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Homiletics: Outlines on the New Pulpit Program Series

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HOMILETICS

As "This Year with the Bible" continues to unfold the history of God's salvation, we survey the leaders: Moses, Joshua, the judges, and Samuel. The leaders followed the seven patriarchs and preceded the kings. The next division (Sexagesima to III Lent) deals with the kings: Saul, David, Solomon, and the divided kingdom.

A schedule of daily Bible readings which may be used in family devotions by members of the congregation in preparation for the Sunday's message may be secured from Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo. Order No. 13-1183.

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

MOSES

Ex. 19:1-8

Today's Propers. The keynote is in the Introit: "Serve the Lord with gladness!" and in the Epistle's emphasis on sacrifice and duty. The Gospel's exhibition of Christ's knowledge concludes with a reference to His obedience. His "Father's house" and being "subject" to Mary and Joseph fit into one pericope without a clash. The Collect asks "that they may . . . know what things they ought to do." Such a "proper" background fits the daily Bible readings suggested for use with this series.

(Ex. 1—14)

Introduction. Hebrews 11, the "hall of faith," has examples of those blessed for obedience of faith. Christmastide brings to mind the names of others who were obedient in faith: Mary (God's handmaid), Joseph (not afraid to take Mary to wife), and Jesus (subject to His parents). Moses is prominent in the list as a hero of faith. He did what he was told, followed where God led.

God gave Moses

The Knowledge to Obey

By observing Moses' life in Egypt, in the wilderness, and before the mountain, we can

realize the importance of the obedient follow-through of faith and seek from a gracious God that gift for ourselves today.

I. In Egypt

A. Death threatens obedience.

1. In pre-Mosaic time the people of Israel were favored; now they are slaves, Ex. 1:11. Male children to be killed, Ex. 1:15. Moses — born to die, Ex. 2.

2. Moses' parents, Jochebed and Amram (Ex. 6:20), as well as midwives, Shiphrah and Puah (Ex. 1:15), obey God. They risked death with obedience to God rather than choosing life in subservience to Pharaoh. (Ex. 1:17; Heb. 11:23)

3. Disobedience to God brought sin into the world (Rom. 5:19); now temporal death is expected, eternal death threatens. (Rom. 6:16; John 8:34)

4. We are to fear Him "who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:4, 5). "Obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

B. Deliverance accompanies obedience to God.

1. Moses would deliver (Ex. 1:11), but he cannot. Fleeing to Midian, he learns that deliverance comes only in God's time and by His schedule. "Mine hour."

2. God will deliver (Ex. 2:23-25). God calls Moses (Ex. 3:1). With God all things are possible, and without Him nothing is possible. "Our help is in the name of the Lord" is the opening versicle of the Lutheran liturgy and the closing versicle of the psalm of Israel's deliverance. (Ps. 124)

3. Israel's deliverance is but a part of a fulfillment of deliverance in Jesus Christ. Christ is the world's only Deliverance (John 8:36; John 14:6). Only in Him, called

Jesus as a child (Matt. 1:21), is there salvation (Acts 4:12). By the obedience of the Suffering Servant (Is. 53) we are set free.

C. Doubt must give way to obedience.

1. God calls. Moses doubts. "Who am I?" (Ex. 3:11). "What is God's name?" (Ex. 3:13). "They will not believe me" (Ex. 4:1). "I am not eloquent. . . . Send some other person" (Ex. 4:10, 13). And still doubt must give way to obedience. "Go."

2. God calls. We doubt. Check up—is it modesty or stubborn disobedience that prompts our excuses? God gives strength to obey. "I believe; help me when my faith falls short." The obedience of God's Son makes our obedience possible. "Not My will but Thine be done." "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." (Acts 26:19)

II. In the Wilderness

A. Passover calls for obedience.

1. The Passover rite called for trust in God's promise and obedience to His command. A sign of God's sparing His own (Ex. 12:27), calling for strict preparation and an obedience "forever" (Ex. 12:24), recalled by Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:41). The Passover foreshadowed the Christ as the Paschal Lamb. (1 Cor. 5:7; Luke 22:7; Mark 14:12; 1 Peter 1:19; John 1:29)

2. In the midst of the Passover, Jesus instituted the new covenant of forgiveness and said, "This do in remembrance of Me." By faith and obedience we receive in the new covenant "forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the body, and life everlasting."

