

TALK #47 ALIEN IN CLIMAX OF DEUTERONOMY AND LOVE OF ALIEN
Continuation of talk 46 in terms of numbering

3. Remember your roots as aliens in Egypt, climax of Deuteronomy: Deut 26, esp. vss 5, 11, 12, 13

3.1. Literary location of this “hymn” and the text of the hymn

We have already considered Deuteronomy 26 in connection with firstfruits along with third year tithes above. Here we only need to add that Deuteronomy 26 is the *climax* to the giving of the Law by Moses in Deuteronomy (central section on laws in Deuteronomy is usually considered to be Deut 12-26), although it is not the climax of Deuteronomy itself. Deuteronomy 27 and 28 assume that the law has now been *completed* and what is needed is instruction about writing “all of the words of this law” on stones at Mt. Ebal “when you cross the Jordan”, laws which are followed by curses and blessings for disobedience or obedience to the Law (Deut 27-28), the renewal of the covenant (Deut 29), the “Song of Moses” (Deut 32) and Moses’ blessing on the tribes (Deut 33) and the death of Moses (Deut 34). We shall construct a more detailed structure of Deuteronomy later, but this is enough to show that Deuteronomy 26 is indeed the *climax* of the law.

3.2. Don’t forget your roots, the text of the hymn

As language students in Batangas City, in the Philippines, my wife and I tried to learn a new “proverb” in Tagalog each week. One of the first we memorized (and I have now forgotten it in Tagalog) said “He who is not looking backward cannot see where he is going forward!” In America, we might say “Don’t forget your roots!” Moses in his lengthy concluding statement in the law about firstfruits, about being thankful for what God has done in the past for Israel, declared that after entering the land, Israelites are to take a basket of firstfruits, the product of the hard work in the land *given* to them by the LORD and say in the presence of the priest (Deut 26:5-11):

“My father was a wandering (*‘abad*:H006) Aramean (*‘Arammiy*:H761), and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived (sojourned, *guwr*:H1481) there and became a *great nation*, powerful and numerous. ⁶

But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. ⁷
Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. ⁸

So the LORD *brought* (*yatsa’*:H3318) us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. ⁹

He *brought* (*bow’*:H935) us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; ¹⁰

and now I *bring* (*bow’*:H935) the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me.”

Place the basket before the LORD your God and bow down before him. ¹¹

And you and the Levites and the *aliens* (*ger*) among you shall rejoice in all the good things the LORD your God has *given* to you and your household.

3.3. Key words in the hymn considered

Jacob, who lived for years with his father-in-law, “Laban the Aramean” (Gen 25:20; 28:5, 31:20, 24), is the “wandering Aramean”. The adjective “wandering” (*‘abad*:H006) in “wandering Aramean” underscores the idea of sojourning, of being an alien.⁹ Therefore, when he “went down into Egypt,” he *continued* to be an alien. The NIV of vs 5b obscures the verb *guwr*, to sojourn, to live as an alien, by rendering it “lived there” whereas many translations have “sojourned” (KJV, ASV, RSV, ESV, JPS, NAU, cf “lived as a foreigner”, NLT, GWN). *Guwr* is the verb related to *ger* the noun for alien, one who sojourns. Jacob, the landless, wandering Aramean, was also an alien in Canaan. And he continued to be an alien in Egypt where his descendants became “numerous” (cf Gen 1:28) so that Jacob’s family could be called a “great nation” (cf Gen 12:2). But this great nation, Israel (Jacob’s new name), was mistreated (vs 6) and as aliens were made to “suffer” (Ex 1:11, 12) and “put...to hard labor” (Ex 1:14; 2:23).

In their mistreatment as slaves and aliens, they cried out to the LORD (Ex 2:23) who “with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders” (vs 6) delivered them with

mighty acts of justice (Ex 6:6). He not only *brought us out*, but he also *brought us to* this place, this land flowing with milk and honey (vs 9). Consequently, the thankful Israelite who has *not forgotten his roots, his past, where he has come from*, brings before the LORD and the priest a basket of the firstfruits of the land saying in effect “You, O LORD, have brought (*bow*:H935) me into this land and so now I bring (*bow*:H935) the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have *given* me” (vs 10). Note the emphasis on the land as “gift” in vss 1, 9, 10. We shall return to this in a minute.

