

Deuteronomy

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Deuteronomy 1-7

The title of this book, which translated into English, is "Second-Law," indicates its character; for in it Moses recapitulates and enforces the whole law system to which Israel was committed. Deuteronomy 1: 2-3 remind us that the wilderness journey from Horeb, where the law was given, to the border of the land would normally occupy eleven days; they had taken forty years because of their unbelief. The old generation that had been at Horeb had died out and so the law had to be freshly emphasized to the new generation. Once given, the binding force of the law remained, as we saw in our last issue, when considering the closing words of Malachi, written probably about a thousand years later.

As much that is contained here has already been recorded in the earlier books we will consider these chapters in rather cursory fashion, though pausing here and there to consider details that seem to have a special voice to us. In chapter 1 Moses has to remind the people of their own deplorable condition. He had been unable to bear by himself their "cumbrance," or as we might say, their "wear and tear," their "burden," and their "strife." And further, that when God had told them plainly that He had given them the land and they were to go up and possess it, they had insisted on sending the spies to see and report. The Divine word was, Go up in **faith** and possess in faith. Their response was, We want to act, or not act, on the basis of **sight**. In result of course they refused to act. The spies saw giants and fortified cities, whereas faith would see God, and obey His word.

Not sight but faith is what we have today. When the Lord said to Paul, "Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles" (Acts 29: 21), he had before him a mission that to sight was an impossible one, yet to faith one that has been abundantly verified. God chooses, "the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty," as was seen when Paul reached Corinth, and by Paul's writings in the Scriptures he has edified millions of Gentiles, during nineteen centuries. In the days of Moses, Caleb and Joshua were the men of faith.

In Deuteronomy 2 Moses reminds the people of how God had been with them in their earlier conquests. Verses 24 and 31 we should particularly notice. First comes the Divine act: "I have given," or, "I have begun to give." Then comes the exhortation to the people, "Begin to possess." God's gracious dealings with us today are on similar lines, as we see in the New Testament epistles. First, the unfolding of that which He has given us in Christ. Then, the exhortations that we should begin to possess experimentally all that is given, in the power of the Holy Spirit, who indwells us.

Deuteronomy 3 continues the recital of how the power of God had overthrown the kingdoms on the eastern side of Jordan, and how the territory had been given to the two and a half tribes, on the

understanding that their armed men should go with their brethren to conquer the western side, though Moses personally would not be with them. He had to acknowledge God's disciplinary action against him. He would die, and Joshua be their leader. He was only to view the land, but not to enter it.

It is a comfort however to recognize that there is not only wisdom but also an element of grace in the discipline that God imposes on His saints. Moses was spared many a heartbreak that Joshua must have suffered, owing to the failures of the people; and many centuries later he was in the land for a brief moment and Elijah with him. From the top of Pisgah he saw the land filled with the degraded Amorites. On the Mount of Transfiguration he saw not the land but the glory of the One who will at last fill it with millennial blessedness.

In Deuteronomy 4 we have further touching appeals that Moses made before the people, urging upon them obedience to the law that had been given, and that they should preserve it in its integrity. They were neither to add anything to it nor take anything from it. This command is repeated at the end of Deuteronomy 12, and enforced also as to revelations God has given, in the closing words of the New Testament. The law given to Israel included "statutes and judgments," as verse 5 states, as well as the ten commandments. All these were binding upon them, and Moses tells them in verse 6, that the keeping and the doing of them would be, "your wisdom and your understanding." That "wisdom," they never had, nor have we ever had it. The believer today however is "in Christ Jesus," and He is "made unto us wisdom," as 1 Corinthians 1: 30 tells us. Here is perfect wisdom indeed!