B. Passage results from obedience.

1. Obedience gives passage through the sea, a new life, a victory in the face of death. Thus Israel is "baptized *into* Moses" (1 Cor. 10:2), sealing their redemption.

2. By Holy Baptism we are "drowned" and "buried" with Christ; so we have re-

generation, life, and victory over death. By obedience to the command to pass through the water (Matt. 28:19) we have salvation and deliverance.

C. Provision demands obedience.

1. God provides, but rebellion results. Murmurings are always heard (Ex. 15:24; 16:2,3; 17:3; 32:1-4; Num. 11:1; 14:2,3). God provides sweet water at Marah (Ex. 15:25), spring water at Elim (Ex. 15:27), bread and quail (Ex. 16:12), water from Horeb's rock (Ex. 17:6). The people murmur. God provides, and demands obedience (Ex. 15:26; 16:4). The people were to provide for others (Deut. 15). Keep the Sabbath! (Ex. 16:22-36). Rest on the Sabbath and trust His care, a command given also at creation (Ex. 20:11). Rest the land (Ex. 23:10, 11) so the poor and the beasts are provided for. "He provides" is the Sabbath theme. (Lev. 25)

2. Our obedience also "rests" in God's provision for this world in creation, for our salvation in His redemption and resurrection, for our keeping the faith in His Spirit. Rest in His promises and obey His words!

III. Before the Mountain

A. Possession implies obedience.

1. Israel's children belong to God. "My own possession," "holy to the Lord" (Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ex. 19:5). All the earth is His (Ex. 9:29), but Israel His very own. Expected to obey.

2. Jesus prayed for those who are His alone (John 17:9). We are a "peculiar people" (1 Peter 3:9), "sons of God" doing His will. (1 John 1)

3. God made the choice of Israel and of us. God's mercy and grace chose. We were a "no people" (Hos. 2:23). Those who are chosen or elected or selected are chosen for a purpose, to be His obedient servants. (John 15:16)

B. Priests are to be obedient.

1. Israelites were a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (cf. Is. 61:6) before the establishment of the Levitical priesthood. Children of God, old or new dispensation, are His priests. (1 Peter 3:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6)

2. Christ is the High Priest (Heb. 5). He served His priesthood in obedience, submitting to the heavenly Father's will. Ours is in obedience to declare God's deeds (1 Peter 2:9). Christ, obedient in His sufferings for us (Heb. 5:8), became our Salvation. Like Him, we too must serve.

C. Presence of God expects obedience.

1. After Moses' return from receiving the Law, Israel promised obedience (Ex. 19:7,8). God's covenant included His promise to be with them. Moses was their mediator (Ex. 24:7,8). God's presence established the covenant.

2. In His presence ("always with us") disobedience frightens, obedience blesses. He comes with forgiveness and grace in Christ.

To know God is to obey, fearing none, reaping the bounties of His promises of grace in Christ.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

MOSES

NUM. 11:4-20

Today's Gospel. John 2:1-11 tells of the miracle in Cana of Galilee. In this "good news" a dying Israel begins to experience new life on the third day. The good news of God's courting of His bride begins with an account of a marriage festival. The old covenant gives way to the new, as waters for purification, six pots of them, are changed into wine for gladness by the Christ. The best is saved for the last, not only of wine, but also of God's love.

This miracle of provision for need in His designated hour has been preceded by many examples of God's power to provide. Each

example strengthens our faith in the fact that God cares for us.

Introduction. Two motifs are in the text, a part of the week's Bible readings (Ex. 19; 20; 32—34; 39; 40; Lev. 10; 16; Num. 11; 12; 14): (1) God's miraculous provision in the wilderness and (2) Moses' activity as a responsible leader of his people. Disobedient and grumbling, rebellious and proud, the people stand before Moses, their mediator of God's covenant, and again there is manifested, "epiphanied,"

God's Power to Provide

I. *Is God's provision necessary?*

A. For Israel? Throughout the entire exodus and pilgrimage to Canaan only God could answer their prayers. Slaves, not a warrior nation—only God could equip them with His might. Facing the Red Sea, followed by Pharaoh's hosts—only God could go before them and behind them. In the wilderness without food or water—only God could provide. And they themselves? A sinful, rebellious people. They could live by "His Word" alone.