3.4. The hymn as a biblical theology summary of the story

This short “hymn” or “credo,” as it is sometimes called, sums up four hundred years of the story of the people of God. What is striking in the story of justice are those occasions where someone in the story or the LORD himself, as in this case, looks back over the story and gives a summary of the salient points of the “plot” and its “turning points” along with a description of its “characters”. At least for one like me schooled in systematic theology, it is worth noting that these summaries, snapshots or hymns do not rehearse the character of the LORD in abstract language, i.e. omnipresence, omnipotence, etc.

The story is rehearsed in concrete, historical acts. The story itself presents itself or summarizes itself *as a story*. Or put a bit differently, the story summarizes itself as *biblical* theology and not, at least at this point, as *systematic* theology. The summary uses the *language* (mistreat, suffer, cry out, misery, oppression) of the story itself and follows the historic *contours* of the story (starts with Jacob living with Laban, moves to Egypt and then on to Moab). The summary does not impose upon the story categories drawn from outside the story. This should not be constructed as an argument against *systematic* theology, which does impose on the data categories and the arrangement of the categories from outside the story, i.e. God, heaven, hell, man, first things, last things, etc. Rather this is an argument for *first* doing biblical theology in enough detail so that when systematic theologies are erected, they are built on a substantial biblical theology foundation. I have spend a great deal of my adult life either studying in seminaries or teaching in seminaries and know first-hand that while systematic theology is a *required* subject in most evangelical seminaries, biblical theology, if it is offered, is rarely a *required* subject and is almost never a *prerequisite* for systematic theology. And alas when biblical theology is taught, it is almost always divided up into small bits, such as Pauline theology, Johannine theology or the theology of the Pentateuch, etc. Rarely is there a course on biblical theology based on the Bible as a whole.¹⁰

3.5. Biblical perspective on distributing wealth to the aliens and other poor persons

To grasp fully Deuteronomy’s *perspective* on thankfulness to the LORD as expressed in this text on the offering of firstfruits (Deut 26:1-11) and the offering of tithes (Deut 26:12-15), we should rehearse two gift motifs: 1) the *gift of the land* (Deut 8:7-18) and 2) the *gift of ability to work the land* (Deut 26:1-15).

3.5.1. Gift motif of land Deut 26:1-15

The motif of “gift of the land” in Deuteronomy 26:1-15 occurs in:

26:1 When you have entered the *land* the LORD your God is *giving* you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it...

26:2 take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil of the *land* the LORD your God is *giving* you and put them in a basket.

26:3b "I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come to the *land* the LORD swore to our forefathers to *give* us."

26:9a He brought us to this place and *gave* us this *land*.

26:11 And you and the Levites and the aliens among you shall rejoice in all (land, etc.) the good things the LORD your God has *given* to you and your household.

26:15 Look down from heaven, your holy dwelling place, and bless your people Israel and the *land* you have *given* us as you promised on oath to our forefathers, a *land* flowing with milk and honey."

We shall return to the land as gift motif later.

3.5.2. Gift of ability to work, Deut 8:7-18

The second gift is the *ability* to work the land and thus produce wealth. To capture this perspective we need to go back to Deuteronomy 8:7-18 where again the danger faced by the Israelite is to *forget* that the land and the ability to produce wealth from the land are *gifts* from the LORD and are not given because Israel was righteous.

For the LORD your God is bringing (*bow*':H935) you into a good land--
 a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills;⁸
 a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey;⁹
 a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing;
 a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.¹⁰

When you have eaten and are satisfied,
 praise the LORD your God for the good land he has *given* you.¹¹
 Be careful that you do not *forget* the LORD your God,
 failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees
 that I am giving you this day.¹²
 Otherwise,
 when you eat and are satisfied,
 when you build fine houses and settle down,¹³ and
 when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and
 all you have is multiplied,¹⁴
 then your heart will become proud and
 you will *forget* the LORD your God,
 who brought (*yatsa*':H3318) you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.¹⁵
 He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land,
 with its venomous snakes and scorpions.
 He brought (*yatsa*':H3318) you water out of hard rock.¹⁶
 He gave you manna to eat in the desert,
 something your fathers had never known,
 to humble and to test you
 so that in the end it might go well with you.¹⁷
 You may say to yourself,
 "*My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.*"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.

