passages from throughout the historical books of the Old Testament. This practice was a re-action to the tradition that the people overslept at Sinai on the morning they were to come before the

Lord and Moses had to rouse the encampment to keep their meeting with God. In some Hebrew communities the Shavuot loaves were braided to look like a ladder to commemorate the steps which Moses climbed up the mountain to approach God upon the summit. By the second century A.D., the rabbis had officially ruled that the Torah was presented at Sinai on the 6th day of Sivan, coinciding with the beginning of the Feast. With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Shavuot again became a harvest festival among the Israeli settlers, although most often in a completely secular and nationalist context.

“Celebrate the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field.” - The Feast of Ingathering was the third and final celebration in the annual cycle of pilgrim festivals. This observance marked the end of agricultural year and the final harvests of the vineyards, olive groves and remaining grain fields before the coming of the winter rains. It was celebrated in the Hebrew month of “Tisri” (October) from the 15th thru the 21st. In Leviticus 23:34 this feast is designated as ***“the Lord’s Feast of Tabernacles”*** (Hebrew - “sukkot”):

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites: ‘On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the Lord’s Feast of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days. The first day is a sacred assembly; do no regular work. For seven days present offerings made to the Lord by fire, and on the eighth day hold a sacred assembly and present an offering made to the Lord by fire. It is the closing assembly. Do no regular work.’” (Leviticus 23:33-36; cf. Deuteronomy 16:13-15)

The most prominent feature of Sukkot was the practice of constructing temporary shelters - or booths - in which to live during the seven days of the feast. This is the practice from which the festival takes its name. In its original context, these booths may have been the improvised shelters used by the farmers to protect themselves and/or their crops from the Fall weather during their often frantic efforts to complete the last of the harvest. These temporary shelters became Sukkot’s link to the covenant history of Israel as a reminded of the forty year wandering in the wilderness throughout which the people lived in tents as they made their long journey through the desert. The prominent 18th Century Talmud scholar Rabbi Elijah Gaon argued that the dates of Sukkot were determined by Israel’s apostasy with the Golden Calf and the subsequent removal of the Shekinah as the protecting fire/cloud over the encampment.



“The Feast of Tabernacles”

That divine presence did not return until the construction of the Tabernacle. The respected Rabbi concluded that Sukkot coincided with the return of the Shekinah and the sheltered security which it provided the Children of Israel. Other contend that Sukkot originated in the days of Abraham. This tradition is also reflect in the apocryphal book of Jubilees which links Sukkot to Abraham's celebration over the birth of his son Isaac:

“And he built and altar there to the Lord who delivered him and made him rejoice in the land of his sojourn. And he celebrated a feast of rejoicing in this month, seven days, near the altar which he built by the well of the Oath. And he built booths for himself and for his servants on that festival. And he observed the feast of booths on the earth...And he blessed his Creator who created him in his generation because by His will He created him for He knew and He perceived that from him there would be a righteous planting from eternal generations and a holy seed from him so that he might be like the One who made everything. For he blessed and rejoiced and called the name of this festival ‘the Festival of the Lord,’ a joy acceptable to God Most High. And We eternally blessed him and his seed who are after him in every generation of the earth because he observed this feast in its appointed time according to the testimony of the heavenly tablets. Therefore it is ordained in the heavenly tablets concerning Israel that they will be observers of the Feast of Booths seven days with joy in the seventh month which is acceptable before the Lord as an eternal law in all their generations throughout all time, year by year. And there is no limit of days for this because it is ordained forever concerning Israel so that they should observe it and that they should dwell in tents and that they should place crowns on their heads and so that they should take branches of leaves and willow from the stream. And Abraham took branches of palm trees and fruit of good trees and each day of the days he used to go around the altar with branches. Seven times per day, in the morning he was praising and giving thanks to God for all things.” (Jubilees 17:20-31)



“Modern Sukkoth Observance in Jerusalem With the Luvav and the Etrog”

No matter which theory of origin one subscribes to, all are agreed that the prominence of the booths in the Sukkoth observance is designed to be a reminder of the wilderness wandering of Israel and the blessing of the abundant land which God had bestowed upon them. This is the explicit testimony of Leviticus:

“Live in booths for seven days: all native born Israelites are to live in booths so that your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I led them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God. So Moses announced to the Israelites the appointed feasts of the Lord.”
(Leviticus 23:42-44)

The most distinctive Sukkot practice beyond the construction of the booths themselves is the waving of the four species (Hebrew - “*lulav* and *etrog*”). This wave offering was commanded in Leviticus 23:40 - ***“On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days.”*** The “*lulav*” is a bundle of branches from the date palm, the willow and the myrtle trees. The “*etrog*” is the fruit of a citron tree.



“An Orthodox Rabbi With Luvav and Etrog Praying at the Wailing Wall for the Restoration of the Holy Temple”

Each of these trees require abundant water to flourish and grow. Their use in this festival signified the bounty of the promised land and the abundance of the water with which God had provided for His people. Amid the deserts of the Middle East this message was pertinent and powerful. In the days of the Temple these offerings were presented before the Lord as the people gave thanks for the abundance of the land. Large willows were mounted at the corners of the great altar and every morning throughout the seven days a priest would lead a procession of pilgrims from the Temple to the Spring of Siloam where a large golden flask would be filled with crystal clear water. The procession would return to the Temple amid the blast of the trumpets, surrounded by joyful throngs of dancing and singing worshipers. The water would then be poured out upon the corners of the altar.

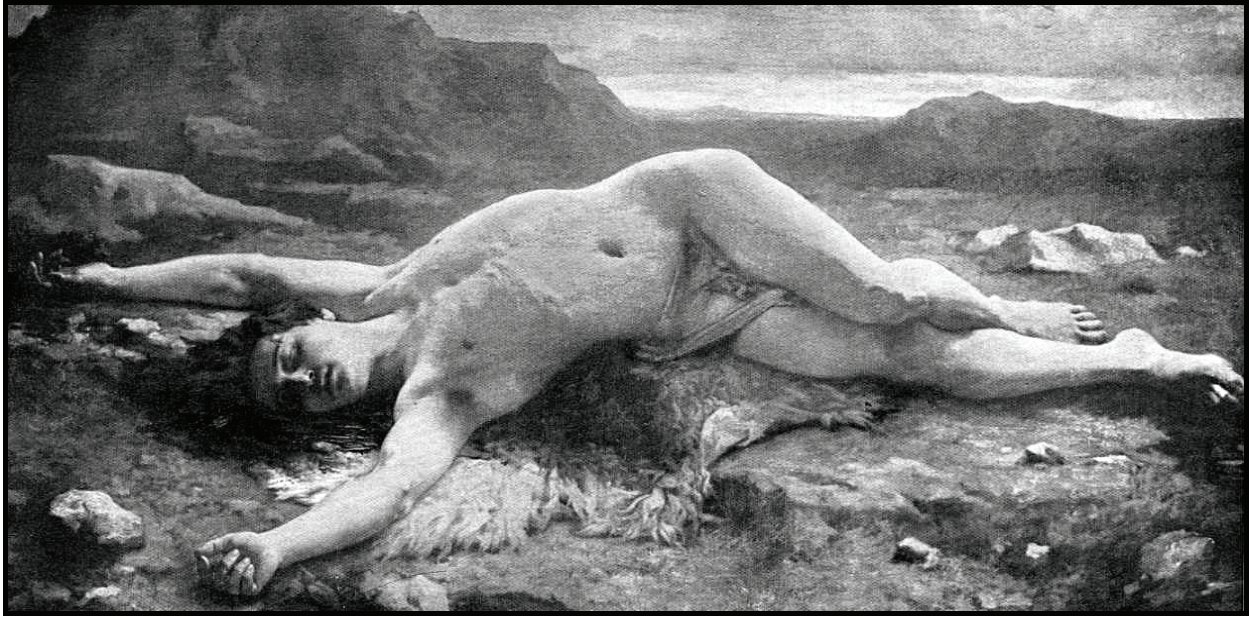
festival combines the celebration of Israel’s covenant history with the bounty of God’s blessings in the Promised Land in the characteristic manner of these feasts. Rejoicing in the gracious goodness of God, demonstrated throughout all the generations and evident in the fulfillment of His promise to bless Israel with a land flowing with milk and honey is the consistent theme of all three of the pilgrimage feasts. The ceremonies and sacrifices at the Temple served to exemplify that joy in a way that pointed forward to the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promises in the coming of the Messiah.

