

HAVE WE STAYED HERE LONG ENOUGH?

Reflections on selections from Deuteronomy with Dr Barry Chant.

The name ‘Deuteronomy’ is a transliteration of the terms *deuteros* (‘second’) and *nomos* (‘law’). It derives from a misreading of Deut 17:18 (‘copy of this law’) as ‘second law’. Deuteronomy was mostly written by Moses (except for some editorial additions necessarily including chapter 34) and can be dated at around 1400 B.C.¹ Moses was perhaps the greatest OT prophet—a miracle-worker and a dynamic leader. The book is of considerable importance. It was endorsed by Jesus (e.g. Matt 22:34-40) and there are up to 100 NT quotes from or references to Deuteronomy in the NT. The book is popularly thought of as being tedious and uninspiring, but the opposite is true. It contains many challenging, encouraging and intriguing stories and discussions that are still relevant today. We are the poorer if we overlook or ignore it.

HAVE WE STAYED HERE LONG ENOUGH?

Deuteronomy. 1:6-8 (ESV)

The Lord our God said to us in Horeb, ‘You have stayed long enough at this mountain. [7] Turn and take your journey and go to the hill country of the Amorites and to all their neighbours in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negeb and by the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.

8 ‘I have given you the land to possess...’

The book begins with Moses recounting the history of the Exodus, and focusing strongly on God’s, promise of something much better for Israel. Here was a promise of a new land with new hills and dales, new coastlands and rivers and, in particular, new mountains. Plus buildings and farms that were already to occupy. It was all theirs—but to possess it, they had to leave where they were. They had been there long enough!

Horeb (Mt Sinai) was a miraculous place. It was known as the Mountain of God. It was at Horeb that God offered the people a new covenant containing his divine law and a divine mandate of the conquest of Canaan. People might have said, ‘Why should we move on? It’s fine here. Here is where the presence of God is to be found. Who knows what lies beyond the desert?’ But God told them it was time to move. They had been there long enough. There were plenty of potential objections:

- God has provided for us here (Ex 16:13)—and he can provide for you again; you’ve stayed here long enough.

¹¹ There is some debate about the Mosaic authorship and most liberal scholars say the book was written much later by an unknown recorder or recorders. For a brief discussion on this see G. McConville in D. Carson, R. France, J. Motyer and G. Wenham (eds), *New Bible Commentary 21st Century Edition*, Leicester, UK: IVP, p. 198.

- We have miraculous water to drink (Ex 17:6)—but you’ve stayed here long enough.
- The presence of God is here (Ex 19:20)—no doubt, but you’ve stayed here long enough.
- Our elders saw God’s footsteps like sapphire (Ex 24:10)—that was wonderful, yes, but you’ve stayed here long enough.
- The law was given to us here on tablets of stone (Ex 24:12)—OK, but you’ve stayed here long enough.
- We saw the glory of God here (Ex 24:16)—sure, you did, but you’ve stayed here long enough.
- Fire burned on the mountain top—yes, it was wonderful, but you’ve stayed here long enough.
- Moses’ face shone like the sun (Ex 34:29)—true, but you’ve stayed here long enough.
- God made a covenant here with us (Ex 34)—yes, but you’ve stayed here long enough.

The truth was that most of those things were no longer happening. The people were actually in the desert! It was harsh, hot, barren; the trees were few; the temperatures soared during the day and plummeted at night. Huge rocks lay everywhere; the mountains were rugged and forbidding; animal feed was sparse... It was time to move on to new heights, new blessings, a new environment. In reality, from the desert to the Promised Land. There was new hill country to conquer and possess (6)

To think about: So what about your life? How does this apply to you?

- Well, my prayer life is good—but it could be better. So it’s time to move on. You’ve stayed there long enough.
- Praying in the spirit—well I do it sometimes... You’ve stayed there long enough.
- Bible study, mm OK—couple of times a week... That’s all? You’ve stayed there long enough.
- Witnessing—occasionally, maybe... You’ve stayed there long enough.
- Family life—we get on OK, I guess. You’ve stayed there long enough.
- Health—I’ve kind of got used to it now. You’ve stayed there long enough. You’ve stayed there long enough.
- Marriage—OK. As good as most people. Not terrific, but, you know you kind of accept things... You’ve stayed there long enough.
- Mission vision—Well, I wouldn’t say it was great... You’ve stayed there long enough.
- Young man? Victory over sin—of course, although I have to admit... You’ve stayed there long enough.
- Sister? Fullness of the Holy Spirit—oh well, I kind of coast along... You’ve stayed there long enough.
- Senior? I have worked hard for years. I need to slow down. That’s OK. You’ve stayed there long enough.

All these might be good—but you’ve stayed there long enough! It’s time to move on.

Story of schoolteacher who said to student: ‘Don’t be comfortable!’ Someone has said that the preacher’s task is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable.

You remember what it used to be like when you first became a believer? Exciting, invigorating, even thrilling. When you were baptised, first shared your faith; when you first prayed with spiritual eloquence; or broke through over some relentless temptation. Like the Israelites—fire, glory, sapphire, miracles... But now you’re living on the memories. You’re

trying to hang on to them. But there are new heights to conquer. New hill country to possess. You've been there long enough!

To think about: What about our church? How does this apply?

So we might say, 'Where we are is great!' But it could always be greater. This is not to deny the glories of the past, but simply to acknowledge that while they may certainly inspire us and should never be forgotten, they are yesterday's manna. Only today's manna is right for us today (Ex 16:19-20).

Consider

- missions vision
- evangelism
- worship services
- prayer life
- youth work
- leadership
- preaching
- giving

Have we stayed here long enough!

'The good is the enemy of the best'—when things are bad, we know they are bad, but when they are good we tend to be content with things as they are and not want to move on to what is better. We have a great church, but it's still not what it could be. We haven't yet begun to see all that God can do.

We dare not settle down. We must move on. Otherwise, the best of the blessing of God will not be ours.

DEAL WITH THE DANGERS

One of the saddest verses in the Bible is Deuteronomy 1:2:

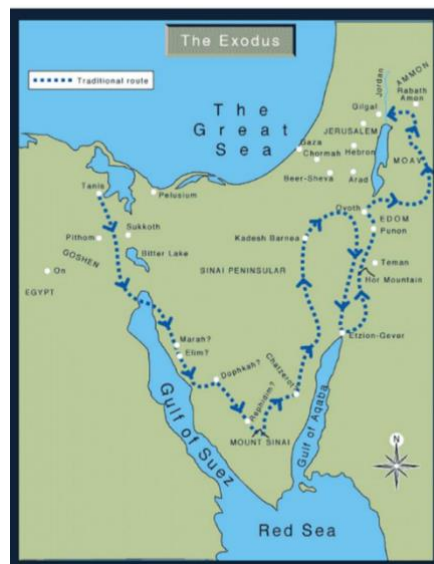
2 It takes eleven days to go from Horeb to Kadesh Barnea by the Mount Seir road.

See also Deuteronomy 2:14:

Thirty-eight years passed from the time we left Kadesh Barnea until we crossed the Zered Valley. By then, that entire generation of fighting men had perished from the camp, as the LORD had sworn to them.

Eleven days to go 200 kms. Thirty-eight years to go 150 kms. What a tragedy—nearly 40 years of wandering for no good purpose.

Deut 1:26-32 gives us seven reasons for failure—



Unwillingness (26)

Deuteronomy 1:26

But you were unwilling to go up; you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God.

The will is vital. Are we acting on *devotion* or *emotion*? It is a matter of choice.

We need to build disciplines into our lives.

Rebellion (26)

Deuteronomy 1:26

But you were unwilling to go up; you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God.

Rebellion is as bad as witchcraft. See 1 Samuel 15:22-23. What God wants from us most of all is obedience!

Grumbling (27)

Deuteronomy 1:27

You grumbled in your tents and said, "The LORD hates us; so he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us.

Grumbling is actually an expression of unbelief. It is rejecting the facts that—

God is love
God is good
God is faithful

and believing that things are not going well etc. See Philippians 2:14

Discouragement (28)

Deuteronomy 1:28

Where can we go? Our brothers have made us lose heart. They say, "The people are stronger and taller than we are; the cities are large, with walls up to the sky. We even saw the Anakites there.