The layout of this passage make clear the central concern of Moses is that Israel may *forget* the LORD. The exhortation is to *remember* the LORD your God. They are in danger of forgetting that they have gotten to where they are, i.e. prosperity, wealth, because of the LORD's gift of *land* and *ability*. Yes, they have worked hard as farmers on the land. But even that hard work is the result of health given by the LORD. What this means as Chris Wright (1996, 128) says that the attitude "I made it, so I own it" is never the bottom line of biblical economics." The first principle of economics, says Wright, is that "The earth is the LORD's and everything in it" (Ps 24:1) and that we in humility are stewards of this gift. To not remember the LORD, to forget the LORD is the first step toward idolatry. Moses anticipating this concludes this section with a stern warning (8:19, 20):

If you ever *forget* the LORD your God and
 follow other gods and worship and
 bow down to them,
 I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed.²⁰
 Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you,
 so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God.

Does this ever happen? Is Israel ever destroyed? Are they absolutely destroyed never again to be the people of God in the land? These are questions that we must pay attention to as the story of justice unfolds. The word "testify" is

justice language in a court where God is judging Israel for forgetting and then moving, maybe slowly, to idolatry and finally to destruction. The Rise and Fall of Israel.

3.5.3. Perspective on the distribution of wealth in light of the *gifts* of land and ability

Taking together Deuteronomy 8:7-8 along with Deuteronomy 26:1-11 (firstfruits) and Deuteronomy 26:12-15 (third year tithe), we ask a fundamental question about the *perspective* that wealthy Israelites are to have about the distribution of a substantial portion¹¹ of their wealth to non-Israelites, i.e. *aliens*, as well as to Israelites, i.e. widows, the orphans and the Levites?

How do people who believe that both
the *access to the means of the production of wealth*,
which in an agricultural society is *land*, and
the *ability* to work,
which in an agricultural land is good health and wisdom about farming,
are *gifts* of God *feel* (and talk) about a society
in which they share their wealth with the poor, especially the alien?

How do these farmers who believe in and practice hard work and also believe that they are stewards of the land and not ultimately owners *feel* about the distribution of their hard earned crops via the third/sixth year tithe to the needy? The biblical answer is that they feel *blessed* (Deut 26:15):

Look down from heaven, your holy dwelling place, and
bless your people Israel and
the land you have given (natan:H5414) us as you promised on oath to our forefathers,
a land flowing with milk and honey."

Also, along with the alien they are *joyful* before the LORD (Deut 26:11):¹²

And you and the Levites and the *aliens* (ger) among you shall *rejoice*
in *all the good things* the LORD your God has given (natan:H5414)
to you and *your household*.

The next verse (12) makes the crucial point that the head of the household to whom much has been *given* by the LORD now *gives* to those in need:

When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year,
the year of the tithe,
you shall give (natan:H5414) it to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow,
so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.

The motivation to do justice by obeying the law is simple: The LORD has given us land and ability to produce wealth, now we give to the needy. *Give as it was given unto you* (cf Deut 16:10, 11). The Israelite will be enabled to share his wealth because his attitude is one of thankfulness for the gifts of God and out of that thankfulness in obedience to the Law (not charity as benevolence) he gives. This makes the Israelite God-like.

God gives to those in need, i.e. the Israelite who was a slave and alien in Egypt:
the Israelite, who now is a land "owner," gives to those in need, among whom are the aliens.

Amazing! If we could imagine our way back into that *just society* which the LORD is seeking to create through obedience to his just and righteous Law, we would see farmers, who are heads of households, wives, children, menservants, maidservants and aliens all working together on the farm. They have *joy* and a keen sense of having been *blessed* by the gifts of the LORD, i.e. land and ability to work the land. The head of the house gives to his household and others because much (gifts) have been given to him. Note the last line of 26:11 says that all of the good things the LORD has given are given not only to you, head of the household, but also to "your household".

3.6. Some of the means of distributing wealth spelled out in the Law

And how are "all the good things" to be given to the "household" (slaves and aliens) but especially those outside the household, transient alien, widow, orphan and Levite? What are the mechanisms of wealth distribution to those in need?¹³ The "wealthy"¹⁴ householder would do the following, which are prescribed by Law, i.e. matters of justice, not charity as benevolence:

1) The householder would provide food, clothing and shelter for the aliens who were part of his household and worked in his field.

2) The faithful Israelite head of a household would also actively participate in the third (and sixth) year tithes which were distributed presumably by the Levites to those in need, i.e. those not embedded in the household of the faithful Israelite.

3) Three times a year, the head of the house would bring the aliens and others of his household to the Tabernacle for a whole week of feasting which includes meat, a very rare item on the menu of the average Israelite.