Sukkot may be the most joyful of the three pilgrim feasts. The harvest had been safely gathered in and the people could relax until the agricultural cycle began again. The

“Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to Me along with anything containing yeast. The fat of My festival offerings must not be kept until morning. Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the House of the Lord your God. Do not cook a young



“The Celebration of the Priest’s Return to the Temple With Water from the Spring”



“The Blood of Abel” by Camille Bellanger

goat in its mother’s milk.” - The segment which established the festivals concludes four ritual regulations for the foregoing celebrations and sacrifices in general. The contrasts set forth in these examples is intended to highlight the symbolism of life and death which was the essence of the sacrificial system. In the first instance, the mingling of the blood of the offering with anything containing yeast is forbidden - **“Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to Me with anything containing yeast.”** **“Blood”** and **“yeast”** were polar opposites in the symbolism of Hebrew ritual. Blood signified life. Yeast was the symbol of death. The dietary regulations in Leviticus - reflected in the *“kosher”* laws of contemporary Judaism - categorically prohibited the consumption of blood in any form. The prohibition and the severe punishment proscribed for its violation were explained in this way:

“For the life of a creature is in the blood and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves upon the altar. It is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life. Therefore I say to the Israelites; ‘None of you may eat blood. Nor may an alien living among you eat blood.’” (Leviticus 17:11-12)

This understanding had prevailed from the beginning as God declared to the murderer Cain - ***“Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.”*** (Genesis 4:10-11) The blood sacrifices of the old covenant were designed to endlessly reinforce the message that sinful man could only

be delivered from the death curse of sin by the shedding of innocent blood. Each of those sacrifices across all the centuries was a proclamation that the Messiah would give His life - shed His blood - to win forgiveness and life for His people. The New Testament explains it this way:

“This is why the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. He said: ‘This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you to keep.’ In the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness...But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins...We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all...Therefore



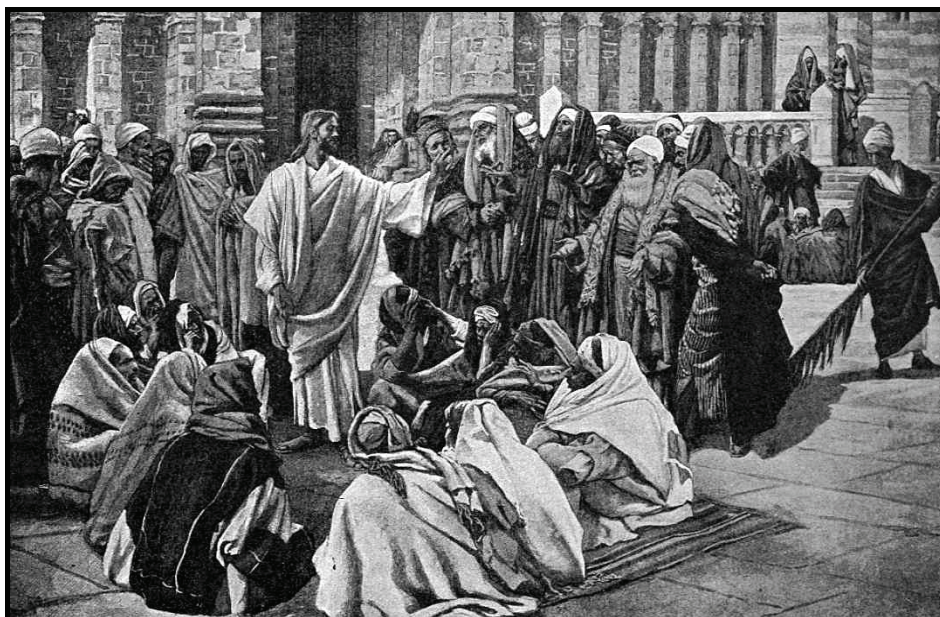
“The High Priest Scattering Blood Upon the Ark on the Day of Atonement”

brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.” (Hebrews 9:18-22; 10:3,10,19,22)

As blood was the symbol of forgiveness and life, leaven, or yeast, (Hebrew - “*se’or*” - leavened dough - “*hametz*”) was the ritual symbol of death and corruption. This is most probably because of the process of fermentation - equated with decay - through which the yeast does its work, causing the dough to rise. The manner in which yeast would permeate an entire batch of dough became a symbol of the contagious corruption of evil. This ritual symbolism was carried over into the New Testament in both the preaching of Jesus and His apostles.

“Be careful,’ Jesus said to them, ‘Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.’ They discussed this among themselves and said, ‘It is because we didn’t bring any bread.’ Aware of their discussion Jesus asked... ‘How is it that you don’t understand that I am not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.’ Then they understood that He was not telling them to be on their guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” (Matthew 16:5-12; cf. Mark 8:14-21; Luke 12:1)

“Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast works



“Jesus Confronting the Scribes and Pharisees in the Temple” by Tissot



“The Pharisees Accusing Jesus” by J. Tissot

through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast - as you really are. For Christ, our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.” (1 Corinthians 5:6-8)

“You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the One who called you. A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough. I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view.”
(Galatians 5:7-10)

With the single exception of the firstfruits offering at the Feast of Tabernacles noted above, all of the grain offerings presented to the Lord were to be completely without yeast. To insure that no particle of yeast could remain within the grain or flour it was to be seasoned with the purifying agent of salt. *“Salt was its opposite and was never to be absent from the altar burnt offering, representing the incorruptible imperishableness of Jehovah’s covenant. Honey as liable to ferment also was excluded from the altar burnt offerings.”* (Fausset, p. 210) The instruction for the grain offerings are detailed in Leviticus 2. Those instructions specify:

“Every grain offering you bring to the Lord must be made without yeast, for you are not to burn any yeast or honey in an offering made to the Lord by fire. You may bring them to the Lord as an offering of

the firstfruits, but they are not to be offered on the altar as a pleasing aroma. Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings. (Leviticus 2:11-13; cf. Leviticus 7:12)

The prophet Amos illustrated Israel's contempt for the Word and command of God by their willingness to defy Him by using leavened bread in the sacrifices offered at the rival shrines which had been established to keep the northern tribes from journeying to the Jerusalem temple:

“Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years. Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings - boast about them you Israelites, for this is what you love to do,” declares the Sovereign Lord. (Amos 4:4-5)

Any combination of the blood of the sacrifice (life) with leaven (death) would have contradicted the entire symbolism of the ritual. Good and evil, corruption and purity cannot coexist before the Lord. Thus the categorical prohibition of mingling the blood and the leaven which is listed here.

The second of the four ritual regulations deals with the fat of the festival offerings:



“King Jeroboam Worships at Bethel and Gilgal” by Fragonard

“The fat of My festival offerings must not be kept until morning.” The same concern is expressed in Exodus 12:9-10; 29:34; Leviticus 7:15; 8:32; 22:30; and Deuteronomy 16:4. The concern here is greater than a matter of simple hygiene. The blood sacrifice is the offering of life to the Lord. If the choicest portion of the sacrifice, the ***“fat of My festival offerings,”*** were to be kept overnight - because of personal convenience or perhaps to extend the celebration - the process of putrefaction and decay would have already begun and that which was to have been the sign of life would be mingled with death. This possibility was to be zealously avoided. This understanding would also explain why these two stipulations - the prohibitions of yeast and keeping sacrifices overnight - are given together. They both deal with the same subject, namely the careful distinction between life and death symbols in the ritual. At the same time, the principle expressed in the prohibition of gathering more manna than could be consumed in one day (Exodus 16:15-20) could also be at work here. Israel was to trust in the Lord for her daily bread each day. *“The manna incident suggests another interpretation...The prohibition of hoarding is a test of Israel’s faith in Providence. Perhaps for sacrifices too one must eat the meat one shares with Yahweh heartily, without concern for the morrow.”* (Propp II, p. 397)

“Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God.” - The offerings of God’s people were to be the expression of their gratitude to Him and the acknowledgment that all of the land’s abundance was a gracious gift from Him. For such an offering to be authentic it must not only be the firstfruits of the harvest, but the very ***“best of the firstfruits of your soil.”*** The Hebrew text emphasizes the issue of quality in its deliberately repetitive language - *“the first of the first fruits.”* The ceremony for the presentation of the first fruits at Pentecost was designed to express and acknowledge the truth that the Israelites were unworthy of all that which the Lord had given them in the Promised Land. That offering could only be genuine if it actually was the very best of the first fruit of the harvest given spontaneously as an expression of love and gratitude to God. Anything less reduced the entire process to a legalistic charade. The use of the personal pronoun in the identification of God - ***“the Lord your God”*** stressed the personal relationship which was the context of the gift. God has chosen this people as His own. He had blessed them beyond their wildest dreams, despite persistent disobedience and defiance. Their voluntary gifts were to be an expression of their appreciation for God’s covenant blessings. The parallel pronouns ***“your land”*** and ***“your God”*** highlight the gift of the fertile land of promise as a key component in that relationship.

“Do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk.” - The concern for the clear distinction between the symbolism of life and death in the sacrificial rituals is

expressed once again in what may seem to us to be a bizarre prohibition. The consumption of a young goat which had been cooked in its own mother's milk was a form of fertility magic among the Canaanite peoples in and around Palestine. The ritual consumption of the kid born by a fertile womb which had been boiled in the very milk produced by the lactating breasts of its own mother was perceived to be a highly potent combination which would compel the gods to bless the worshiper with enhanced fertility. Cuneiform tablets excavated at Ras Shamra near the ancient Mesopotamian city of Ugarit instructed the suppliant to bring the mother's milk to a boil seven times over the fire before eating the flesh of the mother's womb. Aside from the foolishness of all such nonsense, these rituals constituted a grotesque reversal of the natural order of life and death. The essence of the magic, and of its prohibition here, is that the milk must come from the young goat's own mother. This is not a general prohibition against mixing milk and meat, as it has been understood among orthodox Jews. Clement of Alexandria, a 2nd Century Christian commentator, noted that such practices are contrary to nature itself, reversing the order of life and death: *"Our physical nature rebels against making the nourishment of the living a garnish for the dead or the cause of life an accessory to the death of the body."* (Lienhardt, p. 118)



"The Angel of the Lord Appearing To Manoah" by Jean Laurens

"See, I am sending an angel to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared." - The regulations establishing the pilgrimage festivals and defining their observance presumed the settlement of Israel in the Promised Land. Accordingly this segment concludes with the assurance that God will bring them into that land and enable them to conquer its inhabitants if they remain faithful to Him and His covenant. Particular emphasis is placed upon the insidious threat posed by the corruption and idolatry of the Canaanites. Any accommodation to their wickedness would contradict Israel's covenant with the Lord and the faithful obedience to that



***“The Angel of the Lord Appears to Moses” by
Nicolas Froment***

covenant which was the concomitant of national blessing.