Major problem. The Anakites were apparently tall and strong. While the land was obviously fertile (it took two men to carry one cluster of grapes) the inhabitants were forbidding. It is easy to become discouraged and to feel like giving up. Examples: marriage breakdown; retrenchment; poor exam results; personal conflict; drop in investment value; sickness; bereavement etc.

Story of Tabor fire.

Fear (27-29)

Deuteronomy 1:27-29

You grumbled in your tents and said, "The LORD hates us; so he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us. {28} Where can we go? Our brothers have made us lose heart. They say, "The people are stronger and taller than we are; the cities are large, with walls up to the sky. We even saw the Anakites there." {29} Then I said to you, "Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them.

Fear is a major problem. Note how fear magnified the difficulties. The descendants of Anak may have been strong and intimidating, but not as much as the spies reported. The city walls

clearly did not go ‘up to the sky’. Fear has a way of making things seem worse than they are. Fear of—

- failure—but failure is never permanent. Note that races are usually only won by one person; the rest of us ‘fail’ to win. Sir James Dyson once said: *"I made 5,127 prototypes of my vacuum before I got it right. There were 5,126 failures. But I learned from each one. That's how I came up with a solution. So I don't mind failure."* Australian author Markus Zusak recently stated: *'Every success I've ever had has come wrapped up in a gift box of failure.'*²
- inability— inadequacy. but see 2 Cor 4:3-6.
- financial stress—always with us! E.g. impact of Covid; inflation.
- betrayal—this is particularly painful. Jesus was betrayed and understands.
- opposition—I don't know any effective Christian who has not faced opposition.

Remember Luke 6:26.

Courage is needed. A brave person is not one who doesn't feel fear. If you are not afraid, courage is not needed. Only those who are actually afraid need to be courageous. Joshua's advice before the Israelites entered the land was pertinent to them and is still pertinent to us today.

Joshua 1:7-9

Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

Lack of Trust (29-32)

Deuteronomy 1:29-32

Then I said to you, "Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. {30} The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, {31} and in the desert. There you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place." {32} In spite of this, you did not trust in the LORD your God,

God had already demonstrated his power in the Exodus. Surely, he could do it again. He is trustworthy (Lam 3:23). Recall the great 1923 hymn by Thomas Chisholm (1866-1860), ‘Great is Thy Faithfulness.’

God has promised to meet every need (Matt 6:25-34). He is worthy of our trust.

Half-heartedness (1:36)

Deuteronomy 1:36

Caleb son of Jephunneh. He will see it, and I will give him and his descendants the land he set his feet on, because he followed the LORD wholeheartedly."

² ‘Every success I've ever had has come wrapped up in a gift box of failure,’ *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, 6-7 May, 2023, p. 21.

Numbers 14:24

But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it.

Joshua 14:9-14

9 So on that day Moses swore to me, 'The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly.' 10 "Now then, just as the LORD promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the desert. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! 11 I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. 12 Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the LORD helping me, I will drive them out just as he said."

13 Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance.

14 So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the LORD, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.

Caleb differed from the other investigators because of his wholehearted faith. He was clearly enthusiastic. The Hebrews actually says he served the Lord 'wholly' i.e. in every way with every part of him. He was an embodiment of the great command (Deut 6:5). He is a model to be imitated.

e.g. David Garrick and bishop. Why did Garrick move people?

Have we been here long enough?

Are we content where we are? Are we going to hold back for lack of will, rebellion, grumbling etc? Is it time to stir ourselves to attaining new levels of faith, love, prayer and so on? Note: This is not a matter of working harder. It's working better.

To think about: Which of the problems listed above is applicable to you? What can you do about it?

Although they are not mentioned in Deuteronomy, we could add *ignorance* and *indifference* to the list.

POSSESS YOUR POSSESSIONS

In Deuteronomy there are 53 references to possessing the land (including improvements, Deut 6:10-12). Many of these are in the past tense. Even before they went into Canaan, the land belonged to them! In fact, occupation of the Promised Land was promised originally to Abraham who settled there with his household (Gen 12:1-8). The promise, now guaranteed by a covenant, is later expanded to include territory from the Nile to the Euphrates (Gen 15:18-21). The fulfillment of that promise was a long time coming.

Here in Deuteronomy chapter one, Moses recounts the story of how it began to happen, hundreds of years later. He begins by repeating the promise. Notice that he tells how the land has already been given but that it is also being given and will yet be given. All are true.

Deut 1:8: *See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land that the LORD swore he would give to your fathers—to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—and to their descendants after them.*

Deut 1:21: *See, the LORD your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it as the LORD, the God of your fathers, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.*

Deut 3:18: *I commanded you at that time: "The LORD your God has given you this land to take possession of it. But all your able-bodied men, armed for battle, must cross over ahead of your brother Israelites.*

Deut 12:1: *These are the decrees and laws you must be careful to follow in the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess—as long as you live in the land.*

Deut 4:1: *Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. See also vv. 5, 22, 26.*

Joshua 1:3: *I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.*

KNOWING WHO I AM

- I am a saint (1:1)
- Grace and peace are mine (1:2)
- I am blessed with every blessing (1:3)
- I am chosen before the creation of the world
- I am predestined (1:5)
- I am adopted into God's family (1:5)
- I am redeemed (1:7)
- I am forgiven (1:7)
- God's grace is lavished on me (1:8)
- Wisdom and understanding are mine (1:8)
- God's will is made known to me (1:9)
- I am included in Christ (1:13)
- I am sealed with the Holy Spirit (1:13)
- I have a guaranteed inheritance (1:14)
- I am called to hope (1:18)
- I have a glorious inheritance (1:18)
- His immeasurably great power works in me (1:19)
- God has given me life (2:5)
- I am seated in heavenly places (2:6)
- I am saved by grace (2:8)
- I am God's workmanship (2:10)
- I am brought near through Christ's blood (2:13)
- I am reconciled with others (2:16)
- I have access to the Father (2:18)
- I am a fellow citizen with God's people (2:19)
- I am a dwelling place for God's Spirit (2:22)
- I am a member of one body (3:6)
- I share in the promise of Christ (3:6)
- God is able to do immeasurably more than I can ask or imagine (3:20)
- I can approach God with freedom (3:13)

So with our blessings in Christ. They are already ours but we continue to receive them.

The promised inheritance was validated by the signs and wonders that God performed—crossing the Red Sea, absence of sickness, preservation of clothing and footwear and so on (Deut 7:17-21; 29:5). Furthermore, God promises to bless them even further (Deut 7:12-16)—to bless them above all other people. Not just bringing them into the land, but giving them flourishing crops and herds as well.

So with the New Covenant. Particularly at the beginning of our new life in Christ, miracles often seem to come easily. Like growing children, we develop into maturity where miracles may still happen, of course, but where we learn to walk by faith and trust.

Ongoing victory is sometimes more difficult. So it was to be with the Israelites (Deut 7:12-16). God actually warned them that they would only possess the land gradually. It would be too much for them to do it all at once (Deut 7:22). So for centuries, the Israelites co-existed with various Canaanite peoples—with whom there were frequent skirmishes and outright battles. In fact, the inheritance part of the Abrahamic covenant was not fulfilled until the days of David, and then not completely, probably because of Israel's constant disobedience and falling away (4:23-26).

Under the new Covenant, every blessing in heavenly places has already been given to us. Yet we also claim them both for now and for the future. We cannot cope with all the enemies of faith when we are just beginning. And there will be enemies, even in a land 'flowing with milk and honey' (Deut 6:3).

Leo Harris: 'In a land of milk and honey there are sure to be bulls and bees.'

So although every blessing is ours in Christ, we still need to claim them.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph 1:3).

Note five things in that verse:

- first we bless (εὐλογεῖν, *eulogeo*, speak well of) God;
- he is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ;
- every blessing is in Christ;
- every blessing is already ours;
- the verb is in the past tense;
- they are heavenly blessings (not necessarily earthly).