4) At harvest time, the householder allowed for aliens and others to glean in his field for basic food stuffs, i.e., olives, grapes and grain. Indeed, he would deliberately not harvest the corners of the fields so that there would be adequate gleanings. The Mishnah (200 A.D.) calculated the corner (*pe'ah*) as 1/6 (17%) of the field.

5) The householder would also provide rest (non-productive time) for the alien on the Sabbath day and probably on the observance of the monthly New Moon. In modern terms, one might think of these non-work days as *paid* vacations.

6) Most amazing of all the commandments is that the householder would cease all work on the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee year. (see Law as Constitution of Israel)

7) Other ways of sharing: When we return to the BC (Ex 22:25-27), we shall consider interest free loans and in Deuteronomy 15 we shall consider the possibility of cancelling these loans in the seventh year.

There is a good deal about the life of an Israelite farmer that we do not know, but what we do know paints a picture for us of a godly person who is responsible for creating and maintaining his own small, but very significant, household which would be a miniature *just society* and as such the basic building block in the construction of Israel as a *just society*. He also has obligations to the marginals outside of his household.

3.7. Summary

In sum, Israelite remembering their past as aliens and slaves come before the LORD with a basket of firstfruits and with third tithes, but they do not come alone. They come with the dependent Levites and with the aliens among you. They *all* share in the worship of Yahweh. They *all* share in the wealth. The aliens share in the wealth not as a matter of *charity as benevolence* on the part of the wealthy, but because the wealthy do what is right and just as a matter of obedience to the Law motivated by the divine perspective about wealth that it is a *gift*. Both the ability to do the hard work and the land are *viewed* as gifts from the LORD. Therefore, the wealth is the LORD's, and as a matter of obedience to the Law the LORD has the absolute right to require his "stewards" to distribute their wealthy to the dependent ones, the poor.

What is really important for us to discover, if possible, is not primarily a collection of individual laws both apodictic and case studies--as important as these are, but the *perspective of the LORD* expressed in the Law about one's attitude toward access to the means of producing wealth, toward work, toward wealth itself and toward the commands to the Israelite landowner to distribute wealth to the needy, e.g. gleanings, or to give their wealth to the Levites to distribute for the poor. Obviously, the mechanisms of distributing wealth to the needy, such as allowing them to glean, will not be relevant in modern, industrial and post-industrial worlds, but the *attitude* which the Law seeks to inculcate is of lasting value.

Slowly, very slowly, we are moving to a place where after we have considered the rest of the BC (Ex 22:25-23:19), the covenant (Ex 24), the Tabernacle (Ex 25-40 with Leviticus 1-16) and the Law as the Constitution of Israel (mainly Deuteronomy 16-19 but also the whole of Deuteronomy and some of the rest of the law), we can then portray God's *vision*, i.e. his *perspective*, for the construction of a great, holy and just society of his people (ACT III).

3.8. What might this mean for today?

A preliminary thought for discussion: For secular moderns who are soaked in a modern point of *view* this Deuteronomic *perspective* on wealth is scandalous. They are scandalized because they believe that they achieved their wealth by their own hard work as a matter of personal discipline. (On occasion one of them might talk about being "lucky", another facet of the pagan worldview.) They also believe that the resources they used to produce that wealth are a *right* or an *entitlement*, but certainly not a *gift*. But Deuteronomy teaches that both the ability to work hard and the resources with which one works are *gifts* from the LORD.

4. Command to Love the alien as yourself--the amazing requirement of the Law: Leviticus 19:33, 34; Deut 10:18.

The command to love the alien as yourself is one of the most amazing laws in the Law of Moses. It first occurs in the storyline in Leviticus 19:33, 34 and then is expanded in a very dramatic way in Deuteronomy 10:14-19.

4.1. Love the alien as yourself, Lev 19:33, 34

I have deliberately reserved Leviticus 19:33, 34 because it makes *explicit* what seems to be implicit in all of the laws about care for the alien, i.e. love. Before citing the text, let me break my own rule and step outside of the story--just for sixty seconds! For those who read the Bible *backwards*, i.e. read into the story of Israel what they know or *think* they know from later in the story, it is common to assume that when one moves out of the OT into the NT or really out of Israel into the church that one moves from law to love or from law to grace and that love *fulfills* the Law and where *fulfills* is understood to mean *replaces* the Law. This surely is one of the major “heresies” of our time. Does not Jesus himself say “if you *love* me, you will obey what I *command*?” (John 14:15; cf 14:24; 21:15, 16). In due course we will come to Jesus and especially Paul and try our best to sort out the attitude toward and the *use* of the Law by both Jesus and then Paul, along with Peter, James, John, Luke and especially Matthew.