This chapter also bears witness to the plain and emphatic warning that Moses gave as to the results that would follow their disobedience, verses 25-27 being specially definite. and forecasting their sorrowful history under judges and kings in subsequent centuries. Yet, if in their scattered condition they turned and sought the Lord, in obedience they would find mercy. They had been privileged above all other people, and hence were responsible above all others, yet mercy would be shown. We may remember that at the close of Romans 11, both Jew and Gentile are considered, and the blessing that ultimately will reach both will be on the ground of mercy - "God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all. We are "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 21). So in the coming age the mercy of God will be displayed in the church on high, as well as in Israel, at last established in blessing on the earth.

The call for obedience that Moses gave is specially clear and pronounced in the opening verses of Deuteronomy 5. Let us notice the four verbs that appear in the first verse — "Hear," "learn;" "keep," "do." We are not under the law but under grace, yet we may well accept these four verbs as expressing what should mark us as we face the many instructions that fill the New Testament. Verbs one to three are really in view of verb four, since all the truth made known through the faith of Christ, and ministered to us, is intended to govern our lives in this world, while we wait for the Saviour, and to come into expression in our **actions**. The Apostle Paul, who was to be a "pattern" to others, wrote, "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me do, and the God of peace shall be with you" (Phil. 4: 9).

And further, in these opening verses Moses made it plain that the law was just as really and truly made with those to whom he spoke as to their fathers, some forty years previously. In all dispensations what God has said at the outset stands. We have to remember this. What God laid down through the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 12-14, for instance, as to the Christian assembly and its order, stands throughout our dispensation and is as valid today as in the hour when first it was written.

So the law covenant was made with the generation to whom Moses was speaking, and he proceeded to rehearse the commandments, that first appear in Exodus 2, and then he reminded them

that their fathers had been filled with fear when they saw the glory of the Lord at Sinai and heard His voice out of the midst of the darkness and the fire. In result, they begged Moses to receive the words of God on their behalf, for they said, "If we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die." Now, why this fear of death?

With them it was instinctive, but for us the answer is clear in the light of the Gospel. "The law worketh wrath" (Rom. 4: 15), and again it is, "The ministration of death written and engraver in stones . . . the ministry of condemnation" (2 Cor. 3: 7-9). The Apostle Paul has told us that, "the law is good, if a man use it lawfully" (1 Tim. 1: 8), and if the law be used to bring the sentence of condemnation and death into a sinner's heart, it is used in a most lawful way.

In verse 29 of our chapter Moses gives us words spoken to him by the Lord Himself at that time. He knew what was lacking on the part of the people. They had not, "such an heart in them," as would incline them to godly fear and obedience. Later in this book we shall find Moses deploring the same thing and speaking of the people as having no "faith." They had, as no other people had, a religion of both sight and hearing, yet without faith it availed nothing. The Epistle to the Hebrews stands in sharp contrast to this. The Christian Hebrew had come, not to the mount that might be touched and to visible and audible things, but to unseen realities, and hence we have the great chapter on faith, and the statement that without faith it is impossible to please God.

Notice also in verse 29 the words "all" and "always," or, "all the days." Obedience must be **complete and continuous**. Under law man is like a boat under strain but held in safety by a chain of many links. If every link is intact all the time, well and good. But, if at any time, just one link breaks, the boat drifts on to the rocks as surely as if every link had snapped. It is a case of all and all the time. This is again emphasized in the last verse of our chapter.

As the opening verses of Deuteronomy 6 reveal, Moses continued to enforce this fact on the minds and consciences of the people. And what would move them to keep all the laws and statutes that were set before them? Nothing indeed but faith which works by love. Hence in verse 5 we get the words which were referred to by our Lord, as recorded in Matthew 22: 36, 37, and which He called "the first and great commandment." Jehovah is One, in contrast with the many false gods of the heathen world, and if He be the supreme Object of love, obedience will surely follow. Now He had shown His love for Israel by all that He had done on their behalf and this should have drawn out their love toward Him. Yet of course they had not known the great display of God's love in the gift of His Son, as we have known it. We can indeed say, "We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4: 19), and we know the love displayed in surpassing degree. Still God had shown His love towards them as a people, as they are reminded in the next chapter. They should have loved Him in return.