The central component of God’s assurance to His people is the presence of the Angel of the Lord ***“to guard you along the way and bring you to the place I have prepared.”*** It was the Angel of the Lord who had appeared to Moses at the burning bush. This title is one of the Old Testament’s primary designations for the second Person of the divine Trinity, the pre-incarnate Christ. (Cf. Notes pp. 71-74) Accordingly, with these precious words of promise, God is assuring His people of His presence among them in the person of His Son. Alfred Edersheim, a 19th century Hebrew convert to Christianity, offers this poignant summary of the profound significance of God’s presence among His people in the person of His Son:

“The judgements which the Lord enjoins upon His people are appropriately followed by promises (xxiii. 20-33), in which, as their King

and Lord, He undertakes their guidance and protection, and their possession of the land He had assigned to them. First and foremost, assurance is given them of the personal presence of Jehovah Himself, in that ANGEL, in Whom is the Name of the Lord (vs.20). This was no common angel, however exalted, but a manifestation of Jehovah Himself, prefigurative of and preparatory to His manifestation in the flesh in the Person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For all that is here said of Him is attributed to the Lord Himself in Exodus xxiii, 21; while in Exodus xxxiii, 14, 15, He is expressly designated as ‘the Face’ of Jehovah. Accordingly, all obedience is to be shown to His guidance, and every contact with idolatry and idolaters avoided. In that case, the Lord would fulfill every good and gracious promise to His people, and cause them to possess the land in all its extent.” (Edersheim, p. 119)

The crucial role of the Angel of the Lord throughout the Old Testament - from Genesis to Malachi - defines the unique identity of the second member of the Holy Trinity as the consistent Mediator between God and men and the nature of the divine/human Savior as the decisive manifestation of God's gracious resolve to accomplish the salvation of fallen humanity. In his classic 1854 study, *The Christology of the Old Testament*, E.W. Hengstenberg observed that the activities of the Angel of the Lord demonstrate the perfect unity of Scripture and the anticipatory character of the entire Old Testament:

“The New Testament distinguishes between the hidden God (‘deus absconditus’) and the revealed God (‘deus revelatus’) - the Son or Logos - connected with the former by oneness of nature who from everlasting, and even at the creation itself - filled up the immeasurable distance between the Creator and the creation - who has been the Mediator in all God’s relations to the world - who at all times, even before He became a man in Christ, has been the Light of the World, and to whom, specially, was committed the direction of the structure of the old covenant. It is evident that this doctrine stands in the closest connection to Christology, that it forms, indeed, its theological foundation and groundwork... If the Word be indeed with God - we cannot avoid ascribing to God the desire of revealing Himself; nor, in such a case, can we conceive that He should content Himself with inferior forms of revelation - with merely transitory manifestations. We can recognize in these, only temporary preparations, and preludes of the highest and truest revelation ... Sound Christian theology has discovered the outline of such a distinction between the hidden and revealed God, in many passages of the Old Testament, in which mention is made of the Angel or Messenger of God.” (Hengstenberg, I, p. 80)



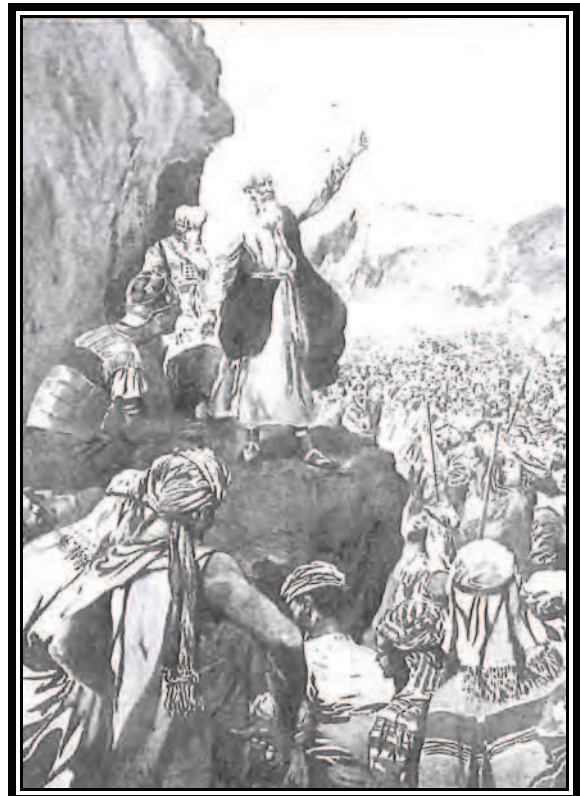
“In the Beginning Was the Word” - Dore

The Angel of the Lord would be sent by God - ***“I am sending an Angel.”*** This divine sending suggests the bestowal of a gracious gift. The presence of this Angel is a demonstration of God’s concern for His people. The Angel will not merely accompany the people, He will lead them - ***“ahead of you.”*** In addition to the wondrous pillar of cloud/fire which had led the people to Mount Sinai, from henceforth as they set out from Sinai, God will participate more intimately in leading them through the Angel of the Lord. In this instance, the Angel of the Lord will serve as the guardian and guide of the Children of Israel - ***“to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared.”*** The capacity of the Angel of the Lord to carry out these tasks further suggests His divine power and wisdom. God designates their destination as ***“the place I have prepared.”*** The phrase is redolent with the assurance that God has already done everything that is necessary for their possession of the land of promise. The parallel text in Deuteronomy specifies - ***“a land filled with flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant.”*** (Deuteronomy 6:10-11) They would receive this land not because of their own preparations, but by God’s plan and purpose for them. The Hebrew noun ***“makom”*** (***“place”***) is typically used of a sacred place. Its use here conveys the concept of Palestine as a Holy Land set apart by God for the particular use of His own people.

Verse 21

Pay attention to Him and listen to what He says. Do not rebel against Him; He will not forgive your rebellion since My Name is in Him.

“Pay attention to Him and listen to what He says.” - The Hebrew verb translated as ***“pay attention”*** literally means ***“be guarded.”*** Thus the phrase balances the response of the people to the role of the Lord’s angel. ***“The messenger comes from the divine authority, and so is an extension of the divine presence. The command has about it a sense of urgent tension.”*** (Durham, p. 314) Just as He guards you, so you must guard yourselves to pay heed to



***“Moses Admonishing Rebellious Israel” -
19th Century Bible Engraving***

His words. ***“Listen to what He says”*** carries the unmistakable connotation of obedience. R.J. Rushdooney accurately translates this phrase as *“Beware of Him and obey His voice.”* The Word of the Lord through the Angel of the Lord cannot be ignored or disobeyed without the most serious consequences. This was literally a matter of life and death.

“Success requires obedience. The people could not hope to enjoy God’s benefits, including His abiding protection, if they tried to make decisions on their own. Could they be so stupid and headstrong as to try to arrange for their own invasion of the promised land rather than following faithfully His leading. Absolutely! ... Knowing their capability to disobey, God reminded them sternly that only through obedience to His leaders and His word would they prosper in the conquest of Canaan.” (Stuart, p. 543)

“Do not rebel against Him” - This verb means to defy or to rise up against authority. *“This verb is overwhelmingly used of rebellion against God.”* (Sarna, p. 148) This is the word which Moses would later use to describe the peoples’ refusal to enter Canaan:

“Only do not rebel against the Lord and do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone but the Lord is with us ... The Lord said to Moses, ‘How long will these people treat Me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in Me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?’” (Numbers 14:9,11)

The psalmist repeatedly used the same word to characterize Israel’s disobedience in the wilderness:

“But they continued to sin against Him, rebelling in the desert against the Most High ... How often they rebelled against Him in the desert, and grieved Him in the wasteland. Again and again they put God to the test; they vexed the Holy One of Israel ... But they put God to the test and rebelled against the Most High; they did not keep His statutes.” (Psalm 78: 17, 40, 56)

“He will not forgive your rebellion since My Name is in Him.” - A righteous and

holy God cannot tolerate wilful disobedience of His Word. Those who choose to misunderstand divine mercy as permissiveness have made a fatal error. Because the Angel of the Lord is God Himself his actions will necessarily reflect the nature of God, including righteousness and holiness. When Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic, His enemies recognized that action as an assertion of divinity: ***“When Jesus saw their faith, He said***



“Who Can Forgive Sins But God Alone?” by Burnand



“Jesus Heals the Paralytic” by Carl Bloch

to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ Now some of the teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ‘Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone?’” (Mark 2:5-7)

The phrase ***“My Name is in Him”*** is virtually an assertion of equivalence. The Angel of the Lord and God are one and the same. The profound significance of names and their link to the identity of the individual has already been indicated in Exodus by the disclosure of God’s sacred Name to Moses at the burning bush. (3:13-15). This Hebrew usage is typical of the Semitic languages of the ancient Middle East.