B. For Moses? Moses felt incapable of being their leader on his own account, on Pharaoh's account, and on their account. Moses' crying unto the Lord (Ex. 14:15), his impatience (Ex. 17:2-4), and his complaint of the burdens of office (Num. 11:10-15) revealed his need for God's providing food, guidance, and rescue.

C. For us? We are in no better position than was Israel and Moses. We know not what today, tomorrow, this week, this year may bring forth. "In the midst of life we are in death" (Job 14) is a passage appropriate not only for the funeral service but as a description of man's unliving nature.

We are always "up against it," whatever the "it" may be. We need His guidance for our pilgrimage, His sustenance for our life. We are not sufficient of ourselves. "Our sufficiency" can only be "of God."

II. *Is God's provision adequate?*

A. For Israel? Their deliverance from slavery, their passage through the Red Sea, their provision in the wilderness would say "Yes." Daily manna, the fire at night, the cloud by day; the ark of the covenant before them, the tabernacle in their midst with the tribes' tents surrounding; their mediator, Moses; their spokesman, Aaron. And always He—their God, their Savior!

B. For Moses? Onions or cucumbers, fish or flesh is what Israel wanted; help is what Moses needed. Help is what Moses received. No one starved. Shoes outlasted normal wear, bitterness became sweetness, death was used by God to bring them life. Moses in farewell speech (Deut. 33) could but echo the faith in his heart: "The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms." (Deut. 33:27)

C. For us, There is no trial facing us for which the Lord has not provided an escape, the strength to bear it. Often the provision is like the manna and the quail—so abundant that it sticks out of our nostrils (Num. 11:20). God gives daily bread, even as daily and richly He forgives us our sins and does not bring us into judgment or wrath. His grace covers our every sin. His mercy answers our every prayer according to His gracious and good will. There is no need which He does not meet, not "barely satisfactorily" or "merely acceptably," but overabundantly, far beyond what we ask for or deserve. The best example is in the riches of forgiveness in Christ Jesus.

III. *Is God's provision acceptable?*

A. For Israel? They grabbed as much manna and quail as they could in their greed. They forgot God's directions. They complained. They were jealous of Moses' leadership; even Aaron and Miriam (those closest to Moses) joined the complainers. They needed correction and guidance.

B. For Moses? The help of 70 men,

which Moses' father-in-law suggested, lightens his administrative burden. But the burden of the people's sin, as they murmur and are jealous, is heavier. Moses becomes their mediator, pleading for God to forgive. He cites God's covenant relationship with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. He pleads God's promises to help. He urges their rescue lest the enemies claim God put Israel in the wilderness to destroy them. God hears. His provision of mercy and grace is sought by Moses, given to him, and received favorably by him.

C. For us? We who rebel or misuse His gifts or guidance, who complain or groan against His ways, we deserve nothing but wrath. God said to Moses: "My holiness cannot go with you, for My holiness will destroy you."

The world's Mediator is not another Moses, but the God of Moses. God Himself makes possible the complete forgiveness of all men's sins. Jesus, our Advocate with the Father, not only asks, "Blot not out their names from Thy book and remember their sins no more," but He takes our sin, transgression, and wrong and suffers our punishment for sin.

Christ is not a mere footnote to Israel's history. He is not simply one more figure in the record of God's provision. No, He *is* God's continual provision for the needs of all mankind. The provision for Israel through Moses is by contrast but a parenthetical historical comment reflecting an attitude of God that changes not. God cares. God cares for us. God provides!

THE THIRD SUNDAY
AFTER THE EPIPHANY

MOSES

DEUT. 7:6-16

See also the exegetical study of this text by Roddy L. Braun following the present study.

Prophets for the Day. Jeremiah (33:6-9) in today's Old Testament Lesson notes that

God's will to Judah and Israel is to give them healing and health rather than punishment for their deserved guilt. We may think evil deserves repayment by our evil, but the Epistle encourages us not to let evil so overcome us that we become evil, but to do good and thus to overcome evil. It is God's will that evil be overcome. So He grants grace and goodness constantly. Even the leper and the centurion's servant, in today's Gospel, are beneficiaries of Christ's grace and will for healing and for doing good. Today's text (Deut. 7:6-16) pleads that Israel be unlike other nations. Sin is not to rule! God, who sent plague and pestilence to Egypt to save His people, will keep His covenant and give them healing.