Their danger would be forgetfulness, as the succeeding verses show, and the same danger is ours today. Hence the instructions given in verses 7-12. They were to **teach** God's laws to their children, to **talk** of them in their houses, and to **write** them on their posts and gates. Here, we venture to think, is a word we need to take home to ourselves. We may remark of course that the invention of printing has given us an enormous advantage, as compared with some 3,500 years ago. It has indeed; but if we do not diligently study our Bibles, and then teach and talk of its contents, we are culpable indeed.

This leads us to ask all our readers, Do you not only read the Scriptures for yourself, but do you avail yourself of the many opportunities of attending meetings where the Word of God is read and discussed, or where servants of the Lord minister the Word? When you meet with other believers in your homes, does your talk at all centre around the things of God? We are not self-sufficient in these things; had we been, the Lord would not raise up those who can teach and pastor His saints. If we do

forsake, "the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Heb. 10: 25), and so get but little in the way of teaching and exhortation from others, our spiritual life and testimony is not likely to be vigorous. We shall have but a poor enjoyment of the blessings that are ours, or of the responsibilities that flow therefrom. May we all be stirred up as to these things.

This exhortation as to teaching God's Word, talking about it and writing it, is followed by a very necessary warning as to the danger that would face them, when they had entered into the land and were enjoying prosperity there. There, in the midst of pleasant things, they might easily forget the Lord and His commandments and follow the ways of surrounding peoples, going after their gods. Here too is a word for us, and observing it we may be made wise unto salvation from a similar danger.

We may state the matter thus: times of worldly prosperity are times of spiritual danger, and usually of spiritual decline. The history of Israel exemplified this. Swift decline followed the magnificence of Solomon's reign. The earlier history of the church exemplified it, for when the era of persecutions ceased, and under the patronage of Constantine the church emerged into favour and outward prosperity, rapid decline took place. It is not otherwise in some parts of the earth today particularly, we may say, in the English-speaking regions, where many are saying, they never had it so good, and are completely indifferent to spiritual things. And what about ourselves? Are we not too often exemplifying the truth of the Lord's words, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt. 24: 12). One might have imagined that much iniquity would stir saints to increased warmth, but it is not so. Increased prosperity leads to increased iniquity in the world, and it affects saints adversely, diverting them from the spiritual realities in which their true life consists.

So the people are plainly warned in the latter part of this chapter how easily they might forget how the Lord had delivered them when they were but bondmen in Egypt, and had brought them forth that they might serve Him and obey His word. They were told that, if they feared the Lord, and obeyed His statutes, it would be, "for our good always," and that such obedience would be "our righteousness." It would have been legal righteousness, but they never had it. The Gospel does not present this to us, but rather righteousness which is of God.

In the opening verses of Deuteronomy 7 the people are plainly told that they are completely to exterminate the nations then in possession of the land. They were to make no covenant with them and to show them no mercy. This command has, we believe, been denounced by sceptics as being savage and utterly unworthy of God, if He is supposed to be a God of goodness and kindness. So let us consider it for a moment. Israel did not fully carry it out, tent had they done so, it would have been the third time that God had acted in summary and wholesale judgment.

The first case was of course the flood. Mankind was then wiped off the face of the earth with the exception of eight souls. The second occasion was the destruction of the cities of the plain, including Sodom and Gomorrah, when only righteous Lot and two daughters were saved. On these two occasions the destruction was an act of God — by water and by fire and brimstone. In both cases human corruption had risen to such a height that it could not be further tolerated. This was now the case with the Amorite nations. Some four hundred years previously Abraham had been told, "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15: 16), but now evidently it was "full," and God purposed to wipe them out as He had previously done with the antediluvian world, and then with Sodom, only this time using Israel to do it, and hence, as we shall see, using men to do His strange work of judgment, failure came in, and the work was not thoroughly done, as when God acted by the forces of nature.