“The angel is divine. This is what is in effect said in the phrase, ‘My Name is in Him.’ ‘Name’ represents the revelation of the character and attributes of God (6:3, 34:5) It is virtually a synonym for God’s effective presence. Such an idiom was not exclusively Hebrew. In Mesopotamia, the name of the god was frequently used for the god himself Here we have a unique dignity accorded to the angel as manifesting all that God has made known regarding Himself. That is why the angel can command complete obedience and trust; his presence is the equivalent of the presence of God Himself.” (Mackay, p. 408)

Verse 22

If you listen carefully to all that He says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you.

“If you listen carefully to all that He says and do all that I say...” - Having defined the obedience which was Israel’s responsibility in the national covenant which God was establishing with them at Sinai, the Lord proceeded to define the blessings which He promised to bestow upon His faithful people. That promise is introduced with a summary repetition of the previous stipulations and reiterates the reality that in this bilateral agreement both sides had responsibilities to fulfill. Cassutto stresses the conditional nature of the promises which follow with his translation *“For only if you listen carefully...”* Scholars note that the structure of the text follows the pattern of secular *“suzerainty treaties”* between a king and his vassals. These are not agreements between equals (parity covenant) but a commitment by one who is more powerful to protect and defend those who remain loyal to him. That is the concept embodied here. The language of the phrase restates the previous stipulations of obedience, notably interchanging the pronouns referring to the Angel and to God, thereby indicating once again that they are one and the same - ***“listen carefully to all that He says and do all that I say.”*** The grammar of the Hebrew text is particularly forceful. *“The ‘if - then’ clause is emphatic. In Hebrew when a conditional sentence is followed by an infinitive absolute/imperfect construction, it lays great weight on the action.”* (McKay, p. 125) The dramatic parallelism of the following phrases - ***“enemy - enemies; oppose -oppose”*** also serves to add a particular forcefulness to the sentence. All of the promised blessings are conditional upon Israel’s consistent obedience to the Word of God.

“I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you.” - As the covenant people of God, the Israelites would enjoy His protection. The Lord had chosen this relatively small, weak nation to play a unique role in His plan of salvation for humanity. If they remained faithful to His command God promised to identify with them. This is the commitment inherent in the parallelism of the text. Their enemies would become His enemies and God Himself would oppose those who dared to oppose them. The Lord would destroy those who opposed or oppressed them. This national commitment was unique in human history. It had never happened before nor would it ever be repeated again. The Israelite theocracy was designed to enable them to carry out their crucial role as the custodians of the promise of salvation. God would enable the Israelites to conquer the land of Canaan, and grant them victory over the larger more powerful nations who presently occupied the land. God’s destruction of those nations through Israel was not arbitrary. It was, instead righteous judgement upon the wickedness and corruption of the Canaanites. The text is particularly careful to indicate that this special covenant was conditional upon obedience: *“Careful listening to the law was required here, as was obedience to ‘all that I say.’ Then and only then would God be ‘an enemy to your enemies’ and oppose those who oppose you.”* (Stuart, p. 543)

Verse 23

My Angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out.

“My Angel will go ahead of you...” - The conquest and extermination of the various Canaanite nations would be the righteous judgement of God upon cultures which had become notorious in the ancient world for their decadence and corruption. God had already indicated the nature of that judgement in His promise to Abraham centuries before.

“In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure ... To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates - the land of the Kenites, Kenizites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.” (Genesis 15:16-19)

The six particular nations mentioned are not an exhaustive listing of the occupants of the land. They merely represent all the numerous peoples who were included under the more general heading of Canaanites. Jewish tradition came to refer to the seven nations of Canaanites, adding the Gergashites to this list.

“The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power He led them out of that country, He endured their conduct for about forty years in the desert, He overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to His people as their inheritance.” (Acts 13:17-19; cf. Deuteronomy 7:1; Joshua 3:10; 24:11; Nehemiah 9:8)

The Canaanites derive their name from Canaan, the son of Ham. Many of the various Canaanite tribes are included in the Table of Nations in Genesis 10:6,15.



“The Angel of the Lord Appears to Gideon” by Austin Abbey

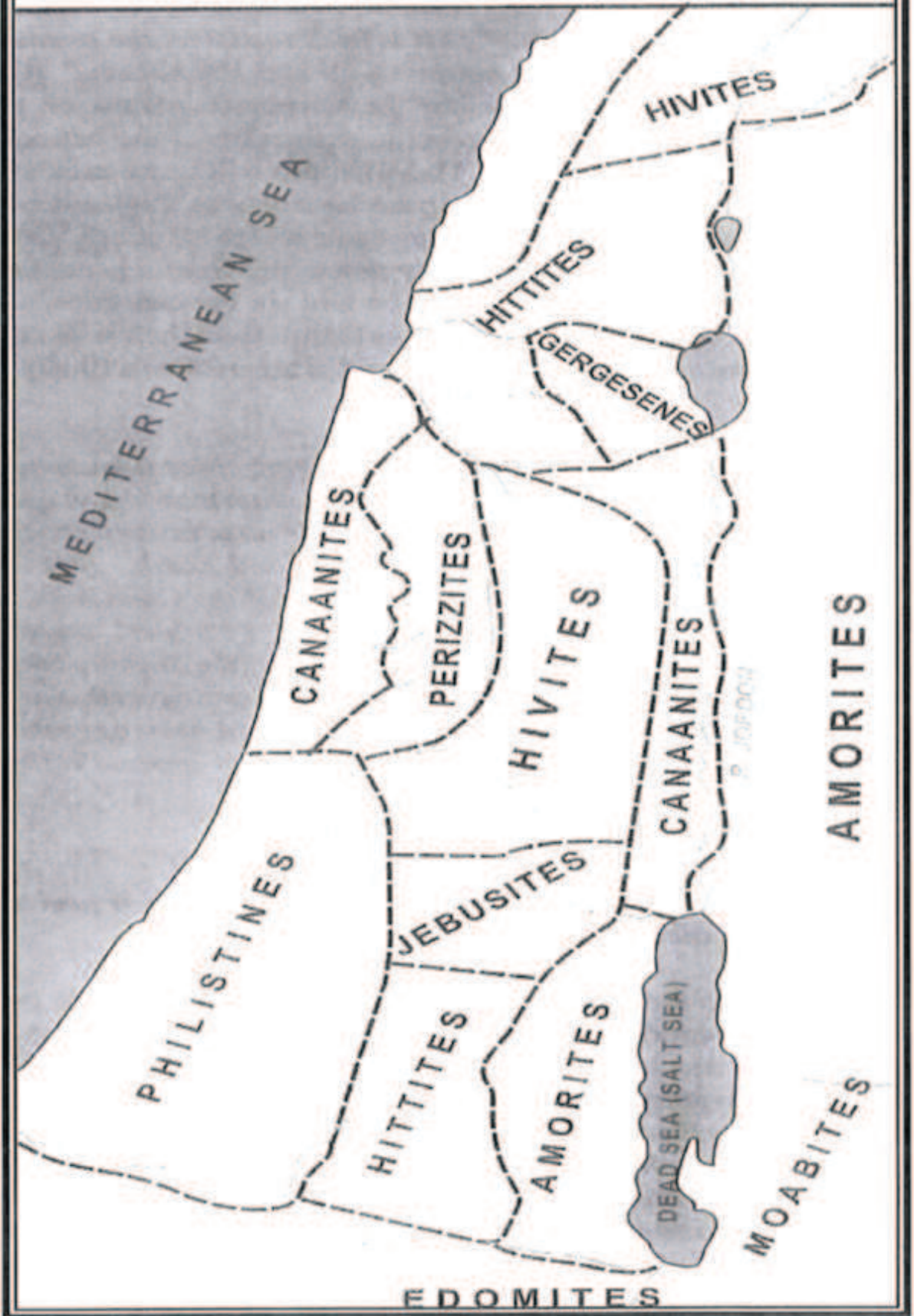
Amorite simply means “*Westerner*” which would suggest a location to the west of Mesopotamia. Amorite tribes settled in the mountainous areas of what would later be the allotment of Judah (Deuteronomy 1:19,27-***“the hill country of the Amorites... so He brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites”***)



“Joshua Executes the Kings of the Amorites” by Tissot

and east of the Jordan in the kingdoms of Hesbon and Bashan (Joshua 2:10 9:10 ***“And what you did to Sihon and Og, two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan ... And all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, Sihon, king of Heshbon, and Og, king of Bashan who ruled in Ashtaroh”***) Perizzite means “*One Who Dwells in Un-walled Villages - Dweller in the Open Country.*” (Ezekiel 38:10-12 - ***“I will invade a land of unwalled villages; I will attack a peaceful and unsuspecting people - all of them living without walls and without gates and bars.”***) The Hittites are the scattered survivors of the ancient empire of Ratti which had flourished in Asia Minor and Syria prior to the time of Abraham. The best known Hittite in Scripture is Uriah, the husband of David’s consort Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:3) Hittite settlements appear to have been scattered throughout Syria and Palestine. The Perizzites settled in the southern part of Canaan around the towns of Bethel and Shechem. They participated in the alliance of Adoni-Bezek and were defeated by the warriors of Judah (Judges 1:4-7) The Hivites are associated with the city of Shechem and apparently lived in central and northern Palestine. They are also associated with the Horites. The Jebusites were the clan which dwelt in Jerusalem and were conquered by David. Their name appears to have been derived from Jebus, the father of their clan which was also the Canaanite designation for Jerusalem before it became an Israelite city (Judges 19: 10-11). It would seem that these particular (groups are cited because of their dispersal throughout Canaan which signaled the conquest of the entire country.