To think about: Consider the accompanying list of individual blessings enumerated by Paul in Ephesians chapters 1-3. Choose three that seems specifically relevant to you at this time.

Since God's blessings are bestowed on us, we may claim them and make them ours.

So why don't people claim their blessings? Suggestions?

So let's come down from the mountain. We have stayed here long enough. Let's grab the moment. Let's step out by faith into new territory. And let's do it now.

BATTLING FOR CONQUEST

Deuteronomy 2:30

But Sihon the king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him, for the LORD your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that he might give him into your hand, as he is this day. 31 And the LORD said to me, 'Behold, I have begun to give Sihon and his land over to you. Begin to take possession, that you may occupy his land.' 32 Then Sihon came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Jahaz. 33 And the LORD our God gave him over to us, and we defeated him and his sons and all his people. 34 And we captured all his cities at that time and devoted to destruction every city, men, women, and children. We left no survivors. 35 Only the livestock we took as spoil for ourselves, with the plunder of the cities that we captured...

3:1 "Then we turned and went up the way to Bashan. And Og the king of Bashan came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei. 2 But the LORD said to me, 'Do

not fear him, for I have given him and all his people and his land into your hand. And you shall do to him as you did to Sihon the king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon.’ 3 So the LORD our God gave into our hand Og also, the king of Bashan, and all his people, and we struck him down until he had no survivor left. 4 And we took all his cities at that time—there was not a city that we did not take from them—sixty cities, the whole region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan. 5 All these were cities fortified with high walls, gates, and bars, besides very many unwalled villages. 6 And we devoted them to destruction as we did to Sihon the king of Heshbon, devoting to destruction every city, men, women, and children. 7 But all the livestock and the spoil of the cities we took as our plunder. 8 So we took the land at that time out of the hand of the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, from the Valley of the Arnon to Mount Hermon 9 (the Sidonians call Hermon Sirion, while the Amorites call it Senir), 10 all the cities of the tableland and all Gilead and all Bashan, as far as Salecah and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan. 11 (For only Og the king of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaim. Behold, his bed was a bed of iron. Is it not in Rabbah of the Ammonites? Nine cubits was its length, and four cubits its breadth, according to the common cubit.

Heshbon and Bashan were two regions to the east of the Jordan parallel with the river. They were prosperous hilly lands, populated by the Amorites, renowned for their livestock (compare Amos 4:1). They formed part of what came to be known to modern historians as the Fertile Crescent, which stretched in an arched shape from the Jordan to the Euphrates. The Israelites conquered the Canaanites. Even though the land was promised to them, there were still battles to be fought. As long as they trusted the Lord, they were victorious.

Israelites sang of their victory over the Amorites for centuries (Josh 12:1-6; 13:10-12, 30-31; Psalm 135:11-12; 136:17-22; 1 Kings 4:19; Neh 9:22); and the story of their conquest was known elsewhere as well (Joshua 9:10).

Sihon—not much is known about him personally but

His territory was prosperous and fruitful
He opposed the people of God
He was obstinate

All of this worked against him and he was overcome.

Og—the last of the Rephaim (Genesis 14:5; 15:20). The meaning of this term is unknown. Traditionally, it has been taken to mean ‘giants’ and the Rephaim included the ‘tall’ Anakim (e.g. Deut 2:10-11; 3:13). Strong suggests that it derives from the Hebrew word ‘to heal’ (*rapha*). See also 2 Sam 21:15-22, where the Greek word *Rapha* is used in the LXX for ‘giant’. Centuries later, Amos referred back to the legendary height and strength of the Amorites (Amos 2:9) and compared the luxurious life Israelite women to the renowned cattle of Bashan (Amos 4:1).

Walter claims the name derives from ‘sink’ and hence means ‘sunken’ or ‘powerless ones’³ and suggests that after the time of Moses the Rephaim were viewed as inhabitants of the nether world (see Prov 2:18; 9:18 where the word is used as a synonym for *sheol* and ‘the dead’).

In Deuteronomy, there are several references to the Israelites overcoming the Rephaim (2:11, 20; 3:11, 13; see also Joshua 12:4; 13:12; 17:15). It is not known whether there is any historical or semantic link with the Valley of Rephaim (Josh 1:18:16; 2 Sam 5:18, 22 et al). We can make the following observations:

- Og was evidently a tall man (Deut 2:10-11; and 3:13, KJV). This is also suggested by his huge bed: 4.1 metres (13.5 feet) by 1.8 metres (4.5 feet).

³ Tenney (ed), *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopaedia of the Bible*, Grand Rapids:1976, Vol 5:44.

- Why is Og's bed specifically mentioned? Obviously, because of its size but also because it represented advanced technology, given that the Iron Age is commonly dated as beginning around BC 1200. The bed was later kept as a museum piece by the Ammonites (Deut 3:11).
- Perhaps the bed also suggests many wives and/or a harem (seen as a mark of wealth in ancient times).
- 60 cities = a minor empire.
- Highly fortified cities—towers, gates and bars = wealth, resources, militant attitude

Og was a doughty enemy and renowned far and wide.

But the land was already promised to the Israelites (Deut 1:8) and all they had to do was take it.⁴

To think about: How is this story applicable to us today?

An Exegetical issue

The Israelites were told to destroy all the inhabitants of the land and later boasted that this is what they had done (2:34; 3:6; 7:2). In the light of the teaching of Jesus, such massacre of men, women and children seem to us to be barbaric and extreme. How do we interpret these passages?

First, the Canaanites were corrupt and wicked. They threw their own children into a furnace as a sacrifice to their gods (Deut 12:31; 18:10; the god Molech was particularly renowned for this practice, See Lev 18:21; 20:2-5; 1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 23:10; Jer 32:25). The extent of Canaanite wickedness was clearly extreme and repugnant, but little specific detail is given. Previously, God had told Abraham that it was not yet time to invade Canaan because, among other reasons, the iniquity of the Amorites had not yet reached its peak. But God said this mounting evil was the reason for the massacres by Israel.

See Deuteronomy 9:4-6:

4 "Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. 5 Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

6 "Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people.

That the Amorites merited God's judgement may be beyond dispute, but even so, such wholesale slaughter still seems extreme. Why should innocent children suffer? How could Israelite men do such a thing? How could this be the will of God? To take the narrative without demur seems unacceptable. In fact we shudder at the thought.

It might be worth noting that such terrible practices do seem to evade human conscience and whole nations, even today, accept them and close their eyes to them without question e.g. Stalinist Russia; Nazi Germany; contemporary Australia (100,000 babies aborted every year.)

⁴ At this time, the Israelites are sometimes referred to as the Jews. This is a common misapprehension. The term 'Jew' is derived from the name 'Judah' and only came into common usage after the sixth century Babylonian captivity and, with the exception of 2 Kings 25:25, first occurs in general biblical usage in Ezra 4:12.

Even so, the issue here is different. There was clearly a divine instruction behind this behaviour (Deut 2:30; 3:2). How can a good God command such a thing? How can we accept that this is even possible? Our hearts are appalled. The Psalmist actually refers to the conquest of the Amorites as evidence of God's unfailing love! (Ps 136:18-21). How could it be?

One option is to suggest that Israelite actions were excessive. Certainly, God did command them to take the land, but did he actually order them to kill even the children? Did the Israelites yield to blood-lust and go further than they ought to have? The Scripture does not suggest this. That the Israelite actions were taken according to God's mandate seems beyond question (see the passages quoted above).

Another option is to argue that the Israelite behaviour may be excused by seeing it in the context of the day. C.f. Australians in 2023 interpreting unfeeling treatment by European settlers of Aborigines a century ago as justifiable in the light of their time. No doubt there is some merit to this point but it still does not address the whole issue.

Another option is to deny the historicity of Scripture and to argue that the record is simply wrong either in its original text or because of subsequent redaction. The fact that there are so many references to the conquest of the Amorites in the OT militates against this argument. And of course, if we accept the Bible as God's Word written, this view is not acceptable in any case.

A final option is to reconsider our hermeneutics (i.e. interpretation of Scripture, from *hermeneuo*, to explain, interpret, derived from the name 'Hermes', who was the messenger of the gods).