Now returning to the story and reading *from within the story*, hear this amazing commandment in Leviticus 19:33, 34:

When an alien (ger) lives with you in your land,
do not mistreat him.³⁴
The alien (ger) living with you must be treated *as* one of your native-born.
Love (ahab:H157) him *as* yourself,
for you were aliens in Egypt.
I am the LORD your God.

This law has three provisions which seem to be three steps *upward* in terms of expectation of Israelites’ treatment of aliens. 1) they are not to mistreat the aliens. We have clearly heard that in the BC laws (Ex 22:21; 23:9; cf 23:12). 2) We again hear a clear reference to the “one law” principle (Ex 12:49) in the direction that the alien “must be treated as one of your native-born”. 3) Leviticus 19:33, 34 extends the command of 19:18, “love your neighbor as yourself” to include the alien. In terms of our larger Bringer of Justice model, *love* is the motivation that enables the Israelites to do justice to the alien. As already noted the command to *love* the alien makes *explicit* what is *implicit* in the Law. The three directives of Leviticus 19:33, 34 about how to treat the alien captures the very heart of the matter.¹⁵

Love and Law: Leviticus 19 is a rehearsal of most of the Ten Commandments, such as “you must respect your mother and father”, “do not turn to idols”, “do not steal”, “do not lie”, “do not swear falsely”, “do not wear clothing with two kinds of material”, etc. In the middle of all of these, and many more, is the command “love your neighbor as yourself” (19:18) and then toward the end of the list of laws comes “love him (the alien) as yourself” (19:34). If love fulfills the law in the sense of *replaces* the law, then we have a major *contradiction* in Leviticus 19. Laws and love are side by side. If however love fulfills the law in the sense of *fills full* of motive (or empowerment), then love and law are friends, not enemies, and need to be held together. Love is a *motive* and law is a *guideline*. Remember Dolores and *milk* chocolate!

Returning to the command to love the alien, we ask why is the Israelite to love the alien?

Love (ahab:H157) him *as* yourself,
for you were aliens in Egypt.
I am the LORD your God.

The Israelite is to remember his past when he was an alien in Egypt and recall how miserable he was (Ex 1 & 2). With empathy and sympathy for the alien, he will love the alien for that is how he wished he had been treated. He is to love the alien because God commands it. We move beyond Leviticus 19:33, 34 to Deuteronomy 10:14-11:1 to understand why and in what way Israelites are to love the alien.

4.2. Love of aliens, even the rebellious ones, Deut 10:14-11:1

Deuteronomy 10:14-19:

To the LORD your God belong the heavens,
even the highest heavens,
the earth and everything in it.

Yet the LORD set his affection (chashaq:H2836) on your forefathers and
 loved ('ahab:H157) them, and
 he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. ¹⁶
 Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. ¹⁷
 For the LORD your God is
 God of gods and
 Lord of lords,
 the great God, mighty and awesome,
 who shows (nasa':H5375) no partiality (panyim:H6440) and
 accepts no bribes (shachad:H7810). ¹⁸
 He defends the cause of
 (executes, 'asah:H6213, justice, mishpat:H4941 for, RSV)
 the fatherless and the widow, and
 loves ('ahab:H157) the alien (ger),
 giving him food and clothing. ¹⁹
 And you are to love ('ahab:H157) those who are aliens (ger),
 for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.

4.2.1. Larger literary context

We must place this amazing declaration of the LORD's character, i.e. "God of gods", his love for Israel and his command that Israel should love the alien (Deut 10:14-19) in its *larger literary context* which begins with Deuteronomy 9:1, "Hear, O Israel".

In 9:1-6 Moses reminds Israel as they are about to cross Jordan and enter the promised land that their taking of the land is not based on Israel's righteousness but "on account of the wickedness of these nations" (9:5).

In 9:7-24, Moses also reminds Israel of their continued rebelliousness. Instead of being righteous, Israel has been "rebellious", the term that brackets the description of their desert experience (9:7, 24):

9:7 From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here,
 you have been *rebellious* against the LORD.

9:24 You have been *rebellious* against the LORD
 ever since I have known you.

