

DEUTERONOMY 11-15 HIGH PLACES PROHIBITED, THREE TITHES

We continue with Moses' last instructions, inspired by God, to the second generation of Israel before they enter the Promised Land. God, through Moses, repeatedly warns them when they enter Canaan not to corrupt themselves by forsaking His commandments and instead following the false gods of this nation. After carefully covering the reasons for obedience, He tells them they are much more responsible for obedience than their children, who were born in the wilderness and did not witness the powerful miracles in Egypt.

He says, "But your eyes have seen every great act of the Lord which He did. Therefore you shall keep every commandment which I command you today, that you may be strong and go in and possess the land which you cross over to possess, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord swore to give your fathers...a land flowing with milk and honey" (Deut. 11:7-9). Why did He say "milk and honey?" It is a marvelous symbol of the fertility of the land—the cattle producing abundant milk and the bees making honey because of the lush vegetation.

Contrast between land of Egypt & Israel

He then contrasts this land with Egypt. "For the land which you go to possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come, *where you sowed your seed and watered it by foot*, as a vegetable garden" (11:10). What does it mean to water it by foot? It means the writer truly understood Egyptian agriculture, where feet were vital for the job and it is compelling evidence that the account is authentic.

"*The JFB Commentary* explains, "A widely extending plain forms the cultivated portion of Egypt, and on the greater part of this low and level country rain *never* falls. This natural want is supplied by the annual overflow of the Nile, and by artificial means from the same source when the river has receded within its customary channel. Close by the bank the process of irrigation is very simple. The cultivator opens a small sluice on the edge of the square bed in which seed has been sown, making drill after drill; and when a sufficient quantity of water has poured in, *he shuts it up with his foot*. Where the bank is high, the water is drawn up by hydraulic means, of which there are three kinds used, of different power, according to the subsidence of the stream. The water is distributed in small channels or earthen conduits, simple in construction, *worked by the foot*, and

formed with a mattock by the gardener who directs their course, and which are banked up or opened, as occasion may require, *by pressing in the soil with the foot*. Thus was the land watered in which the Israelites had dwelt so long. Such vigilance and laborious industry would not be needed in the promised land."

In contrast, the Promised land would be cultivated far easier. Moses says, "But the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, a land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year. And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments...then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain...Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the Lord's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you" (11:11-17).

We next see how God respects their free will and expects them to choose between two ways of life—His way or the world's way. God does not decide for them. He says, "Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse; the blessing if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God...and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments...but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known" (11:26-28).

He tells them they must destroy every vestige of the abominable Canaanite religion. He says, "You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. You shall not worship the God with such things. But you shall seed the place where the Lord your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place, and there you shall go" (12:2-4).

The high places -- obelisks

Why did the pagans build their places of worship atop a mountain or a hill? Notice what *The JFB Commentary* says, “The ‘places’ chosen as the scene of heathen worship were situated either on the summit of a lofty mountain, or on some artificial mound, or in a grove, planted with particular trees, such as oaks, poplars, and elms (Isaiah 57:5-7; Hosea 4:13). The reason for the selection of such sites was both to secure retirement and to *direct the attention upward to heaven.*”

In Egypt, where they generally did not have high mountains, they built obelisks and towers to their gods. It is amazing to know one of those pagan obelisks stands right in front of the Vatican!

The book, *Babylon, Mystery Religion*, states, “Diodorus [the Greek historian] says that Queen Semiramis erected an obelisk at Babylon which was 130 feet in height...Originally, these obelisks were associated with sun-worship...But not only were the obelisks sun-symbols, they were recognized as sex-symbols also...The word ‘images’ that appears in our Bible is translated from several different original words, having different shades of meaning. One of these words is ‘*matzebah*,’ meaning ‘standing images,’ that is, obelisks. Another original word that often refers to obelisks is ‘*hammanim*,’ which means ‘sun images.’”