Israel then were to have been the executioners of God's judgment on these utterly corrupt peoples, and their extermination was designed to have a salutary effect as regards themselves. It would have

prevented their making these marriages with daughters of the various peoples, which was the surest way by which they would catch the infection of their awful idolatrous systems. Their subsequent history shows how their failure in this matter largely accounted for their own constant dabbling in idolatrous things, which ultimately brought about their own judgment and dispersal under the Assyrians and Babylonians. Failing in a complete way to judge and destroy the evil, they caught its infection and fell under its power. The separation enjoined was a natural rather than a spiritual one, but a complete necessity, as God well knew.

Now we as Christians are committed to separation of a spiritual sort, as is made very plain in 2 Corinthians 6: 14-18. Israel as a nation were the objects of God's love, which was set upon them, not because of anything great in themselves, for they were few and insignificant, but because God was faithful to His oath to their fathers; and since they were thus loved they were to be a holy, or separated, people in all their ways. We Christians are loved in a more personal and intimate way, and therefore our separation and deliverance from this present evil age is even more distinct. We are in the world but are to be kept from its evil, even as the Lord Jesus said, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17: 16).

Then as separated from the nations then in the land, Israel was not to fear them, though they were more mighty and numerous than themselves, since God, who had shown His power in dealing with Pharaoh, was still on their side, and would dispossess them "by little and little" - not all at once, but step by step. This is still God's way in dealing with His saints. We do not apprehend everything at once. Step by step we may advance in the things of God. We all begin as spiritual babes, and happy it is if we do indeed move on to become the "young men," and then the "fathers," of 1 John 2.

Once more, at the end of the chapter, they are warned against loving the silver and gold connected with idolatrous images. So they were not to **fear** their power, nor to be **fascinated** with their luxuries. Their subsequent history showed that of the two the ensnaring tendencies of the latter had the more disastrous effect upon them.

And let us remember that the same tendency is operative with us today. Hence the first epistle of John ends with the words, "keep yourselves from idols." Now for us an idol is anything that ensnares, and usurps in our hearts the place that belongs to God alone.

Deuteronomy 8-15

In the opening verses of chapter 8, Moses confronted the people with certain facts that have a very distinct voice to us today. In the first place emphasis is laid again upon "All the commandments," that God had given. There was unity stamped upon the demands of the law system, just as there is upon the revelation that we have in the New Testament — the revelation of God in Christ, and of all purposed and established in Him, as the great expression of grace. Israel had no liberty to pick and choose amongst the commandments, neither have we today amongst the many instructions that grace has furnished.

Then again they were to remember, "**all** the way," in which God had tested them in the wilderness, to humble them and to reveal what was really in their hearts, and to show them that their real life was not based on material food but on the spiritual instructions and food that is found in the word of God. Here in verse 3 we have the words quoted by the Lord Jesus to Satan in the wilderness temptation that He endured. Israel's wilderness temptations revealed their complete failure, whereas the temptation of our Lord was permitted in order to reveal His absolute perfection. He did indeed live by

"every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord;" in other words, His life was one of perfect obedience to the Father's will in all things. We are "elect . . . through sanctification of the Spirit, unto **obedience . . . of Jesus Christ**" (1 Peter 1: 2). We are to obey as He obeyed.

Further they were reminded that while God tested them in the wilderness He performed a miracle, lasting 40 years on their behalf. We venture to say that no one else has ever had clothes that lasted for so many years without waxing old and wearing out. There was of course the chastening of which verse 5 speaks, and this may have helped to dull their recognition of the miracle, but even this chastening came upon them because they were a people brought into relationship with God. Men chasten their own sons and not others. This is exactly the principle applied- to ourselves in Hebrews 12. So the word is, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons, for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?" We are further told that though no chastening is a joyful matter, it afterwards yields "the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." Israel was to be exercised to keep the commandments, walk in God's ways and fear Him, as verse 6 states, and the more so, since they were to be brought into a land of much earthly prosperity, while we are brought into a wealth of spiritual blessing.