MAP OF CANAANITE NATIONS



“And I will wipe them out.” = God does merely promise the defeat of the Canaanite kingdoms. These nations are to be exterminated. The verb literally means to be removed from sight, to disappear. The Hebrew text uses the singular pronoun “*him,*” viewing all of these disparate groups as a single entity. *“This is used to reflect the oneness of the many pagan peoples as they stand collectively against God and His nation.”* (Currid, p. 126) This unusual grammar serves to emphasize the corporate nature of the impending destruction. That which is envisioned here is the extinction of the nations or kingdoms rather than the genocide of every individual. These nations will cease to exist as identifiable entities. Their survivors could remain among the Israelites as “*sojourners*” adapting to Israelite society, but the cultures from which they came had to be utterly destroyed, lest the impact and pervert God’s people. As previously noted, this action is neither arbitrary nor unfair. These cultures had wallowed in corruption and sin for centuries, since before the time of Abraham. They had been given generations to turn from their wicked ways. Instead they had only become more corrupt. Now the time of judgement was finally at hand. Israel was to be the instrument of that righteous judgement.

“This promise is in accordance with a purpose long since announced. Four hundred years before, the Lord had informed Abraham that ‘the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full.’ (Genesis 15:16) This is no arbitrary procedure on the part of the Most High Possessor of Heaven and Earth. It is an act of retributive justice. What was the original offense of the Canaanite, whether it was an early apostasy from the living God, the ruthless invasion of a preoccupied country) and the barbarous oppression of the Shemite inhabitants, among whom the knowledge of the true God still lingered, we are not informed. But we perceive that the original crime had been aggravated by a course of transgression which made the nation ripe for a penal extirpation.” (Murphy, p. 274)

Verse 24

Do not bow down before their gods, or worship them, or follow their practices. You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces.

“Do not bow down before their gods...” A rapid-fire series of five prohibitions and commands spell out the categorical rejection of any form of participation in or toleration of the idolatry of the Canaanites. Israel’s commitment to Jahweh as the one true God ruled out the possibility of the easy-going syncretism which prevailed throughout the polytheistic cultures of the ancient Near East. The language of the first two phrases parallels that of the first commandment: ***“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.”*** (Exodus 20:5) The additional phrase ***“or follow their practices”*** prohibits the adaption of Canaanite worship practices as a means of worshiping the true God. This allure of this temptation would



*“King Solomon Worships the Idols of His Pagan Wives”
by Sebastian Bourdon*

shortly become evident in the tragedy of the golden calf. God was to be worshiped on His own terms in the manner which He prescribed. The manner of worship both reflects and effects what we believe about God and our relationship with Him (*“Lex Grandi - Lex Credendi”*). The thrust of this prohibition is indicated in the commands which follow. ***“You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces.”*** Every vestige of Canaanite worship was to be eliminated. The idols themselves were to be demolished, shattered into pieces beyond the possibility of reconstruction, so the even the material from which they had been constructed - often precious metals and jewels - could never be used again. The ***“sacred stones”*** (Hebrew – *“masseboth”*) were upright slabs of rock. In Israelite tradition such stone were occasionally used as memorials to commemorate great events or divine visitations, as, for example the stone erected at Bethel by Jacob: ***“Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked with him, and he poured out a drink offering on it and he also pour oil on it. Jacob called the place where God had talked with him Bethel”*** (Genesis 35:14-15; cf. Exodus 24:4; Joshua 4: 19-24) In the pagan religion of the Canaanites, however, these standing stones served an entirely different purpose. Canaanite mythology was basically a fertility cult, designed to ensure the fertility of fields and farm animals and of human families. Baal, the god of rain and the storm had his female counterparts in Asherah and Astarte. The worship of these gods and goddesses acted out the intercourse between them in sacred groves and high places throughout the land. The priests and priestesses of Baal and his consorts were temple prostitutes who were paid to have sex with those who came to worship. Their payments funded the cult. In this

context the standing stones became phallic symbols of the potency of Baal and the spirit of the god was believed to dwell within them. The fertility of the goddesses was represented by the green trees of the groves and poles which were carved from them. The denunciation of these perverse practices throughout the Old Testament indicates their irresistible fascination to the Israelites.

“You must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord's anger will turn against you and will quickly destroy you. This is what you are to do to them: break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire ... The images of their gods you are to burn in the fire. Do not covet the silver and gold on them and do not take it for yourselves, or you will be ensnared by it, for it is detestable to the Lord your God. Do not bring a detestable thing into your house or you, like it, will be set apart for destruction. Utterly abhor and detest it, for it is set apart for destruction.” (Deuteronomy 7:2-5; 25-26)

“Do not set up any wooden Asherah pole beside the altar you build to the Lord your God, and do not erect a sacred stone, for these the Lord your God hates.” (Deuteronomy 16:21-22)

“The king order Hilkiah the high priest, the priests next in rank and the doorkeepers to remove from the temple of the Lord all the articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron Valley and took the ashes to Bethel. He did away with the pagan priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem - those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and the moon, to the constellations and to all the starry hosts. He took the Asherah pole from the temple of the Lord to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem and burned it there. He ground it to powder and scattered it over the graves of the common people. He also tore down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes which were in the temple of the Lord and where the women did weaving for Asherah...The king also desecrated the high places that were on the hills east of Jerusalem on the south of the Hill of Corruption - the ones Solomon, king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the vile goddess of the Sidonians, for Chemosh, the vile god of Moab and for Molech, the detestable god of the people of Ammon. Josiah smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles and covered the sites with human bones.” (2 Kings 23: 4- 7; 13-14)



King Josiah Cleansing the Temple by William Hole

“They will eat but not have enough; they will engage in prostitution but not increase, because they have deserted the Lord to give themselves to prostitution, to old wine and new which take away the understanding of my people. They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God; they sacrifice on the mountaintops and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar and tenebrith, where the shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughter-in-laws to adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they turn to prostitution or your daughter-in-laws when they commit adultery, because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes - a people without understanding will come to ruin.” (Hosea 4:10-14)

“I will destroy the cities of your land and tear down your strongholds. I will destroy your witchcraft and you will no longer cast spells. I will destroy your

carved images and your sacred stones from among you; you will no longer bow down to the work of your hands. I will uproot from among you your Asherah poles and demolish your cities. I will take vengeance in anger and wrath upon the nations that have not obeyed me.” (Micah 5: 11 - 15)

Verses 25-26

Worship the Lord your God and His blessing will be on your food and water, I will take away sickness from among you, and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span.

“Worship the Lord your God...” - Having commanded the absolute destruction of the corrupt idolatry of the Canaanites, the Lord goes on to summarize the blessings which He will bestow upon His people if they remain faithful to Him. This listing is relatively brief compared to its extended counterpart in Deuteronomy 28: 1 - 14 . Baal and Asherah were worshiped in the hope that they would provide ample rain and abundant harvest. These were empty delusions. The only true God promises His people that He alone can provide the blessings which the pagans seek in vain. *“His blessing will be on your food and water.”* The enumeration of blessings aptly begins with the gifts most directly linked to Baal and his consorts - abundant harvest and ample rain. The Hebrew specifically refers to *“bread”* - the produce of the green fields. The Lord would also bless His people with good health – *“I will take away sickness from among you.”* Next the Lord addressed fertility. another of the central concerns of ancient religion. All of the degraded sexual rites and ceremonies of the Canaanites, including the brutal sacrifice of their own firstborn children were designed in insure fertility among man and beast. The Lord assures Israel that His people need not be concerned about such things – *“none will miscarry or be barren in your land.”* In addition to all this He promised that His own would enjoy long full lives under His blessing and protection – *“I will give you a full life span.”* It was God's intent that His people within the land of promise would be a paragon of abundance, vitality and prosperity the demonstration of the goodness and mercy of the true God. Tragically, the Children of Israel spurned these wondrous promises of God. Instead of trusting in His Word, they sought to achieve all of these things by adapting to the corrupt world in which they lived and imitating the antics of their pagan neighbors.

Verses 27-28

I will send My terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all of your enemies turn their backs and run. I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way

“I will send My terror ahead of you...” -The Israelite conquest of the larger more powerful nations arrayed against them would be accomplished by divine intimidation. The vanguard of this host would be *“terror”* and *“confusion”* inflicted by God upon all the enemies of Israel. The language of the text is particularly forceful – *“dreading fear”* and *“panic terror”*. The NIV’s *“confusion”* fails to reflect the intensity of the original.