Introduction. In an installment of TV's "This Is the Life," a wife contemplating divorce changed her mind when by registered mail she received a can opener from her husband. The gift was a reminder of happier days when on their honeymoon they discovered a can opener in the cottage kitchen cupboard and were saved from starvation!

For many, a remembered flower, picture, or gift opens pages of a diary. Memory which all too often discourages us, may also encourage. In the midst of our remembered sinfulness, we can lift out the memory of God's mighty acts of grace for His people and, remembering, rejoice.

Three speeches of Moses in Deuteronomy — in each is woven the thread of memory. "Remember who you are, Israel!" It is a chorus and refrain in Israel's spiritual song. One we can learn and sing along. It is the memory of the great gift of God.

Grace to Be Healed

I. *God sanctifies to Himself a people to belong to the Lord.*

A. Holiness belongs to the Lord. "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2). Israel's call is also our

call. Like the centurion in today's Gospel (Matt. 8:1-13), we should realize we are "not worthy that the Lord should come under our roof." We do not want to be a separated people. We writing and twist His commands. We have slipped out of line.

B. Yet a holy God calls us His own. Imagine, sons of God! Deut. 7:6: "a people holy to the Lord." We are covered with His righteousness. By Christ's obedience and atonement we are justified — in a forensic act, declared holy. "What does God see in me?" He sees us as holy in Christ. We are His.

II. *God separates to possess.*

A. God set aside the Jews. "How odd of God to choose the Jews!" Deut. 7:8 ff. shows that God set them aside neither for numbers nor for their goodness, but out of His love. They were set aside by God's will and not because of their will. "Their God is for them" would be the "enemy's complaint for years to come." "Their God is for us" is our conviction, since the Savior has come, in whom all the world is blessed.

B. Why were they separated from the world? Was the leper of the Gospel healed only because God wanted to heal lepers? Was the centurion's servant healed only for God's glory? Does not God choose to send Christ to be a world Savior? Were we called only to be company for God? They were separated as a people to be a blessing. They were related to the holy God for His purpose. Called to be God's agents for good. From them the Savior came, Israel's fulfillment. For us the Savior has come. The tasks He assigned to us await fulfillment.

III. *God sets His love upon His people.*

A. Love is not a reward. It is grace. If we want rewards and deservings, they would be wrath and damnation. Arrogance or pride in being chosen misunderstands love and grace.

B. His love will forgive and heal the sin-stricken soul. It may be that suffering comes, even as Moses could not enter the land (Deut. 1:37; Ps. 106:32); but God's love is there. The dying thief receives Paradise but must die. Nathan tells David the Lord has put away his sin, but the child dies. God's love forgives.

C. Animals are sacrificed by Israel. Animals are innocent and they bear the sins of the guilty. The fulfillment of such sacrifice is in Christ, who did no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth. God set His love upon us in Christ.

IV. *God swears such love by an oath.*

A. God's oath of love is for now and hereafter. His mercy and love continue. His love will never fail. Daily, continually He loves. God says: "I will not let you go. You are Mine. No man shall pluck you out of My hand."

B. If sins of past are remembered and consciences are disturbed, thank God. Even the cutting edge of the Word is used by God to save. Return to His oath of love in Christ.

V. *God summons to obedience.*

A. Deuteronomy closes with blessings and curses. God knows and God sees. But above all, God is God—therefore obey.

B. Moses looks for a place to die, climbing a craggy mountain, overlooking the Holy Land (Deut. 34). "His eyes were not dimmed. His hands did not shake. His feet were not feeble. His strength had not slackened." But die he must. God called him; God summoned him to die.

A legend has it that Moses was afraid to die. He lay down. Angels told him death was not to be feared. The devil came and derided him. Then the devil and Michael fought. (Jude 9)

C. God is God—and God is victorious. God saves His own, calms their fear, heals

them by His grace. When the time comes that we are summoned to die, the time for the carpenter to put down his tools, the child to put away his toys, the mother to set aside her knitting, then—meet God. "God knows our frame. He remembers we are dust." Our healing will not be preservation in our weakness or continuation of earthly life, but the blessing of being "with the Lord," and the resurrection of the body, forgiveness of sins in Christ, and life everlasting in Christ. Healed forever by His grace!