Origen (AD 185-c.254) tried to address this issue. Origen was born in Alexandria. His name was Egyptian (= son of Horus) but his family became Christian. His father died as a Christian martyr (encouraged by his son!). Origen tried to offer himself up to martyrdom but overnight his mother hid all his clothes and so prevented him. It is also said that later in life he castrated himself although some have questioned the veracity of this story. Alexandria was a cosmopolitan seaport and a mixing point for learning and philosophy of all kinds, including that of Philo, one of the city's resident philosophers.

Along with Antioch, Alexandria was a leading centre of Christian theology and study; there was a catechetical school said by Jerome to have been founded by John Mark. Because of persecution and martyrdom, leadership was hard to find and at the age of 18, Origen was appointed head of the school. Not only was theology taught there, but also science, mathematics, Greek and Roman literature and philosophy.

Origen was a diligent student of Scripture. In order to sort out various discrepancies in translation, he prepared and edited the *Hexapla*, a volume of two Hebrew and four Greek versions of the Old Testament in columns side by side, a painstaking work he did not complete until he was around 50 years of age (All done by hand; no means of printing or copying except by hand; codex versions still not universal etc). He is sometimes recognised today as the 'father of biblical criticism'.

Origen had to flee from Alexandria to Caesarea Philippi, where he built a great library. He was finally captured and tortured under the Decian persecution from which he died when he was around 65 years of age.

Origen suggested a layered approach to exegesis. Confronted by the dilemma of biblical records that were hard to accept (e.g. Cain's wife; the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, Abraham lying about Sarah, the wholesale destruction of Amorite men, women and children, David's concubines being given to him by God and so on) Origen came to the obvious but daring conclusion that many of the events recounted in the Old Testament Scriptures, if they are interpreted in the literal, or fleshly, sense, are impossible or nonsensical. They must be interpreted allegorically to be understood. He concluded that some passages have parts that are literally true and parts that are literally impossible. Then,

he wrote, "The reader must endeavour to grasp the entire meaning, connecting by an intellectual process the account of what is literally impossible with the parts that are not impossible but historically true, these being interpreted allegorically in common with the part which, so far as the letter goes, did not happen at all."⁵

Origen initially compared the Scripture to a human being created in the image of God as spirit, soul and body

- Flesh: literal, historical view
- Soul: instructive, moral view
- Spirit: eternal, incorporeal view

He argued that the historical view applies more commonly, but the spiritual view is the deepest and most important.

It may be argued that Origen went too far in asserting that some passages could not literally be true. From a literary perspective, the historical parts of Scripture sound like history; and archaeology has repeatedly confirmed the record. On the other hand, in most of the Psalms, the Song of Songs, and parts of the prophets, poetic imagery is clearly being used. The issue is that many of the difficult passages are to be found in the historical books. Further, one of the primary teachings of the Reformers was that the primary meaning of Scripture was the literal meaning and that this had to be the hermeneutical starting point.

Ultimately, possibly by incorporating the ideas of Philo and other philosophers, Origen came up with a further development. He now enumerated four different levels of biblical understanding.

- *Literal*: the plain sense of Scripture; the historical events without attention to their deeper meaning.
- *Allegorical*: a consideration of how the Old Testament anticipates the New Testament, often by interpreting Old Testament passages as allegories or 'types' of Christ's life.
- *Tropological*: the moral and pastoral application (from *tropos* = 'mode', 'manner').
- *Anagogical*: the ultimate and spiritual sense, often relating to the centrality of Christ, the Church triumphant in the world to come (from *ana* = 'above'; 'again', and *ago* = 'I lead', hence elevating or leading to a higher place; offering spiritual insight or interpretation).

Origen's approach was essentially Christological. Whereas today the hermeneutical principle we adopt is to identify the primary, historical and literal meaning. Origen's aim was first and foremost to discern the Christological meaning. In other words, even if the literal, historical meaning is hard to accept or understand, the message of Christ is paramount. So for instance, in these Deuteronomical texts, even though we might shrink back at the thought of wholesale extermination, if we see in the story the holiness of God, the utter sinfulness of sin, the hopelessness of humankind and the redemption we have in Christ, we have followed the text correctly.

Origen gives many examples—that the disciples did not understand the OT prophecies about his death and resurrection; the nature of the liberty Christ came to bring; God repenting of choosing Saul as king; the details of the tabernacle; the Song of Songs; the Apocalypse; and many others. He quotes a version of Proverbs 22:20-21 which uses the word 'threefold' to support his approach.

To our modern, objective way of thinking, this is difficult to accept. Even if we interpret the narrative Christologically, we are still faced with the historical data. Surely this is paramount. This is a dilemma that I have not been able to resolve fully other than to quote another passage from Deuteronomy. In chapter 29, the sinfulness of Canaan is reviewed. Sihon and Gog are again mentioned as provocateurs of God's wrath. If anything, the

⁵ Origen, *Treatise on First Principles*.

seriousness of God's judgement on them is re-emphasised. And there are severe warnings of what will happen to Israel if they adopt Canaanite idolatrous and wicked practices—God's anger, fury and great wrath will be aroused. As if anticipating questions and objections, Moses then says: 'The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law' (Deut 29:29). In other words, 'Don't argue.'

The New Testament writers give frequent examples of an anagogical approach to the Old Testament.

Out of Egypt: God clearly called Israel out of Egypt (Deut 7:8) which Hosea recalls (11:1) and uses as an encouragement to his generation. Then Matthew takes Hosea's word and says it speaks prophetically of Joseph and Mary returning from Egypt with the child Jesus (Matt 2:15). Here the Christological, anagogical meaning is paramount.

Bronze serpent: Jesus tells us plainly that the real significance of the bronze serpent is its portrayal of his own crucifixion (John 3:14-15).

Sarah and Hagar: these two women are seen as representing the flesh and the spirit; two covenants; slavery and freedom; law and grace (Gal 4:21-31).

Sinai and Jerusalem (Gal 4:23-25). Jerusalem is the Jerusalem above (i.e. heavenly).

Later, in Hebrews 12:22, Jerusalem is also defined as the church. In the Galatians passage, Paul clearly says he is writing allegorically (from the verb ἀλληγορέω/allegoreo).

Oxen: Paul raises the OT statement about looking after oxen and says it is really about caring for church leaders (1 Cor 9:9).

The tabernacle: This is clearly described as just a shadow of things to come (Heb 8:8; 9:9; 10:1). First and foremost it portrays the saving work of Christ. In other words, the Tabernacle was itself a prophetic proclamation of redemption. (Which is the basis of Jesus's rebuke to the Emmaus Road disciples that they did not understand why he was crucified (Luke 24:25-27). Every time an animal was sacrificed at the altar, it was a prophecy. They ought to have comprehended this.)

Melchizedek: Melchizedek is a type of Christ, partly because he has no recorded human parentage and therefore symbolises the eternal risen Saviour (Hebrews 7:1-10).

Origen writes: Our failure to handle Scripture correctly 'appears to be nothing else than not understanding the Scripture according to its spiritual meaning'⁶.

Catholic writer Mark Shea puts it like this;

Jesus speaks of the end times in Matthew 24, not a few readers have noticed that it's hard to tell when Jesus is talking about the end of the world and when He's talking about the destruction of Jerusalem and the razing of the Temple (which would occur in 70 AD). The reason for that is that the destruction of the Temple is the destruction of a world: the world of the Old Covenant. And so the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple are likewise invested with ultimate significance as a foretaste of our destiny and of the destiny of the world and the Church. "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up," said Jesus. So the destruction of the Temple is an image of the destruction of Christ's body on the Cross. It is also an image of the physical death of each member of the Body of Christ. It is even an image of the coming suffering of the Church and the world in the final conflict with Antichrist.

But likewise, the Church's survival of the calamity of 70 AD is an image of the Resurrection, of the hope of eternal life for the believer, and of the Church ultimate victory on the Last Day, when Christ shall come to judge the living and the dead.