“*Consternation*” might be a better translation of the Hebrew. This was the same consternation which had been experienced by the Egyptians at the Red Sea: **“During the last watch of the night, the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion.”** (Exodus 14:24) Their fear would not be provoked by the prospect of battling Israel but by the recognition that Israel had been blessed with supernatural protection which they were incapable of overcoming. *“My terror’ refers to the feeling of dread that would overwhelm the inhabitants of the land as they realized that the Lord was fighting for His people.”* (Mackay, p. 410) This is precisely the situation which Rahab, the harlot of Jericho, described to the spies who she concealed in her home:



“Rahab of Jericho” by Pickersgill

“I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, who you completely destroyed. When we heard it, our hearts melted and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.” (Joshua 2:9 - 11)

This is exactly what Moses had foretold in his song of victory after the destruction of the mighty army of Pharaoh at the Red Sea: ***“The nations will hear and tremble. Anguish will grip the people of Philistia. The chiefs of Edom will be terrified; the leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling, the people of Canaan will melt away; terror and dread will fall upon them.”*** (Exodus 15:14 - 16)

“I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run.” -Instead of confronting a series of foes who are confident in their superiority and well-prepared to repel the invaders, Israel will find their **“enemies”** demoralized and disorganized, in total disarray. That demoralization will make them easy prey, vulnerable to conquest. The colorful phrase in the original reads – *“I will make all of your enemies turn the back of their necks to you.”* The point of the graphic imagery is that Israel will be able to seize by the scruff of the neck as an adult might grab a helpless child to shake some sense into him. The same idiom is used in reference to Israel’s panic on the battlefield before the Canaanite city of Ai: **“O**

Lord, what can I say now that Israel has been routed by its enemies?...That is why Israel cannot stand against their enemies. They turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. (Joshua 7:8,12) In Psalm 18, David celebrates the victories which God had given him using the same language: ***“You made my enemies turn their backs in flight, and I destroyed my foes.”*** (Psalm 18:40)

“I will send the hornet ahead of you...” - The meaning of the unusual noun ***“hornet”*** (Hebrew – *“sira”*) in this phrase has been the subject of significant debate among scholars. The only other uses of the term (both in contexts very similar to this reference) are in Deuteronomy 7 :20 (***“Moreover the Lord your God will send the hornet among them until even the survivors who hide from you have perished.”***) and Joshua 24:12 (***“I sent the hornet ahead of you which drove them out before you - also the two Amorite kings. You did not do this with your own sword and bow.”***). Three major alternatives have been proposed. Some contend that the reference is to a literal plague of stinging insects, similar to the plagues which devastated the land of Egypt and included stinging insects (cf. Exodus 8:16-27; 10:3-19). James Murphy advocates this view:

“The hornet is here used collectively for a plague of hornets infesting the land....Some suppose this to be a figurative description of otherwise unknown calamities that befell these nations in the war of extermination. There is no reason, therefore to retire from the ground of plain matter of fact, historically recorded, into the region of a dark figurative unknown which cannot be filled up even by the imagination.” (Murphy, p. 276)

Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish offered this dramatic description of the hornet's attack: *“the hornets stood on the banks of the Jordan and sprayed venom, which blinded their enemies eyes from above and castrated them from below.”* (Harstad, p. 773) The major weakness of this argument is the absence of any reference to such a phenomenon in the historical account of the conquest in Joshua. One would have expected such miraculous divine intervention to have been noted and celebrated.

Others contend that the ***“hornet”*** is simply a metaphor for the same demoralizing panic which had been promised in the preceding verses. In support of this conclusion, Umberto Cassutto points out a similar usage in contemporary Arabic:

“The hornet...is nothing but unreasoning dread, synonymous with the word for terror (a repetition of the thought in different words; for this, too, compare the Song of the Sea- 'terror and dread shall fall upon them). This is apparently the correct interpretation of hornet, for the Arabs to this day call panic resulting in mass flight by a word signifying hornet.” (Casutto, p. 308)



“The Destruction of the Host of Pharaoh”

In his 1931 commentary of Joshua and Judges, archaeologist John Garstang argues that the hornet represents the land of Egypt which had carried out a series of incursions throughout Palestine in the years before the conquest. Garstang bases his argument on the discovery of a hieroglyph which represented the power of pharaoh as a stinging hornet.

“Light was shed on verse 28 by the archeological work of John Garstand. The sovereignty of Egypt’s pharaoh was represented by the hieroglyph of a hornet. Egypt had devastated the old Canaanite powers and civilization. Its plunder had included not only great amounts of gold, slaves, horses, and chariots, but also some of Canaan’s leading nobles and their wives. Thus, when Joshua and the Israelites appeared before the walls of Jericho, they faced shattered powers whose prosperity and morale had not yet been restored. Egypt had broken the Canaanites and Israel had broken Egypt.” (Rushdooney, p. 346)

Each of the interpretations has its strengths and weaknesses. In the absence of textual confirmation, none are conclusive. The point, as indicated in the parallel texts cited above, is that the conquest will be accomplished by the power of God rather than Israel herself.

The object of the hornet’s is *“to drive the Hivites, Hittites and Canaanites out of your way.”* The abbreviated tribal listing is representative rather than specific. It does not refer to particular kingdoms but signifies the entire population of Palestine.



Verses 29-30

But I will not drive them out in a single year because the land would become desolate, and the wild animals too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land.

“But I will not drive them out in a single year...”-The Lord forewarned the people that the conquest would be a gradual process, extending over a period of years. This was designed to enable an orderly transition from Canaanite to Israelite control without the destruction or disruption of the agricultural economy. If the Canaanite population had been eliminated overnight the country would have reverted to wilderness before the Israelite settlement could have taken place – ***“the land***

would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you.” ***“If all the inhabitants of Canaan were removed overnight, it would be disastrous for the land. The fields would be untended and would revert to wild ground. There would be an opportunity for predatory animals to infest the land.”*** (MacKay, p. 411) At the same time, the Israelite nation needed to grow and expand before it would be capable of taking full possession of the extensive territory which the Lord planned to bestow upon them. As it turned out, given the Israelite reluctance to persist in and complete the conquest, the fullest expansion of the realm did not occur until the days of David and Solomon.

Verse 31

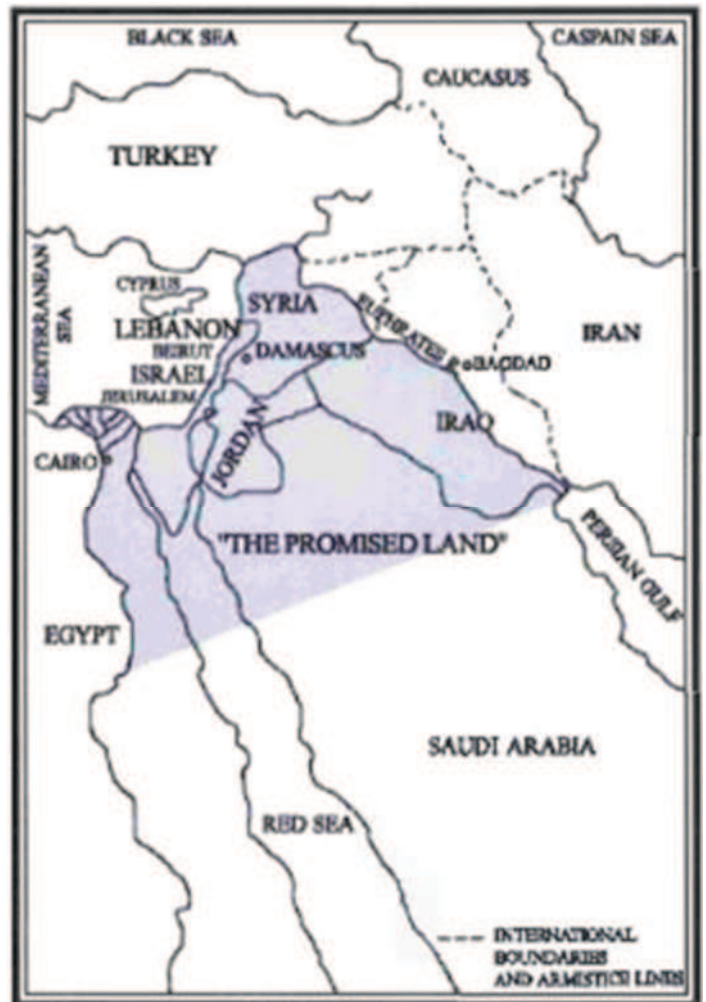
I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the river. I will hand over to you the people of the land and you will drive them out before you.