Deut. 7:6-11

Exegetical Study

By RODDY L. BRAUN

I

Encamped on the plains of Moab, ready to cross over into the Promised Land, Israel receives its final instructions for life in Canaan. Throughout the three sermons of the Book of Deuteronomy (1—4; 5—28; 29, 30) there is one chief concern: Israel may even now, after passing through such great trials, forget the very God who has delivered her from Egypt to be His people.

With this thought in mind, the preacher seeks to motivate his hearers for complete love and obedience to God. He rehearses for them God's great acts on Israel's behalf (Chs. 1—3). He reminds them that from first to last, from promise to fulfillment, their relationship with God has been created and preserved only by His grace. He sets before them God's Law and the blessings which will result from their keeping it. He reminds them of the wrath of God, and of the curses pronounced on those who disobey that Law.

But Israel's relationship with God is basically a personal one. God and Israel have made a covenant; He will be their God, and they will be His people. God has taken them for His own, and the only thing that can immediately destroy that relationship is idolatry. For that would be to reject not only

the terms of the covenant but the Maker of the covenant Himself. On the other hand, to love God with the whole heart is to keep the covenant, for Moses recognized, as did Luther, that if this one commandment were kept, the remainder would naturally follow. Our text is a portion of Moses' lengthy sermon (Chs. 5—11) on the First Commandment.

II

The concept of the covenant, which is basic for a proper understanding of our text, has long been considered the unifying core of the Old Testament. In its simplest form a covenant is no more than an agreement; *the* covenant in the Old Testament, reduced to a minimum, is the agreement, found so frequently, that Yahweh will be Israel's God, and they will be His people. (Ex. 6:7; 19:5, 6; Deut. 29:13; Jer. 30:22; Ezek. 37:23; etc.)

Studies in the covenant like that of George Mendenhall (*Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* [Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium, 1955]) have shown this conception to be even more important than was believed previously. According to Mendenhall, Israel's relationship to her God was given expression by means of an international covenant form adopted from the political sphere. Yahweh was like a great king making a treaty with his vassal Israel. After recalling to the vassal his benevolent acts in her behalf (such as we find in Joshua 24:2-13; Deut. 1—3; and the single significant verse at the beginning of the Ten Commandments, Ex. 20:2, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage"), the king then lays down the conditions of the covenant (Ex. 20:3-17; 21:1—23:24; Lev. 17—25; Deut. 12—26). Primary among these is always the forbidding of any other foreign alliances (cf. the First Commandment, and the entirety of Deut. 6—11). One of the most lengthy portions of the treaty form is

the enumeration of the blessings and curses which will result from the keeping or breaking of the covenant. See Ex. 23:25-33; Lev. 26; Deut. 27:15-26; and, most completely, Deut. 28. The covenant is then witnessed by the deities of the two parties (necessarily impossible in Israel, but note the interesting developments in Deut. 30:19 and Joshua 24:27) and is laid up in the sanctuary of the vassal to be read periodically. (Ex. 25:16; 31:10, 11)

All of these elements of the international treaty occur, as indicated, in the Old Testament, some of them frequently. It is possible that the entire Book of Deuteronomy, with its historical narrative of Chapters 1—3; the sermon on the First Commandment in 6—11, the laws in 12—26, and its repeated exhortations of faithfulness to the conditions of the covenant should be understood as an elaboration of this basic covenant form. (The October issue of the *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY* discusses the covenant relationship in detail in several articles.)

III

This text is closely related to the preceding context, and is dependent in large degree on two classic Israelite covenant confessions, Ex. 19:5, 6 and Ex. 20:5, 6. (Cf. Deut. 5:9, 10.)

V. 6—The first verse brings out clearly the relationship with vv. 1-5. It is *because of* Israel's unique relationship to her God, Yahweh, that the idolatrous worship of the Canaanites and everything connected with it must be destroyed. "For you are a people holy to the Lord."