Scripture, said St. Thomas More, is a river that an ant can wade in and an elephant can swim in. All four senses of Scripture highlight this fact and help us see, imitate, and follow Jesus—all the way to Heaven.⁷

⁶ Origen, *First Principles*, 8.

Alan Hayes writes: the story of David and Goliath can be read as:

*a story of something that happened in the history of Israel,
a prefiguring of Christ's struggle with Satan in the wilderness (Goliath spent forty days confronting Israel, and Satan spent forty days confronting Jesus),
a teaching about the strategies that we should adopt in spiritual combat, and
the certainty of Christ's final victory over death.*⁸

Baptist Matt Emerson says that the Bible has two primary functions: *revelation* and *transformation*. For these, one needs a multi-layered approach, as long as we remember that the 'entire scriptural web has one primary goal—to reveal Christ and to make us like him.'⁹

So let's go back to our difficult passages: Deut 2:34 and 3:6. We will take just the anagogical meanings.

Idolatry and degradation—idolatry is a picture of sin. There is nothing beautiful about sin. Whether gross sins or subtle, 'respectable' sins—all are the same colour underneath.

Annihilation of the people—this, discomfiting as it may seem, makes it plain that every single sin must be dealt with in our lives, even apparently harmless ones, without exception. The narrative depicts this in a graphic disturbing fashion. If we can move past the troubling issues, there is a strong lesson to be learned about sin. Paul talks of the exceeding sinfulness of sin (Romans 7:13). It is a serious issue. Seventeenth century Puritan writer Ralph Venning wrote a whole book on this subject entitled *The Sinfulness of Sin* (available freely on-line). *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices* by Rupert Brooks is another Puritan book covering how we must address sin in our lives. Not one sin shall have dominion over us (Rom 6:11-14). God is light and in him there is no darkness at all (1 Jn 1:5).

When we stumble in the darkness, the simplest way to regain our bearings is to switch on the light. It is only as we walk in the light that we have fellowship with God and with one another (1 John 1:1-9).

This is particularly important for those in leadership, which is reflected in another part of the Exodus and Occupation story, explaining how Moses, who most of all deserved to enter Canaan, was forbidden to do so, over an apparently minor transgression (Num 20:2-12; Deut 3:23-39).

To think about: What do you think Chaucer meant when he wrote: 'If gold rust, what shall iron do?'

Thankfully, all sin is dealt with through the blood of Jesus (1 Cor 15:3). Both *failing* (deliberate sin) and *falling* ('accidental' sin) are covered, although *failing* demands clear and uncompromising repentance. For repentance and confession of sin as marks of divine visitation, see the Ugandan and Barrio revivals.¹⁰

In Romans 6 and 7 Paul makes the following points about sin:

We have died to sin (6:1, 11)
We can be enslaved by sin (6:6, 16, 29)

⁷ 'The Anagogical Sense of Scripture' (catholicexchange.com).

⁸ *Early Church #11 Interpreting Scripture* (utoronto.ca)

⁹ In Defence of the Fourfold Method/ Biblical Reasoning, *secundumscripturas/.com*.

¹⁰ R. and R. Hession, *The Calvary Road*, London: Christian Literature Crusade (1950), 1966; R. Hession, *My Calvary Road*, Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1996; S. and L. Bulan, *The Barrio Revival*, Selangor: Home Matters Network, 2004; B.Chant, *This is Revival*, Miranda: Tabor, 2015.

We are justified from sin (6:7)
 We are set free from sin (6:18, 22)
 Sin can reign in mortal lives (6:12)
 The dominion of sin can be broken (6:14)
 The wages of sin is death (6:23)
 Sin is made known by the law (7:7)
 Sin's power is revealed by the law (7:8-13)
 Indwelling sin is dealt with by grace (7:20-23)
 Sin is corrupting (7:24)
 Victory over sin is possible through Christ (7:25)

To think about: In Romans 7: 14-25 is Paul talking about himself as he was when under the law or as he is now as a new believer in Christ? Give reasons for your answer.

Og—a giant of a man. He represents Satan, who is a powerful foe, and his armies, the ‘principalities and powers’. Jesus is exalted and lifted high over all! (Romans 8:37-39; 2 Cor 2:14; Eph 6:10-17; Phil 2:11) and through him we are triumphant.

The iron bed—signifies the latest and greatest seemingly irresistible lures of the world, but Jesus has conquered the world (John 16:33) and those who do God's will can prevail (1 John 2:15-17).

Sin	Virtue
Pride	Humility
Greed/covetousness	Love
Lust	Chastity
Envy	Gratitude
Gluttony	Temperance/self-control
Wrath	Patience
Sloth	Diligence

It also speaks of indolence (sloth). This has traditionally been included in the list of the seven deadly sins (pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, sloth) first enumerated by Gregory the Great and elaborated by Thomas Aquinas. There is no place for laziness in God's kingdom (Proverbs 6:1-6; Amos 6:1; Matt 9:36-38).

Against the seven deadly sins lie the seven heavenly virtues. Note how some of these sins today are no longer considered sinful, the result being inevitable changes to the law and to social acceptance, resulting in the view that Christian believers are commonly seen as being bigoted or judgemental.

60 cities—the enemy may be powerful and extensive but God has delivered us from his kingdom (Col 1:13).

Highly fortified cities—these may be seen to represent areas in our lives which we defend vigorously or places where Satan has footholds (Eph 4:27). no matter how strong the enemy is, all authority and power is given to Christ (Matt 28:18; Eph 1:21-23)

Overall, here is a message of absolute obedience to God; of dealing with everything and anything that may be displeasing to him; of claiming our promised land of victory, holiness and hope. All Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and in spite of hermeneutical difficulties, is to be embraced wholeheartedly, so that like the Emmaus disciples, we see Christ in all the Scriptures (Luke 24:27). Amen.

THE GOD WHO RULES MAKES THE RULES

Deuteronomy 4:1-6

1 And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. 2 You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you. 3 Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal-peor, for the LORD your God destroyed from among you all the men who followed the Baal of Peor. 4 But you who held fast to the LORD your God are all alive today. 5 See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. 6 Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'

Note the following terms:

Law (*torah*)—direction, teaching (Deut 1:5)
Word (*dabar*)—word, matter, thing (1:1)
Statute—decree, limit, pronouncement (4:1, 5, 6, 8)
Rule—decree, judgement, declaration (4:1, 5)
Command—word, precept, edict (4:13, 27)
Testimony—witness, testimony (4:44, 45)

While there are subtle distinctions between each of these terms, in practice, they are used interchangeably and the distinctions do not seem to be significant. It is by constant repetition of each of them that one overall message is conveyed i.e. the need for obedience to God's Word. There is no sidestepping the idea or watering it down. However we look at it, we are to do what we are told.

The sin of Idolatry

The greatest danger to the migrating Israelites was idolatry.

4:15 "Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, 16 beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, 17 the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, 18 the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. 19 And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. 20 But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own inheritance, as you are this day. 21 Furthermore, the LORD was angry with me because of you, and he swore that I should not cross the Jordan, and that I should not enter the good land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance. 22 For I must die in this land; I must not go over the Jordan. But you shall go over and take possession of that good land. 23 Take care, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make a carved image, the form of anything that the LORD your God has forbidden you. 24 For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

25 "When you father children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing

what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, so as to provoke him to anger, 26 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed. 27 And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you. 28 And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. 29 But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. 30 When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice. 31 For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.

Several qualities of idols stand out here. They are—

- Materialistic (15-19) i.e. shadows, insubstantial copies of substantial reality, counterfeit.
- Corrupting (16) i.e. their influence is like mould in stale bread.
- Unreal (16-18) i.e. they look like the real thing but they are not.
- Created, not creative (19-20) i.e. an idol is an effect not a cause (Rom 1:25).
- Contrary to God's covenant (23-24, 31) i.e. incapable of carrying out a promise or a pledge.
- Actually powerless—they cannot see, hear or speak, and so cannot accomplish anything (28).

Societal trends rarely happen in a vacuum. What lies behind 21st century idolatry? While there has always been idolatry, it may be argued that several factors have provided a fertile breeding ground for contemporary idolatry.