“Considering the use of the obelisk at the ENTRANCE of the temples of ancient paganism, we need not be too alarmed to find *exactly* the same thing in connection with modern Babylon—the Roman Catholic church! Yes, not only was an obelisk placed at the entry of the temples of the ancient sun-worshippers, but in the front of the entrance of St. Peter’s Cathedral at Rome, the *very same* symbol found today!...As the Mystery religion spread to Rome, along came the use of the obelisk as a symbol....Caligula, in A.D. 37-41, had this obelisk transported from Heliopolis, Egypt, to his circus on the Vatican Hill, where now stands St. Peter’s Cathedral!...In 1586...it was moved a short distance to its present location—St. Peter’s square—by order of Pope Sixtus V...who attached the death penalty if the obelisk was dropped and broken. (Such a regulation in itself indicates how much importance that the Pope and his people accredited to this abominable idol!)” (pp. 39-42).

Instead of using high places, God instructed them to only worship at their assigned sites. *The JFB*

Commentary says, “It was admirably calculated to prevent the corruption which would otherwise have crept in from their frequenting groves and high hills - to preserve uniformity of worship and keep alive their faith in Him to whom all their sacrifices pointed. The place was successively Mizpeh, Shiloh, and especially Jerusalem.”

Religious syncretism

God then warns them about creating religious syncretism, the mixing of the true with the false religions in this key scripture. He says, “When the Lord your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ You shall not worship the Lord your god in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it” (12:29-32).

This applies to the New Testament as well as the Old Testament, for it is covered in the Second Commandment. This is why we do not celebrate Christmas, Easter, or other man-made festivals with pagan origins. For instance, in Rome, the Roman Church mixed the pagan days of Saturnalia with Christianity—and created Christmas day, as any serious history book will confirm.

Next, God warns His people of false prophets that will arise and even produce signs and miracles. He tells them why He allows this and what they should do. “If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods—which you have not known—and let us serve them, you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God *is testing you* to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments...But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the Lord your God” (13:1-5). This also applies to the N.T. and

we should not be deceived by miracle-working images, ministers or priests. If they tell us not to keep the commandments of God, for instance, to keep Sunday instead of the Sabbath they reveal themselves as false prophets and should not be followed.

In Deut. 14, we again have the food laws repeated, which we covered before in Lev. 11. Then God gives the very important laws on the Festival or the Second Tithe and what we call the Third Tithe.

The festival or second tithe

He says, "You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the Lord your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain...of the firstborn of your herds, that you may learn to fear the Lord...But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe...then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the Lord your God chooses. And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires...and you shall rejoice, you and your household" (14:22-26).

This is what we do every year, by keeping this tithe and attend God's feast days.

The third tithe for the poor

Next comes the principle of the Third Tithe: "At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do" (14:28-29).

We see shortly after Jesus' time, Josephus, the Jewish historian, that the practice of collecting these three tithes was well-known. He wrote: "Let there be taken out of your fruits a tenth, besides that which you have allotted to give to the priests and Levites. This you may indeed sell in the country, but it is to be used in those feasts and sacrifices that are to be celebrated in the holy city" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, book 4, chapter 8, section 8). He later adds: "Besides those two tithes, which I already said you are to pay every year, the one for the Levites, the other for festivals, you are to bring every third year a third tithe to be distributed to those that want; to women

also that are widows, and to children that are orphans" (section 22).

With regard to the third tithe, the Church considers where up to or more than 10% of a person's income is taken by the government, that this satisfies the provision for social services for the poor, and it is not necessary to save an additional 10% of one's income for this tithe, since the requirement is already met.

God continues explaining other economic laws. In Israel, where it could legislate the keeping of the seventh year of releasing debts, God tells them they are to forgive debts on the seventh year, and "if there is among you a poor man of your brethren...you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, buy you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs" (15:7-8).

The principle behind this is that God wants us to learn to be "cheerful givers" (2 Cor. 9:7) just as He is (James 1:17).

God also legislated so slavery as it existed among other nations would not appear in Israel with fellow Hebrews. A person could become an *indentured servant*, but only for six years and then he would be released with a just compensation. "If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. And when you send him away free from you, you shall not let him go away empty-handed: you shall supply him liberally from your flock, from your threshing floor, and from our winepress. From what the Lord has blessed you with, you shall give him" (15:12-14).

All these laws are very humanitarian, and would have revolutionized economic and labor systems. In fact, much of our modern economic and labor laws are based on these very principles, that began to take effect in 19th century England, when mainly Christian religious reformers attacked the most oppressive labor and economic practices during the Industrial Revolution and turned to the Bible to prevent these abuses. Finally, it took hold, and today we have many more humane principles thanks mostly to these biblical laws, although they have not been fully applied.