Although the original connotation of holiness is disputed, it is evident that in many passages in the Old Testament it has to do with *separation*. "Holiness is ethical only by implication." (George Adam Smith, *The Book of Deuteronomy*). Our association of it with purity is derived and secondary. When God is spoken of as "holy," it is His com-

plete "otherness" which is depicted, so that the paradox of Hosea 11:9, that the Holy One dwells in the midst of His people, is essentially the same paradox we confront in the Incarnation.

Furthermore, the concept of holiness is basically positive rather than negative; i. e., it is primarily a separation *to* something, rather than *from* something, although it necessarily involves the latter also. Israel is, for example, separated from the other peoples (Lev. 20:26), while things set apart for God are at the same time removed from common use. (Lev. 10:10; 27:9; etc.)

It is noteworthy that of some 700 occurrences of words with the root meaning of holiness in the Old Testament only six are to be found prior to Ex. 19:6. For it was particularly in the Exodus, as it found its goal in the covenant at Sinai and the gift of the Promised Land, that Israel saw herself as set apart to, holy to, her God. Since Yahweh was the people's God, they could have no contact with what was holy to other gods. What was holy to one god was in fact *cherem* to another, i. e., set apart, but in the negative sense that it must be completely destroyed. For this reason the Israelites are commanded "utterly to destroy" the Canaanites, their altars, their pillars, their Asherim, and their images (Deut. 7:2, 5); for only thus could the polluted objects be removed from their midst.

Some of the more obscure laws, such as 14:21 (the boiling of a kid in its mother's milk), are best explained in this context. Some of the common practices of the pagans were to be avoided by Israel as a mark of her separation. (Lev. 18:2 ff.)

Israel had been set apart for Yahweh; He had made her His own. Israel was His *segullab*, His personal private property. In 1 Chron. 29:3, for example, *segullab* is used of the king's personal treasure as distinct from the public funds. The translation "peculiar" is a good one if its etymology is re-

called. The Latin *peculium* referred to that personal property which a master or parent allowed a slave or child to keep for his own.

It was, once again, to acquire for Himself such a personal property that our Lord gave Himself for us (Titus 2:14); and in being made His own, the church, the new Israel, has received the prerogatives of the old Israel: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." (1 Peter 2:9; Ex. 19:5 f.)

V. 7—Israel's unique position can give her no cause for boasting, however. It was not because of her numbers that God chose Israel, any more than it was because of her righteousness (Deut. 9:4-8; 1 Cor. 1:26-31). Although the punishment of the Canaanites was deserved, Israel's continued disobedience merited the same judgment. (9:7 ff.)

V. 8—Moses can find reason for God's choice of Israel only in God's love. God loved the fathers (4:37; 10:15) and made a promise to them; He is bringing up Israel from Egypt because He loves them too (23:5) and He would keep His promise to the fathers. God's love was not conditioned by finding something worth loving. It was rather because of this unconditioned love, this electing love, that God had made His covenant with man.

Israel's poets frequently depict God's choice of Israel as being spontaneous, almost accidental. Compare, for example, Deut. 32:10, "He found him in a desert land"; Hosea 9:10; "like grapes in the wilderness I found Israel"; and the unflattering description of Israel in Ezek. 16.

God's love is active in redeeming Israel from Egypt and in making her His people. The exodus is for the Old Testament writers what the resurrection is for those of the New, the great redemptive act of God in the light of which all history must be understood. When Israel was led captive, it was in terms of the exodus that she expressed her hope for deliverance (Is 43:19-21; Hos. 2:14 f.;

etc.), and on the Mount of Transfiguration our Lord spoke to the disciples of the exodus which He was to fulfill in Jerusalem by His death and resurrection. (Luke 9:31)

"Redeemed. . . ." The primary meaning of the word is to buy back from death or slavery. To the Hebrews Egypt itself was nothing other than a "house of slaves." It is thus again in terms at least partially reminiscent of the exodus that the New Testament has chosen to interpret the work of Christ.

V. 9—"Know therefore. . . ." The translations of both the RSV and the KJV obscure the connection between vv. 8 and 9. God has acted "in order that you might know. . . ." But "knowledge" seldom denotes mere intellectual comprehension in the Old Testament. It is frequently used, for example, of the relations of a man with his wife, as in Gen. 4:1. In Hos. 6:6 it is parallel to *chesed*, "steadfast love" (see below). Cf. also Hos. 2:20; 4:1-6; 13:4 f. As George Adam Smith states: "It is not to know so as to see the fact of, but to know so as to feel the force of; knowledge not as acquisition and mastery, but as impression, passion." It is this kind of response which God's actions should arouse in His people.