Important note: In the following discussion, the focus is on the practice of idolatry but the examples given should not be seen as implying that they include everyone. Nor should it be assumed that every idolatrous practice quoted is totally bad. Even good things can become idols if taken to extremes or put in the place of God.

First a question: Why do social movements and dyslectic cultural changes arise when they do, often without apparent cause? Clearly the god of this world is constantly aggravating human thinking to this end and blinds the eyes of those who don't believe (2 Cor 4:4). So, otherwise, it is impossible to explain how so many people at any given time can adopt illogical or unreasonable attitudes (e.g. that to hate sin is to hate the sinner; or the argument that women have the right to do what they will with their own bodies and therefore it is OK to destroy an unborn baby's body;).

So idolatry finds its origins in areas such as:

Evolutionary theories. Generally, since the popularising of evolutionary thinking through Darwin's work nearly 150 years ago, there has been an ongoing and general undermining of confidence in the Scriptures and this has had obvious consequences.

The evisceration of Christianity. Many churches have drifted into liberal theology (e.g. the major shift in theological seminaries from evangelicalism in Australia in the twentieth century). Others have allowed the world to influence them unnecessarily (e.g. adopting same-sex marriage). The failure of some Christian leaders to deal with abuse and hypocrisy either in their own lives or the lives of others has simply encouraged disillusionment and defection.

Rising prosperity. After a century which saw two world wars, a pandemic (Spanish flu) and the Great Depression, there is now in the West a generation who, apart from the hardships engendered by the pandemic, have experienced little of sacrifice and austerity, and, thanks to the advances of medical science and technology generally, know a higher level of freedom

from poverty, disease, violence, together with a rising level of prosperity and comfort, etc. All of this resulted in a clamour for individual rights and freedoms.

The power of protest. The ability of protest groups to take to the streets and in particular to have their voices heard virtually instantaneously all around the world through the news media and the entertainment industry has accelerated the spread of unrest. Visibility and audibility become more persuasive than integrity and verity.

Social media. The ability to communicate rapidly, extensively and, if necessary, anonymously, advantages the unscrupulous and lures the unwary.

The use of language. The change of word meanings, the invention of new terminology and the like through which new concepts are promoted simply by repetition and exposure (e.g. hate, pride, gay, racist, trans, culture/religion, freedom). Fundamentally, those who control our language control our values which means that the entertainment and communication industries constantly bring us new terminology, not by legislation but simply by repetition.

'Virtue signalling' in which people find a sense of self-acceptance and even salvation through what they genuinely see as moral behaviour, as in various protest groups. Some of these groups seem to reflect contrary agendas (e.g. abort babies but protect native frogs; defend freedom of speech for themselves but deny it for those who disagree with them; refuse to accept blame but deny the presumption of innocence unless proven guilty; denounce the health system but advocate euthanasia) but yet there are common factors.

In Western society, idolatry displays the following features¹¹:

- Apparently well-intentioned behaviour stemming from genuine motivation to help the needy.
- The fostering of a sense of morality by pursuing various social causes.
- The cult of the individual and a focus on human 'rights'.
- A hedonistic approach to personal life ('I have the right to do what I like').
- Post-modernism, with its redefinition of truth (subjective rather than objective).
- Disorderly and abstract (even ugly?) expression in art, literature and music.
- A widespread sense of community guilt but without any true redemption.
- The ongoing need for self-validation and fulfilment.
- A consequential compulsion to recognise minority groups.
- An ignorance of or an unwillingness to acknowledge sin.
- Intolerance of the views of others.
- 'Scientism—the widespread and unquestioning acceptance of 'science' as the ultimate authority.
- A general rejection of traditional values, especially Christian values.

One general outcome of these is a redefinition of truth. A constant unchanging God means constant, unchanging truth. Without God, we find ourselves once again in the days of the Judges, where in a fearfully short space of time after the Conquest, Israel became a place where 'everyone did what was right in this own eyes' (Jud 17:6; 21:25) Nowadays, we are in the same position.

Similarly, one four-letter word that used to epitomise Western values¹² has fallen into disuse, namely the term 'duty'.

¹¹ See Appendix One for more on western idolatry.

The majority of people may not be directly involved in the areas mentioned above, but are implicitly involved, simply because they accept idolatrous behaviour without protest. This is more likely to be true of Millennials who have no personal experience of the boundaries and values of previous generations and who relish the extraordinary convenience and freedom offered by technological advances.¹³

John Carroll¹⁴ recently argued that Western Society has, but does not recognise, a deep need of a saviour and that although The Saviour has been rejected, the lack of any satisfactory alternative continues. People try to meet this need by doing 'good works' (climate change, Aboriginal welfare, toleration and inclusivity, celebration of diversity and so on) which do not acknowledge the reality of sin and which can never rescue or redeem (Eph 2:8-9).

Example: The presentation of trophies at the 2023 Adelaide International Tennis Tournament was an actual representation of paganism in our society.

Andre Rublev with 2020 trophy. How did this happen?



Our response

Moses pointed out that the stars are given to everyone, but that God has particular benefits for his chosen ones (Deut 4:19-20) a thought repeated by Jesus (Matt 5:45). This gives us a unique sense both of privilege and responsibility.

Our focus is to be on the nature of God as revealed in Christ so we can clearly declare how much he differs from impotent idols (see above). While recognising the forces of darkness against whom we are in constant battle (Eph 6:10-17) and over whom we already have a guaranteed victory (Eph 1:19-23; Phil 2:11), we also understand that idols are in themselves powerless and cannot prevail. We have no part in idolatry (1 Cor 10:14; Gal 5:20; Col 3:5; 1 Pet 4:3). So we rejoice in the constant victories that we experience, in changed lives, in dynamic churches, in unexpected breakthroughs, in divine visitations and so on. E.g. the coronation of Charles III through which the gospel was declared to millions around the world.

Qualities of God

In chapter 4, several qualities of God stand out.

- He is near (7)
- He is righteous (8)
- He is spiritual (15)
- He is jealous (24)
- He is demanding (25-27)

¹² For a parody of this theme See W.S. Gilbert's *The Pirates of Penzance* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1994, p. 106) where Frederick describes himself as 'a slave of duty'. This term also figured prominently in both the funeral service for the late Queen Elizabeth and the Coronation Service for King Charles III.

¹³ Hence the near-addictive behaviour of young people with smart phones.

¹⁴ *The Weekend Australian*, 29-30 April, 2023, p.24.

He is merciful (31)
He creates (32)
He speaks (33-36)
He works miracles (34-38)
He is God of heaven and earth (39)
He is gracious (41-43)

To think about: Research NT examples of each of these qualities.

GOD'S COVENANT OF LOVE

Deuteronomy 5:1-5

And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them. 2 The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. 3 Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today. 4 The LORD spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire, 5 while I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD. For you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up into the mountain.

Deuteronomy 7:9

"Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands."

Consider qualities of covenants in the Bible. How do these apply to the New Covenant?

Initiated by God

The word 'covenant' occurs some 25 times in Deuteronomy. It was God who initiated the Mosaic covenant, not Israel (Deut 5:2; see also 4:232; 8:18; 9:9; 29:1, 14, 25; 31:16, 20). This is also true of the new covenant (Matt 26:27-28; Luke 22:20) which Jesus introduced.

Biblical covenants are important and form the basis of God's dealings with humankind.

Permanent

The phrase 'covenant of salt' Lev 2:13; (Num 18:19; 2 Chron 13:5) indicates preservation. A covenant may be superseded, but never until it has fulfilled its purpose. So the Mosaic covenant was superseded by the New Covenant. An interesting example occurs in Psalm 89, where a covenant with David seemed to have been broken but found its final fulfilment in Christ (Acts 2:30-31).

A solemn agreement

Shedding of blood was often involved. See the phrase 'cut' a covenant (Jeremiah 34:8, 18). See also Gen 15:1-18. The idea is that if you break the relevant covenant your fate should be like the shedding of blood of a sacrificed animal e.g. Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn: 'Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer swears they will keep mum about this and they wish they may drop down dead in their tracks if they ever tell and rot.'