“I will establish your borders...” - The boundaries of the promised land are determined by God, not by the military prowess or ambition of the Israelites themselves. The ***“Red Sea”*** (***“Sea of Reeds”***) most probably refers to that extension of the Red Sea which is today identified as the Gulf of Aqaba on the eastern side of the Sinai Peninsula. The ***“Sea of the Philistines”*** is the Mediterranean Sea. The ***“desert”*** is the general term which describes the vast deserts of modern Saudi Arabia and the ***“river”*** is the great River Euphrates in Iraq. Genesis 15:18 defines the boundaries of the Land of Promise in God's covenant with Abraham somewhat more broadly: ***“To your descendants I give this land from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates.”*** Scholars debate whether ***“the river of Egypt”*** here

refers to the Brook of Egypt (*“Wadi Al-Arish”*) on the east side of the Sinai Peninsula in the Negev Desert or the easternmost branch of the Nile which would include all of Sinai in the Promised Land. In His commission to Joshua, the Lord declared: ***“Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates, all the Hittite country to the Great Sea on the west.”*** (Joshua 1 :4) The most specific description of the dimensions of the land comes in the survey presented to Moses from Mount Nebo:

“There the Lord showed him the whole land from Gilead to Dan, all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the territory of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms as far as Zoar. And then the Lord said to him, ‘This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, when I said I will give it to your descendants.’” (Deuteronomy 34: 1-4)

Classic modern Zionism (Theodore Hertzl - 1904, Rabbi Fischmann - 1947) and their allies in Dispensational Protestantism perceive these specifications as the divine blueprint for an Israeli state which includes significant parts of Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait along with all of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. Even if their arbitrary delineation of the boundaries were correct - which it most certainly is not! - they fail to recognize the nature of God's covenant with Israel. That covenant was never intended to be an end in itself, an indication of special favor to a superior ethnic group. Israel was chosen by grace to play a unique role in God's plan for the salvation of humanity. Furthermore, like all of the components in the national covenant, the occupation of the Land of Promise was conditional upon Israelite faithfulness to God and obedience to His Law. Israel failed dismally in that regard from the very beginning. Accordingly, they were never allowed to fully occupy the Promised Land and God ended the existence of an independent Jewish nation with the Babylonian destruction



Theodore Hertzl's View of the Promised Land



of Jerusalem and the Temple in the 6th Century BC. There is no connection between the promise of the land of Canaan to Abraham or the Sinai covenant to the modern secular state of Israel.

“I will hand over to you the people who live in the land and you will drive them out before you.” -The Lord emphatically affirms that the conquest of the Canaanites will only occur by His power and under His blessing. The connection between the two verbs in this sentence – ***“I will hand over to you the people who live in this land”*** and only then ***“you will drive them out before you”*** - makes this fact unmistakably clear. The phrase describing Israel's action here – ***“you will drive them out”*** - repeats same word which had been used in Verse 29 to describe God's action- ***“I will not drive them out in a single year”*** -thereby re-emphasizing the same point. This verb is characteristically used to describe what God did to enable Israel to occupy the land: ***“Obey what I command you today. I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.”*** (Exodus 34:11); ***“He will drive out your enemy before you, saying, ‘Destroy him!’”*** (Deuteronomy 33:27); ***“And the Lord drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites who lived in the land.”*** (Joshua 24:18); ***“I will not longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died...I drove them out from before you and gave you their land.”*** (Judges 2:21;6:9); ***“He drove out nations before them and allotted their land to them as an inheritance.”*** (Psalm 78:55)

Verses 32-33

Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. Do not let them live in your land or they will cause you to sin against Me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you.

“Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods.” - The Israelite conquest of the Canaanites was God's righteous judgement upon an extremely decadent and corrupt culture which had indulged in sexual perversion and occult superstition for centuries (cf. Genesis 15:16). Any accommodation with such people would contradict God's judgement and Israel's role as the instrument of God's justice. This was the explicit warning of Moses as he defined the detestable practices of the Canaanites:

“When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord, and because of those detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God.” (Deuteronomy 18:9-13)



“Saul and the Witch of Endor” by Martynov

At the same time, any continued Canaanite presence among the Israelites would become a constant source of temptation. False religion is designed to appeal to the inherent selfishness of sinful human beings. Whether the particular approach is to pride, greed, lust, success or power, every form of idolatry recognizes that the natural inclination of fallen humanity is to seek the gratification of my own needs on my own terms. As long as the Canaanites remained the lure of their sensual paganism ***“will certainly be a snare to you.”*** The term ***“snare”*** referred to a concealed trap that was used to capture and kill small animals. The concept of death as the consequence of falling into such a snare is clearly suggested. ***“The coils of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me.”*** (Psalm 18:5) The covenant between God and His people was exclusive. Therefore, they could not ***“make a covenant with them or their gods.”*** The Hebrew idiom in this phrase literally reads ***“cut a covenant”*** since the formulation of such an agreement necessarily involved religious ceremonies and sacrifices. Hence to making a covenant with any of the Canaanites would have drawn the Israelites into the practices of idolatry – ***“them or their gods.”*** Israel's failure to recognize this peril and to obey the command of the Lord by eliminating the Canaanites and their idolatry would become the crucial factor in the corruption and ultimate destruction of their nation. The Angel of the Lord, identified here in Exodus 23 as the vanguard of the Israelite host's conquest of the Promised Land, denounced that failure in no uncertain terms at Bokim and warned of its dire consequences. The language of that grim condemnation is clearly drawn from the command and warning in this text:

“I said I shall never break My covenant with you and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land but you shall break down their altars. Yet you have disobeyed Me. Why have you done this? Now, therefore, I tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.” (Judges 2:1-3)

Exactly what the Lord had foretold took place. The allure of Canaanite idolatry proved to be irresistible to the Israelites and led to their downfall across the generations and to the ultimate destruction of their nation:

“Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, Who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the people around them. They provoked the Lord to anger because they forsook Him and served Baal and the Astoreths...They would not listen to their judges, but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them...They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways. Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel and said: ‘Because this nation has violated the covenant that I laid down with their forefathers and has not listened to Me, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died...The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.’ (Judges 2:11-13; 17; 20-23; 3:5-6)



***“The Angel of the Lord at Bokim”
By Kenneth Rolly***

This epilogue concludes the *“Book of the Covenant”* which began with the Ten Commandments as a summary of basic moral principles and then prescribed seventy laws for the governance of the Israelite nation as a theocracy. These four chapters (Exodus 20-23) form the core of God's covenant agreement with His chosen people. *“The conclusion to the Book of the Covenant is the primary guide, applying the Ten Commandments to the conduct of life in relationship to Yahweh, the God who has delivered Israel and who is now present with Israel...It's concern is how to serve Jahweh and Him alone.”* (Durham, p. 337)