"The Lord your God is God, the faithful God. . . ." This phrase, almost meaningless in translation, is pregnant with significance when we recall that "Lord" is the translation used by RSV and KJV for the divine name "Yahweh," the personal name of Israel's God. The other two words here used for God, *el* and *elohim*, are more common generic terms for a deity. *El* was a designation given to the head of the Canaanite pantheon, so that to assert that Yahweh was "the *el*" was to pronounce His superiority over whatever other gods the Israelites might confront.

Concerning *elohim*, which regularly occurs with the plural termination, W. F. Albright writes: "Just as the Canaanites had sometimes used the plural of *el*, 'god,' to indicate 'totality of the gods' (as, for instance, in the

Canaanite Amarna letters), so the Israelites used *Elohim* to stress the unity and universality of God!" (*The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra*, p. 18). To state, then, that Yahweh was "the *el*" and "the *elohim*" was to affirm nothing less than that Yahweh was more than the head of the pantheon; indeed, He *was* the pantheon.

"The faithful God. . . ." Since God remains absolutely true to His covenant, He can be relied upon absolutely, is absolutely trustworthy.

"Who keeps covenant and steadfast love. . . ." The Hebrew is more explicit: "the covenant and the steadfast love," i. e., in the covenant and *chesed* which was known and at hand. No translation of *chesed* is completely adequate; it is a covenant term which expresses that loyalty and faithfulness which both parties of a covenant should exhibit towards one another. Since, however, Israel perpetually failed to live up to its covenant obligations, *chesed* comes to refer primarily to God's determined persistence to maintain His covenant with Israel, even when she was unfaithful. No matter how justified He might be in doing so, God does not want to cancel the agreement He has made with Israel; He will not cease to be her God.

Vv. 9, 10—These verses are virtually a paraphrase of Ex. 20:5 f. Two points are worthy of special mention: (1) the note of God's anger and wrath is a constant one in both Old and New Testaments, and (2) the primary emphasis of the passage is, however, on the superabundance of God's mercy, which extends to thousands, in contrast to the more limited extent of His wrath (as seen already by Luther, Large Catechism, "Explanation of the Appendix to the First Commandment"). It is doubtful if the language should be pressed beyond this point.

V. 11—The application of Moses' sermon: Israel, blessed with God's love, set apart to be His people, is to obey Him. To

love God is to obey Him. The note of love dominates the Book of Deuteronomy to an unusual degree, and it was no doubt not by accident that our Lord took His summary of the first and greatest commandment from this book. (Mark 12:29 f.; Deut. 6:4 f.)

Vv. 12-16—Our study of the text would be incomplete without looking at the results that come from keeping the covenant conditions, especially since it is stated that one of the blessings will be that God will keep His covenant with Israel, the covenant which (we have seen before) is made and preserved only by grace. But viewed as a covenant document, this statement is fully understandable. God and Israel have made an agreement. If Israel keeps the terms of the covenant, she can fully expect God to be faithful to the covenant also. If they remain His people, He will continue to be their God. While seemingly overoptimistic about Israel's ability to keep the Law in some cases (cf. 30:11-14), in others it is clear that the complete fulfillment of God's law must again rest on God's grace, even as the Law itself was a gift of grace (4:5-7; 6:24). It will call for a circumcision of the heart (30:6), a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek. 11:19; 18:31; Ps. 51:10), and even a new kind of covenant in which man will fully know and obey God through the forgiveness of sins (Jer. 31:31-34; 32:40; Ezek. 37:26). God will not be frustrated in His efforts to set apart for Himself a people, for His *chesed*—which forbids Him to cease to be God even when we refuse to be His people—endures forever. (Ps. 136)

Fort Wayne, Ind.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

JOSHUA 23:6-15

Proper for the Day. "Help!" is our cry to God in moments of danger (according to

today's Collect). Even the heathen learn to respect and fear God's name (Gradual). The help and power of God is manifested in two miracles over wind and wave, over fear and fever (Gospel).