Marriage is described as a covenant (Prov 2:17; Ezek 16:8; Mal 2:14). It is also a blood covenant.

Marked with a sign

In OT days there was usually some symbol of a covenant e.g. a rainbow, a tree, a cairn (Gen 8:12; 21:33; Prov 22:28; 23:10) which guaranteed its authenticity. This was the equivalent of a signed contract today.

Unconditional

A covenant with God was to be as constant as the stellar movement of the sun and the moon (Gen 8:12; Jeremiah 33:19-26; Matt 5:45).

To think about: How does an understanding of the New Covenant affect (1) our view of life in general and (2) our hope of eternal life?

THE JEALOUSY OF GOD

Deuteronomy 5:8-10

You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 9 You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 10 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments... 29 Oh that they had such a heart as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments, that it might go well with them and with their descendants forever!... 33 You shall walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess.

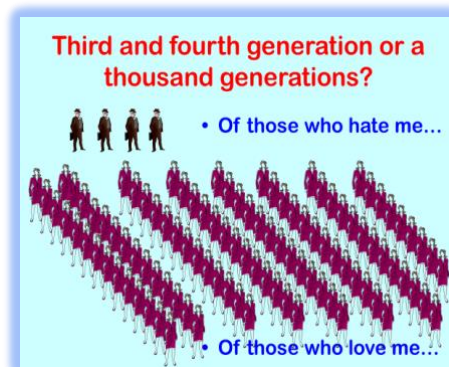
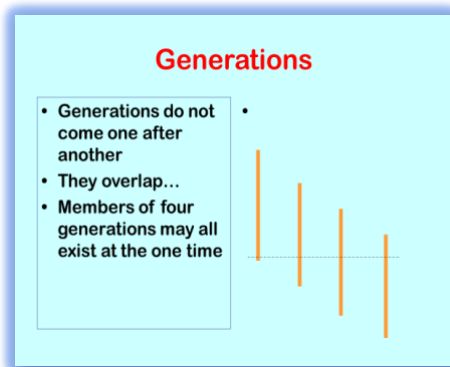
Deuteronomy 7:7-9

7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9 Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments.

Because he is jealous (Deut 5:9).

God will keep his covenant for generations. Divine jealousy is *protective*: he watches over those he loves. It is *demanding*: he demands devotion from those he loves. It is *judgemental*: he judges those who try to steal his people. See also 2 Cor 11:2.

The idea of God visiting his judgement on three or four generations is often thought to be unfair. Usually, people think of these generations being of around 50 years in length and following one after another. In reality, generations overlap and it is feasible for four generations to coexist, at least partly. So the sins of the fathers may affect children, grandchildren and even great-grandchildren while they all still live.



Because he loves us (Deut 7:8).

God loves us because he loves us. But note that for Israel, the commandments were given as a sign of his love for them, because by keeping them, they would be protected from idolatry and wickedness (Deut 5:33).

Because he is faithful (Deut 7:9). God's covenants are also based on his faithfulness.

God's faithfulness is clearly taught in Scripture. Basically, it means that he can be trusted to keep his word. This truth had already been declared by the prophet Balaam (Numbers 23:19). It was to be celebrated in the Psalms (e.g. 31:5; 89:1-2) and the prophets (e.g. Lam 3:23) and in the New Testament (1 Cor 10:13). God's fidelity lies at the heart of the gospel. He cannot deny himself (2 Tim 2:13).

In times of testing, it is important to recall this great attribute of God (1 Cor 10:13). No matter how tough the time, God remains true to his promise and his covenant of love. See Appendix Two for a list of references to covenants in Deuteronomy.

CALLED BY GOD

Deuteronomy 6:1-9, 20-24

1 "Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, 2 that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. 3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates...

20 "When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?' 21 then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. 22 And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. 23 And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. 24 And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day.

The value of remembering our heritage in Christ is emphasised in this passage. Note the following.

Take a long-term perspective (1-3).

It is tragic when honoured and honourable men and women who have served him for years fall into sin. The truth is that anyone can start running a race but not everyone will finish. No one is exempt from the risk. The apostle puts it well.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. 25 Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. 27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

If we are to finish well, we need to focus on continuing well. This is a marathon, not a sprint. See Heb 12:1-3.

The Lord alone is our God (4)

Moses here summarises the core of the ten commandments (chapter five) in a few words:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Note the ESV variations in translation from Hebrew to English (e.g. the Lord is our God, the Lord alone; or, the Lord our God is one Lord). The concept of one invisible God was unique in the ancient world. This one statement stands in the face of all idolatry. It was as revolutionary as the concept of an invisible internet would have been to us a century ago.

Put God first in every way (5)

From a psychological perspective, every complete human experience normally involves three areas: the cognitive, the emotive, the volitive; or putting it more simply, knowing, feeling, willing. So with love for God. It requires knowledge of God, an emotional response to God and a decisive commitment to God. All three are essential.

It is interesting that Jesus modified this statement by adding the mind (Mark 12:30). So love then involves heart (feeling), soul (willing); mind (knowing); strength (doing). Or perhaps Jesus was using 'heart' to denote the spiritual realm. Either way, love for God clearly involves the whole personality.

Give God's Word first place (6-9)

Moses instructed the people of Israel to bind God's commands as signs on their hands and as frontlets (forehead bands or decorations) between their eyes. They were to write them on the doorposts of their houses and on their gates.

Jewish Orthodox men today take this literally by wearing a phylactery on their foreheads and on their left forearm, and by fastening a mezusa to the door frame of their house.

A phylactery or amulet (Greek *phylakterion*; Hebrew *tefillin*) is a small black leather cube-shaped case containing texts written on parchment, which, in accordance with Deuteronomy 6:8 (see also Deut 11:18-20; Ex 13:9, 16) are to be worn as reminders of God and of the obligation to keep the Law during daily life. According to rabbinic regulations, on specified occasions, one of the phylacteries is worn on the arm facing the heart and the other on the forehead.

The hand phylactery has one compartment with the texts written on a single parchment; the head phylactery has four compartments, each with one text. The extracts are Exodus 13:1-10, 11-16; and Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21. Reform Jews interpret the biblical commandment in a figurative sense and, hence, do not wear phylacteries.

A mezuzah is a small folded or rolled parchment inscribed by a qualified calligraphist with scriptural verses (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21) to remind Jews of their obligations toward God. The parchment is placed in a metal, wooden, or glass case and is firmly fixed to the main doorpost of the home (to the right as one enters).

Taking an anagogical approach, however, we see there is a rich symbolism here which goes beyond any literal application.

God's words are to be applied in every area:

- *In our hearts* i.e. deeply personal (6). This also implies memorisation (learning 'by heart') of Scripture. See Ps 119:18; Josh 1:8. e.g. Tabor students; effect of contemporary Versions.
- *In our conversation* (sitting, walking, lying, rising)—blessing the Lord at all times (c.f. Ps 34:1).
- *In our working lives*. The hand or arm represents labour and ability (Num 11:23; Is 63:5)
- *In our thought lives*. The frontlets (ornaments) on the forehead represent the thought life (Is 26:3; Romans 12:1-2; Eph 4:23; Phil 3:6-8; Col 3:1-3).
- *In our home lives*. The Word of God on the entrance to our homes, indicates that the home life is founded on and moderated by God's Word (Ephesians 6:1-9; 1 Tim 3:4-5).

There is an obvious comparison here with the so-called 'mark of the beast' in Revelation 13:16-17 where the mark on the hand symbolises the subjection of labour and the mark on the forehead represents the subjection of the thought life.

To think about: On a scale of one (little) to ten (much), how would you rate your own life in regard to the above practices?

Tell our children the story (20-24)

When our children ask us the meaning of the various statutes, rules etc, we are to tell them! (21). Begin by giving testimony to what God has done (in this case, the deliverance from Egypt), and the promises he has made (23) and only then point out that the laws were given for our benefit (24). God's *promises* always precede his *precepts*.