In the latter part of this chapter they are warned of the dangers that lie hidden in prosperity. Then would come the temptation to rest in the luxury, forget God's goodness to them, and be seduced to seek after false gods. So it came to pass in their history, as we know. Again we as Christians have to remind ourselves that for us also, days of outward and worldly prosperity are times of spiritual danger and defeat.

In Deuteronomy 9 Moses reminds the people of the great strength of the people then in the land from a military point of view. Many of the men were giants, and their cities strongly fortified. God being for them, they would have power to destroy them completely; yet that power would be exerted, not because they were so righteous, but because the peoples of the land were so wicked. He virtually says to the people - Don't imagine God will give you the victory because you have deserved it. Then he proceeded as the rest of this chapter shows to remind the people of their great unbelief and sin in the making of the golden calf, and their refusal to go up to the land when the spies came back. All this proved that they had no righteousness in which to stand before their God.

What then remained? Well, there was the promise to Abraham, and confirmed to Isaac and Jacob, and to this there were no conditions attached, which they had to fulfil. That remained, and that Moses pleaded before God, as verse 27 reveals. The patriarchal covenant was one of grace, and will be made good in the "new covenant," predicted in Jeremiah 31, when the end of God's dealings with Israel is reached. The basis of that new covenant lies in the death and resurrection of Christ, and on this basis the Gospel goes forth today, as 2 Corinthians 3: 6 shows. It is the "everlasting covenant," as we see in Hebrews 13: 20.

Having uttered this plea, Moses ventured to remind the Lord that He had brought the people out of Egypt because of the patriarchal covenant, before the law was given at Sinai. If now, the law having been given, and they having completely failed under it, they were to be destroyed, the Egyptians and other nations would misunderstand this, as meaning that God was unable to complete His work, and bring them into the land He had purposed.

This plea on the part of Moses prevailed, but it did not alter the fact that they were now under the law, and so Deuteronomy 10 opens with the reminder of how the original stones on which the law was written, and which were broken by Moses, were replaced on his second sojourn on the Mount. This time they were placed in the ark of shittim wood, as a standing witness to God's holy demands. The

appointment of the tribe of Levi at that time to their special service, witnessed to the fact that God still bore with their failure to obey, and to appreciate His kindness on their behalf.

Here again is mentioned what came before us in Deuteronomy 6: 5; that which our Lord called, "the first and great commandment" (Matt. 22: 38); for to love God sincerely with heart and soul would carry with it obedience to all the commandments He gave. Hence that word through the Apostle Paul, "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13: 10). What should have moved them was the love that God had shown to their fathers, and in choosing them to be very specially His people above all others. How much greater is the love that has been displayed toward us in Christ.

Now in the first place they were, as verse 16 says, to "circumcise" their hearts, as the answer to the love shown to them. We again find the Apostle Paul alluding to this in Romans 2: 28, 29. The rite of circumcision was established in connection with the patriarchal covenant, as we read in Genesis 17, though confirmed later in connection with the law. The inveterate tendency was to observe the outward ceremony and overlook its significance. Israel was to be a people completely cut off for and to God. Had there been circumcision of "heart," there would have been the cutting off of self-love, in the knowledge of the love of God.

The same tendency to lay much stress on outward, visible ceremony, while overlooking the inward, spiritual import, is with us today. Take the ordinance of baptism, for instance. We are not furnished with an exact, detailed description of just how it was administered, hence the much discussion and argument as to the outward ceremony. If as much attention had been paid to the spiritual meaning of the ordinance, as stated in the early verses of Romans 6, we should have gained far more profit. Dead and buried with Christ - our old life, as in Adam, judged — and "newness of life," now to characterise us.

Had Israel circumcised their hearts, a second thing would have marked them. They would have shown love to the stranger, who might be in their midst. We are to display the love that has reached us by seeking others with the Gospel of the grace of God.