Aware that all nature obeys the Creator we stand in awe ("What sort of man is this?") and we are summoned to faith. *Knowing* Him who is so manifested, we *believe* and place our *trust* in Him. He has all power, power in heaven and on earth.

Introduction. The Book of Joshua (included in the week's suggested Bible reading) in 11 chapters gives a record of Joshua the warrior. A slave for 40 years, a pilgrim for 40 years, a warrior for 30 years, he had been a witness of God's power in nature and he had been an agent of God's power. As a young man he saw God's use of nature to free the Hebrews; as a middle-aged man he saw nature in obedience feed God's people; as an old man he saw Jordan dry up for God's people to cross over; he heard the sound of trumpets announce God's power and the walls of Jericho tumbling; he watched hailstones rout an enemy and the sun stand still to aid in victory. All these mighty acts he witnessed were an unfolding and manifestation of God's power. Epiphanies they were. We see them through his eyes. We hear them in God's Word. To us, too, God reveals Himself that we might be both witness and agent for His power.

The God Whom All Nature Obeys

I. *Knowing the God whom nature obeys*

A. Moses and Joshua knew this God. "Be not dismayed; for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." So Moses spoke to Joshua (Deut. 31:6, 7), God to Joshua (1:9), and Joshua to the people (Joshua 23:6-15). The record of Moses and of Joshua showed the mighty acts of God for subsequent generations. The implication was also passed along—"This God obey" (text),

for He has revealed Himself." (Joshua 23: 6, 16)

B. We can know God. "The sacred writings" instruct us (2 Tim. 3:15, 16). With David (Ps. 37:5) and with Joshua (Joshua 23:14) our experiences in life's alembic show that God's warnings and promises do not fail. The "last word" of God's witness to His covenant is Jesus Christ (Heb. 1; John 1). The implications are also clear for us.

C. To have others know God was Joshua's final desire and should be our continuing ambition. Faith comes by the Word (Rom. 10:17; cf. Luke 11:28). Faith spreads as we go with the Word. No effort will be unrewarded. Old man plants young tree for next generation to have fruit and shade. We expend every effort now to increase knowledge of God's covenant and grace in Christ Jesus.

II. *Believing the God whom nature obeys*

A. Joshua believed God's promises. When he spied out the land he knew God's promises would not fail (Num. 13; Deut. 1). God's covenant was believed and acted upon by Joshua. Joshua encouraged others to believe. At Shechem they promised to serve Him "who did those great signs in our sight." (Joshua 24:17)

B. God has revealed Himself to us in commanding creation to come forth; He has manifested Himself by showing powers over nature in the miracles of Christ; and when the world ends, nature (now "groaning in pain waiting for redemption") will bow to His command. All this summons us to faith (Rom. 1:18, 19). He who revealed Himself to Israel (Joshua 23:15) has manifested Himself in Christ. Each manifestation of Christ's glory (of wisdom, over wind and

wave, fear and fever, death, and His transfiguration) summons us to faith. Christ is Messiah (Matt. 11:4-6; Luke 7:20-22; John 5:36), and we believe. (John 20:30, 31)

III. *Confidence in the God whom nature obeys*

A. After Jericho's destruction, Joshua felt his men capable of conquering Ai. But the Israelites were defeated, 36 of them were killed. Joshua soon discovered that one of their men was a "sinner"; it was Achan who stole. Joshua pleaded for forgiveness. Returned to conquer Ai. The people learn with Joshua that God demands that He be relied on and that His words be followed. Confidence is not to be in ability or numbers ("they were so few and we were so many"), but trust is to be in God.

The Gibeonites sent messengers to trick Joshua into the battle with the five kings. Joshua had not consulted the Lord. Despite his foolishness and self-confidence the Lord did not fail him in the battle.

B. The firm belief of Joshua that God will not fail (Joshua 23:14) can be our confidence in the face of ridicule and death. Our trust is in God (Num. 14:8-10, Joshua and Caleb). In the midst of trouble God comes, and we glorify Him. In the midst of sin God comes and redeems us, and we give praise to Him.

Knowing whom we have believed, we are persuaded that He is able to keep that which we have committed unto Him against that day (2 Tim. 1:12). In the midst of the storm "I AM" says, "Be still! Be calm!" He acts in storm, war, battle, weakness, sin. He is our Peace and Forgiveness. Be faithful to a faithful God!

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