WHAT GOD HAS DONE	WHAT WE MUST DO
Promise	Precept
Indicative	Imperative
Absolute	Relative
Objective	Subjective
Fact	Feeling
Immutable	Mutable
Imputation	Impartation
Standing	State
Word	Spirit
Principle	Practice
Kerygma	Charisma
Relationship	Fellowship
Atonement	Attainment
Grace	Law
Faith	Fervour

To think about: Choose three of the rows in the table above and describe how the difference between the columns actually works out in practice.

CHOSEN BY GOD

Deuteronomy 7:6-9

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. {7} The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. {8} But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. {9} Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.

We are God's chosen people (7:6)

Often want to argue about this, but these are the simple facts. God has chosen us.

See also Rom 8:29-29; Eph 1:1-5; 1 Pet 2:9.

We need to stop arguing about this and just accept it!

God chooses us because he chooses to choose us! (7:7-8)

Here is the mystery of grace. God chooses us long before we ever choose him! And he chooses us just because he chooses us! E.g. choosing team members in school games.

Note that 'choose' is used here in the sense of 'love'. e.g. Jerome's choice of *dilegere* (Latin: 'to choose') rather than *amare* (Latin: 'to love') in John 3:16.

God chooses to love those whom he loves to choose.

This seems like a circular statement—and it is offensive to human pride. We don't like to be chosen just because God chooses to choose us! Otherwise, the 'cross is rendered ineffective' (1 Corinthians 1:17).

God's choosing makes certain things inevitable.

e.g. the attributes of characters in stories, once created, determine how they will normally behave.

Note that *prohoridzo* ('predestine', as in Rom 8:29 et al) = set horizons or, perhaps, boundaries, within which we may freely move.

God's choosing is not based on any merit of ours (7:7)

See 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Too often, we think of election in human terms, as if there were some merit on our part. Neither merit nor demerit has anything to do with it! Compare marital choices (Psalm 45).

The ultimate aim is that God might be glorified (1 Cor 1:27-28)

We are creatures of clay, fashioned by the hand of God (Jeremiah 18:1-4; 2 Cor 4:7-18; Ephesians 2:10).

To think about: How does knowing God has chosen us for his purposes affect how we live. Give examples.

Appendix One

From Outer Space

If you were visitor from outer space, trying to assess and write a report on popular religion in Australia, you might say something like this—

- Religious temples can be seen everywhere, even in the smallest and most remote communities, where people gather regularly to imbibe sacred libations from the fruit of the vine, many even to the point of taking spirits into their own persons, the result of which may be various states of ecstasy and fanatical homage to the gods. Devotees may behave with a variety of uninhibited acts of homage such as loud laughter, singing, shouting on the one hand and anger, belligerence and violence on the other.
- Almost everyone carries a god with them. The nation is clearly polytheistic, with several clusters of gods being widely recognised under various names. The spirits of these gods usually dwell in small rectangular idolatrous devices, about one Mars goad long by half a Mars goad wide¹⁵. It is rare for anyone to do anything without consulting them. When people do consult the gods, the sacred appliances glow with ethereal light and the gods speak in a variety of sounds and images. When the gods make contact without being consulted, no one dares to disregard the signal, no matter what they are doing. Messages from deities are critical for survival. Societal behaviour is significantly affected by these revelations. In fact, if for some reason people are separated from their device, they commonly display physical signs of distress and dismay. The prospect of missing a communication from a deity is too grave. It is also possible for people to communicate with each other by using these holy devices, on which they can both hear one another's voice and see mutual images of each other; in this way the need for corporate interaction and social health is also met.
- It appears that some people believe that nature worship is also important. Some incarnations of the gods form opposing groups and engage in vigorous and stressful pursuit of the inflated skins of animal sacrifices, in which the goal seems to be to kick them away from each other as far as possible while large crowds assemble to shout praises to the gods. There is usually a small group of spirit-beings who regulate this pursuit but they are generally abused and disliked by devotees, although they must be imbued with divine because no one dares to touch them. All this seems far removed from the ancient Hebrew approach of leading sacrificial animals into the desert, yet it may derive from it.
- There are variations of the above practice on smaller temple courtyards or concourses in which people with various kinds of sticks attempt to direct missiles at each other, apparently as some kind of sacrificial offering to the gods.
- Sun worship involving pious disrobing to enable anointing with oil of the whole body accompanied by ritual multiple immersion is popular in the hot season. Many prostrate themselves on the ground for extended periods of time in some kind of sacrificial rite in which the more dedicated devotees deliberately omit the oil ceremony to present themselves as burnt offerings to the gods. The outcome may represent a desire to prove their own unworthiness by punishing themselves and subduing the flesh with severe and painful desiccating of the skin.
- Strangely, there is also widespread adulation of the human body, the female in particular, and there is clearly some kind of regulation to ensure that it is constantly displayed at every public concourse and on every communication device.
- For younger worshippers, regular frenetic and frenzied bodily devotional exercises are encouraged. These are accompanied by heart-pounding music and brilliant electronic

¹⁵ A Mars goad is about 16 centimetres in earth magnitudes.

colour effects clearly designed to dull the senses and lower inhibitions so that they can pursue the ecstatic state of subconsciousness required for religious perfection.

- There is also a mysterious sacerdotal system in which priests of rival religious parties meet in large and usually grand halls for extended periods to shout abuse at each other and to denounce the beliefs of other blocs. When not meeting together, the priests make it their business to announce promises of heaven on earth to their devotees and to denounce similar promises being made by their opponents.
- There is a puzzling mystical condition in which the public mind is coerced into believing that certain sacrificial practices (such as the daily slaying of infant humans and the encouragement of practices that militate against human reproduction) are beneficial and profitable for the whole community. Those who disagree with these creeds are regularly abused and marginalised. This comes as no surprise to anyone who has studied history. Those who oppose vested interests and selfish corruption are never popular.

Appendix Two

Covenant in Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy 4:13

"He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets."

Deuteronomy 4:23

"Be careful not to forget the covenant of the LORD your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the LORD your God has forbidden."

Deuteronomy 4:31

"For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which he confirmed to them by oath."

Deuteronomy 5:2

"The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb."

Deuteronomy 5:3

"It was not with our fathers that the LORD made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today."

Deuteronomy 7:9

"Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands."

Deuteronomy 7:12

"If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the LORD your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your forefathers."

Deuteronomy 8:18

"But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today."

Deuteronomy 9:9

"When I went up on the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that the LORD had made with you, I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I ate no bread and drank no water."

Deuteronomy 9:11

"At the end of the forty days and forty nights, the LORD gave me the two stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant."

Deuteronomy 9:15

"So I turned and went down from the mountain while it was ablaze with fire. And the two tablets of the covenant were in my hands."

Deuteronomy 10:8

"At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister and to pronounce blessings in his name, as they still do today."

Deuteronomy 17:2

"If a man or woman living among you in one of the towns the LORD gives you is found doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God in violation of his covenant,"

Deuteronomy 29:1

"These are the terms of the covenant the LORD commanded Moses to make with the Israelites in Moab, in addition to the covenant he had made with them at Horeb."

Deuteronomy 29:9

"Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may prosper in everything you do."

Deuteronomy 29:12

"You are standing here in order to enter into a covenant with the LORD your God, a covenant the LORD is making with you this day and sealing with an oath,"

Deuteronomy 29:14

"I am making this covenant, with its oath, not only with you"

Deuteronomy 29:21

"The LORD will single him out from all the tribes of Israel for disaster, according to all the curses of the covenant written in this Book of the Law."

Deuteronomy 29:25

"And the answer will be: "It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt."

Deuteronomy 31:9

"So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel."

Deuteronomy 31:16

"And the LORD said to Moses: "You are going to rest with your fathers, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them."

Deuteronomy 31:20

"When I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, the land I promised on oath to their forefathers, and when they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods and worship them, rejecting me and breaking my covenant."

Deuteronomy 31:25

"he gave this command to the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD:"

Deuteronomy 31:26

"Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God. There it will remain as a witness against you."

Deuteronomy 33:9

"He said of his father and mother, 'I have no regard for them.' He did not recognize his brothers or acknowledge his own children, but he watched over your word and guarded your covenant."