The whole of Deuteronomy 11 is taken up with the record of the exhortations that Moses gave, promising on God's behalf a wealth of earthly blessing as the result of their obedience, but on the other hand warning them of the curse that would rest on them if they disobeyed. The land to which they were called was specially dependent for its fruitfulness upon rain from heaven in its season, which, if withheld by God, would bring disaster upon them. That they might obey, they are again told to keep all the commandments continually before them — to teach them, to talk of them, to write them, as they had previously been instructed. If obedient, God would be with them in power that none could resist, and every place whereon they trod should be theirs.

But they were equally warned of the curse that would follow disobedience, and that when in the land there should be a mountain marked by the curse, as well as one marked by blessing. How sadly significant it is that the very last word of the Old Testament is the word, "curse."

Having given this further solemn warning, Deuteronomy 12 is occupied with "statutes and judgments" specially relating to their lives when in the land, to which they were going. It begins with the demand that they should utterly destroy the nations then in the land, and uproot every trace of their idolatrous practices. The chapter ends on the same note, inasmuch as idolatrous evil is very infectious, whereas spiritual good is not. Even in natural things this principle is seen. A good apple placed amongst rotten ones will not remove any rottenness; whereas a rotten apple placed among good ones, will soon spread its rottenness. We must never forget that, though as born of God we have a new nature, yet the old Adamic nature is still in us, and if unjudged it responds at once to all the evil that

confronts it.

So all the high places of these nations, their groves, their pillars, their altars, their images, were to be destroyed, and their very names eradicated from memory. We may remember how, when the kingdom was divided, Jeroboam disobeyed this, and the infection of it persisted through all the kings of the ten tribes, and hastened their captivity under the kings of Assyria. All this evil then was to go.

But statutes of a more positive nature follow. When in the land, God Himself would choose a place where His name should be set, and to that place the people were to bring their sacrifices and offerings. There they could eat before God and rejoice, and they are specially warned against what had evidently in large measure characterized them; doing, "every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes." This injunction was soon forgotten, when for several centuries judges ruled them in the land. The book of Judges ends on the sad note, "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

Carefully note that what they did was not what they considered wrong, but right, yet it was not what God had ordered, and hence it was not right, according to Him. How sadly this same trouble has been manifested in the history of Christendom. A multitude of things have been done, and introduced into the professed worship and service of God, because they seemed so right, even to pious people; yet they have been far removed from the simplicity laid down in the New Testament, and observed by the early church under the guidance of the apostles.

So, in our chapter, we have laid down not only the instruction as to the place that God would choose, but also as to how they should bring their offerings, of clean animals, and while shedding their blood, taking care not to eat of it themselves. This is repeated twice in this chapter, and they were reminded that "the blood is the life;" and life comes directly from God; so that when killing an animal they were to pour the blood forth as water upon the earth. This was blood "as water." It is a remarkable fact that when the soldier pierced the side of Jesus, "forthwith came there out blood and water" (John 19: 34). In his epistle the Apostle John reminds us that our Lord came by blood as well as by water: that is, it not only is the basis of moral and spiritual cleansing but it paid the penalty of sin in the yielding up of His life's blood. It is just this latter fact that many in our day are unwilling to admit, but which is of all importance. Life comes from God, and the blood being the life of all flesh it is sacred and not to be eaten as a common thing.

It was lightly esteemed among the nations, as the closing verses of the chapter show. Even their sons and daughters they burned in their fires in honour of their false gods.

Another danger might arise among them, when they got into the land, as mentioned in the opening verses of Deuteronomy 13. Moses had been their great prophet, through whom God had again and again spoken to them. Now one crafty device of the adversary is to imitate what God does, and so presently there would arise prophets that were inspired not by God but by him, in the effort to lead the people astray. They were not to hearken to such a prophet but rather to put him to death.