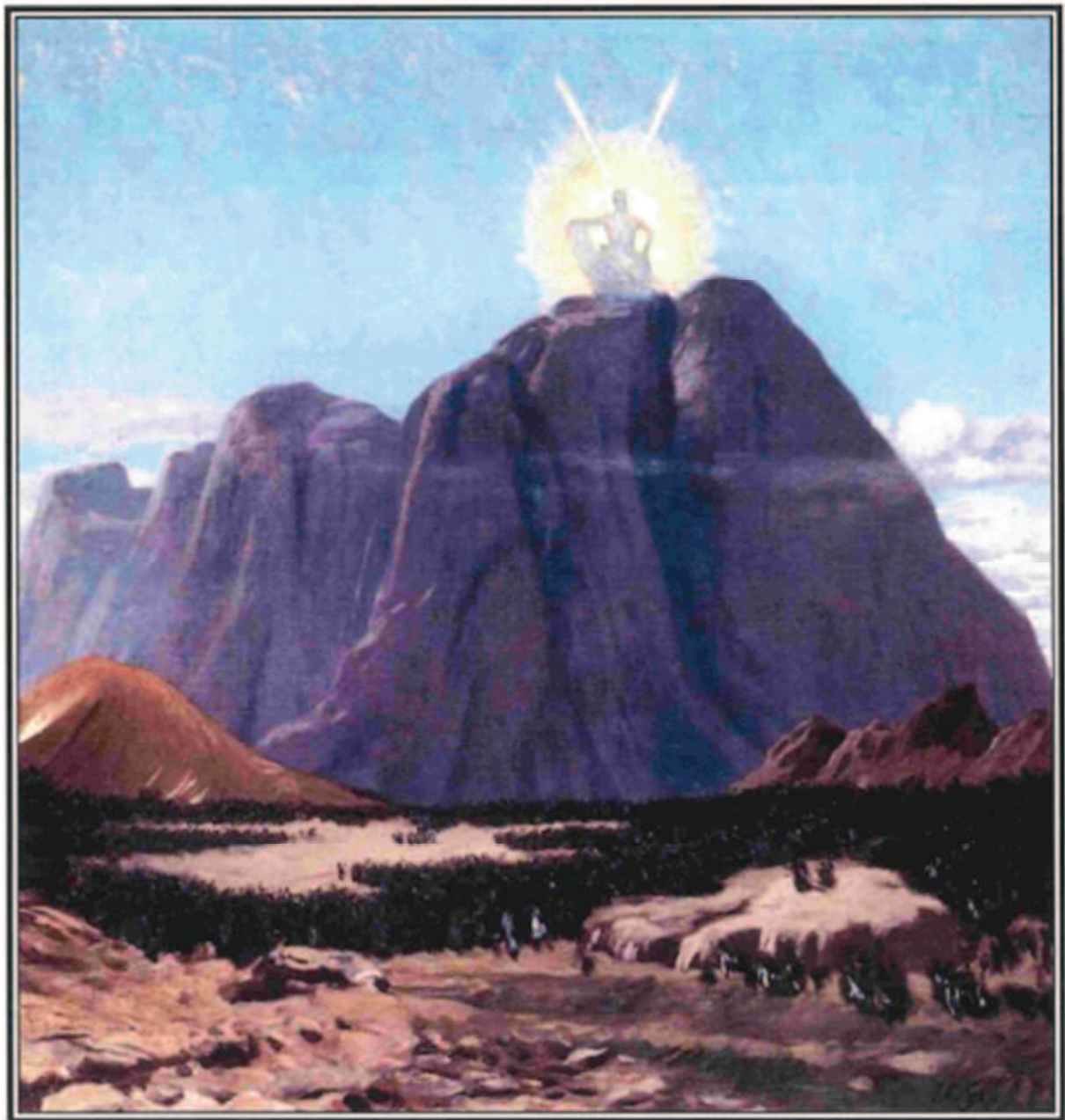


“The Confirmation of the Covenant At Sinai” by J.S. Davis

Exodus Chapter 24

Then He said to Moses, “Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance, but Moses alone is to approach the Lord and others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him. When Moses went and told the people all the Lord’s words and laws, they responded with one voice; “Everything the Lord has said we will do.” Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. They he sent young Israelite men and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord. Moses took half the blood and put it in bowls and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, “We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.” Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words” Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under His feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise His hand against these leaders of

the Israelites; they saw God and they ate and drank. The Lord said to Moses, “Come up to Me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commands I have written for their instruction.” Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses went up on the Mountain of God. He said to the elders, “Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them.” When Moses went up the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites, the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.



“The Glory of the Lord Upon Sinai” by Jean Gerome

Verse 1

Then He said, “Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance.

“Then He said ...” - Having presented the content of the Book of the Covenant in the Ten Commandments and the regulations which followed, the ceremonies which mark the formal ratification of the covenant agreement between God and the nation of Israel are now detailed. A select group of individuals, representing the entire Israelite nation are invited up onto the mountain, into the presence of God. Sinai has come to be the place of God’s presence, thus the words – *“Come up to the Lord.”* This is a remarkable moment, given the previous instruction: *“Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them: ‘Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death’”* (19:12) The unique importance of the event is further indicated by the use of the personal name of God, *“ascend to Yahweh.”*

“You and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel” – God’s invitation is issued to a total of seventy-four people: Moses as the mediator, prophet, God’s chosen representative; Aaron and his two eldest sons Nadab and Abihu the representatives of the priesthood about to be formally established, and seventy elders from the twelve tribes, the number seventy signifying the totality of the nation. Nadab and Abihu would subsequently die for their disobedience of God's command (cf. Leviticus 10:1-2). These *“elders”* were selected on the basis of their prominence and respect among the people, not necessarily their age, although the two often tended to coincide. This view is reflected in Numbers 11:16-17.

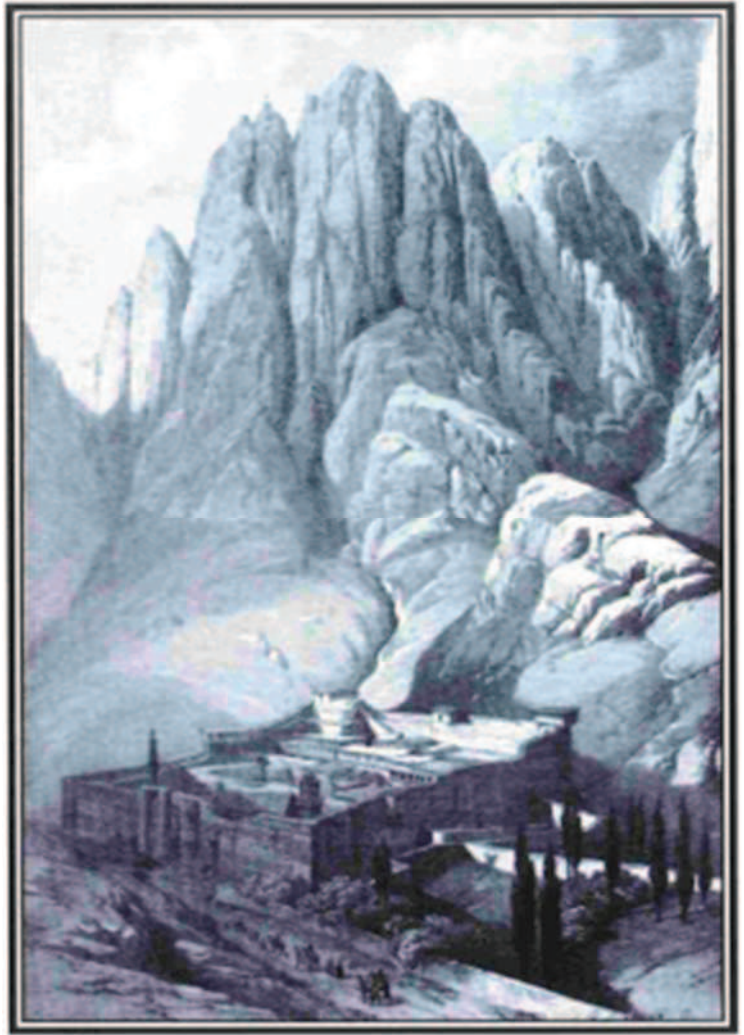
“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Bring me seventy of Israel’s elders, who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting that they may stand there before you. I will come down and speak with you there and I will take the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them...They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.’”

The only other appearance of seventy elders representing the Israelite nation comes in Ezekiel’s vision of the total corruption and idolatry of the temple:

“So I went in and looked and I saw portrayed over all over the walls all kinds of crawling things and all the detestable idols of the House of Israel. In front of them stood seventy elders of the House of Israel and Janziah son of Shaphan was standing among them. Each had a censer in his hand and a fragrant cloud of incense was rising. He said to me, ‘Son of Man, have you seen what the elders of the House of Israel are doing in the darkness each at the shrine of his own idol? They say, ‘The Lord does not see us; the Lord has forsaken the land. ‘Again He said, ‘You will see them doing things

that are even more detestable.”
(Ezekiel 8:9-13)

“You are to worship at a distance.” – In this critically important encounter the holiness of God was to be carefully maintained. These men came to **“worship.”** The Hebrew term literally means to cast one’s self face down upon the ground in an expression of adoration and awe. The posture was designed to express humility and homage - unconditional submission to one who is acknowledged thereby as a superior authority. This attitude is most often sadly lacking amid the casual, cozy, congeniality of what passes for worship in the modern church. We seem to think that we are doing God a favor by permitting Him to share a few minutes of our time, if we don't have anything more important to do that particular Sunday. Even that abject worship was to take place **“at a distance.”** Hebrew commentator Dr. Nahum Sama suggests that this phrase is an idiom which describes a series of ritual obeisances in 19 which the subject would gradually approach the superior bowing repeatedly until he respectfully drew near to an appropriate distance (cf. Jacob’s approach to Esau – Genesis 33:3).



19th Century Engraving of Mount Sinai with The Monastery of St. Cathrine in the Foreground

Verse 2

But Moses alone is to approach the Lord; the others must not come near. And the people may not come with him.

“But Moses alone is to approach the Lord” - The unique role of Moses as God’s prophetic spokesman is maintained. He **“alone”** will be permitted to stand in the immediate presence of God. The priests and elders are allowed to come part way up the mountain and the mass of the people are not allowed to set foot upon the mountain at all. The threefold division reflects the design of the tabernacle which will be revealed shortly and in this way establishes the rationale for that design as the context in God is to be approached by His people. The great 12th Century rabbi Maimonides observed:

“Mount Sinai assumes the character of a sanctuary for the duration of the theophany. A close similarity to the wilderness Tabernacle is suggested by several shared characteristics. Both Sinai and the Tabernacle evidence a tripartite division. The summit corresponds to the inner sanctum, or Holy of Holies. The second zone, part way up the mountain is the equivalent of the Tabernacle’s outer sanctum, or Holy Place. The third zone, at the foot of the mountain, is analogous to the outer court. As with the Tabernacle, the three distinct zones of Sinai feature three gradations of holiness in descending order. Just as Moses alone may ascend to the peak of the mountain, so all but one are barred from the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle. Just as the Holy Place is the exclusive preserve of the priesthood, so only the priests and elders are allowed to ascend to a specific point on the mountain. The confinement of the laity to the outer court of the Tabernacle, where the altar of burnt offering was located, evokes the parallel with Sinai with the restriction of the laity to the foot of the mountain, where the altar was built. The graduated restrictions on access, touch and sight are the counterparts of the repeated regulation about the unlawful invasion of sacred domain in the same three ways. God is said to descend upon the mountain as upon the Tabernacle and He communicates with Moses upon the summit as He does in the Holy of Holies. Finally, the vivid descriptions of smoke, dense cloud, and fire that issued from and enveloped Sinai are paralleled by the cloud and fire that become associated with the Tabernacle.” (Sarna, p. 105)



“The Greek Orthodox Chapel of Moses on the Crest of Mount Sinai”