Similar tactics of the devil have been used against the faith of Christ, as we see for instance in such a scripture as 1 Corinthians 12: 3. In the early Christian assemblies, when as yet hardly any of the New Testament had been written, there were men of prophetic gift, who spoke words inspired by the Spirit of God. Men might appear amongst them who spoke as inspired by some evil spirit; and such were to be detected and refused. Hence the injunction "Let the prophets speak two or three, **and let the other judge**" (1 Cor. 14: 29). In 1 Corinthians 4 had been told not to judge before the time, when they attempted to assess the value of the different servants of God; but here we find that the utterances of prophets in the assembly were to be heard with godly care and judgment, lest things should be said that

were not of God. Similar godly care and judgment is needed today as we listen to what purports to be the ministry of the word of God. It negatives the idea that there may be men who can so speak that everything they say must be received without any question.

In the latter part of this chapter the people are warned against a similar danger, but not from self-styled prophets. There would arise evil men in their midst who would divert a whole city from the Lord to the worship of false gods with their abominations. Such evil was to be utterly destroyed from amongst them, if the fact of it was established beyond all question.

We do well to note carefully the stipulations of verse 14. The judgment was not to be executed until there had been inquiry and search and diligent asking for facts, so that the evil reported was certain and beyond all dispute. Hasty action might easily lead to a miscarriage of justice. If in the church of God today similar diligence and care were exercised, we should be made wise unto salvation from some difficulties that endanger us.

The first 21 verses of Deuteronomy 14 stress the fact that Israel as a nation were a people specially set apart to God, and therefore to avoid certain common practices on the one hand, and to be very careful as to what they ate on the other. The avoidance of the things prohibited would doubtless be for their physical good, and help to mark them off from other peoples. Many centuries later, when in Christian circles those from among the Gentiles soon outnumbered those from the Jews, these restrictions gave rise to the "doubtful disputations," of which Romans 14 speaks. In that chapter the Spirit of God does not legislate but leaves every man to be persuaded in his own mind what he should do. We may profitably transfer the thought to what we may mentally read and inwardly digest. Let us take care that we do not feed mentally on what is impure.

Then the chapter turns from what they should take in as food to what they should give out as tithes, and how they should present it to the Lord. The tithe was ultimately for the upkeep of the Levites whose lives were to be given to the service of God, and also to be used for the poor and needy who would be found amongst them.

Legislation continues through nearly the whole of Deuteronomy 15 as to how the poor amongst them were to be considered. Every seventh year was to be a year of release. The well-to-do Israelite might lend money to his poor neighbour, but anything not repaid when the seventh year arrived, was to be released and left in the hand of the poor man. We see therefore that the law demanded a spirit of gracious care for the poor among the people, though this arrangement did not apply to strangers among them. Should there be no poor, the rule would lapse, but in verse 11 they are plainly told that "the poor shall never cease out of the land." For us Christians it is equally true that there will always be found amongst us those who are "weak in the faith," who are but "babes" in Christ; and those strong in the faith must be careful lest by their "knowledge" they make "the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died" (1 Cor. 8: 11). The poor and weak must be considered.

In verses 16-18, we have a further reference to the law as to the "Hebrew servant," first given in Exodus 21. It is remarkable that it should again appear here, connected with those who are "poor," for in it we see something that found perfect fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. He took "the form of a Servant," and though He was rich yet for our sakes became poor, as we told in

Corinthians 8: 9. We are again reminded of the piercing of the ear against the door, and this meant the shedding of blood, though it may only have been a tiny drop. As it was in Egypt, so it was to be here, blood on the door but this time signifying the devotion of the One whose blood was shed.

The picture presented to us in this chapter is evidently one of grace, which was to shine out in the

midst of the demands of the law. We may well close our meditation on these things by observing that if there was to be an exhibition of grace when law was dominant, how much more should grace characterise all our behaviour today, seeing that we "are not under the law but under grace" (Rom. 6: 14).