This rebelliousness includes not only the golden calves provocation (9:7-21, a reference to Exodus 32-34) but also further provocations at Taberah, at Massah and at Kibroth Hattavah (9:22-24).

In 9:25-29, Moses further reminds Israel that the LORD would have destroyed them if he (Moses) had not interceded for them.

In 10:1-11 Moses gives a brief narration of the giving of the Ten Commandments (10:1-5) and the death of Aaron and the appointment of the Levites to carry the ark (10:6-10). This narration culminated in the LORD's command to Moses (10:11):

Go...and lead the people on their way, so that they may enter and possess the land....

What this larger literary section (9:1-10:11) tells Israel and the reader is that in spite of Israel's rebelliousness the LORD loves Israel (esp. 10:15) and because of his love will bring them into the land. In short, the LORD loves *rebellious* Israel. He does not love rebellion, but he does love *rebellious* Israel. Hold onto this as it will become very significant in understanding what follows.

In 10:12-11:1¹⁶ Moses lays out the LORD's requirements for Israel which are to fear God, to walk in his ways, to serve the LORD and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees. The fear of God brackets the whole section occurring at the beginning (vs 12) and the conclusion (vs 20). What is striking is that the only *specific* command given in this section is to "love those who are aliens" (vs 19). It is as if the whole of the blindingly bright moral light of fearing God, walking in his ways, loving him and observing his commands is *focused* upon this one way of "walking in his ways". Perhaps the acid test of one's love for God and obedience to his commands is "to love those who are aliens"?

4.2.2. Close reading focused on issue of alien

We shall give Deuteronomy 10:12-11:1 a close reading focusing our concern about loving the alien.

Moses then tells the Israelites that (10:14-16):

To the LORD your God belong the heavens,
even the highest heavens,
the earth and everything in it.

Yet the LORD set his affection on your forefathers and *loved* them, and
he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today.

Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.

4.2.2.1. Love of fellow Israelite and love of alien

Although the LORD is God of the whole universe, he has set his affection on Israel. He chose you...*above all the nations*". Israelites might draw an inference from this that the other nations, and those from them, i.e. the aliens, are less loved by the LORD. But the remainder of this passage, i.e. 10:17-18, with its assertion that the LORD loves the alien, clearly contradicts the possibility of drawing that inference. Another possible inference is that the LORD primarily loves Israel and only secondarily loves aliens. Therefore, Israelites themselves ought to love fellow Israelites and only in a secondary and inferior way love the alien in their midst. But Deuteronomy does not make such a distinction between the LORD loving Israelites and the aliens. Indeed the Israelite is to love the alien (vs19), which ought to be sufficient to undercut this second inference. Leviticus 19:34 makes it absolutely clear that the Israelite is to "love him (the alien) *as yourself*".

4.2.2.2. Circumcise your hearts

In light of the LORD's love, Moses pleads with Israel about their hearts and necks: "circumcise your hearts" and do "not be stiff-necked any longer" (10:16). The "stiff-necked" condition of Israelites refers especially to the Gold Calf incident, as we have just seen (Deut 9:6, 13; cf Ex 33:3, 5, 34:9; cf Lev 26:41). This is the first time in the story that we as readers hear the phrase "circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart" (RSV, ESV; the NIV omits "foreskin"). Moses does not explain this metaphorical use of circumcision, but its link to "stiff-necked" indicates that it has to do with softening of the neck/heart. Israel has been rebellious. Now they are to be submissive and obedient so that Israel may successfully occupy the land and establish a just society. Such a change of heart would apply not only to the fear of the LORD but also to keeping his commandments of which the only one mentioned in this context is to love the alien. Without a circumcised heart, an Israelite will not love an alien.

4.2.2.3. The character of God and love for the alien

Besides the LORD's love for Israel, Moses rehearses for Israel four other salient facets of the character of God all of which seem to be leading up to the command to love the alien (10:17, 18a):

For the LORD your God is
God of gods and
Lord of lords,

the great God, mighty and awesome.

1) The expression "God of gods," which occurs here for the first time¹⁷ in the story, means that God is supreme to all other beings, whether they be the other gods who the pagans believe exist, but do not actually exist, or/and other lesser beings such as the "sons of God" (see Job 1:6; cf Gen 6:1-4, so Block, 2012, 272). Likewise "Lord of Lords" occurs here for the first time in the story and probably refers to "supremacy over earthly rulers" (Block, 2012, 272; cf 136:3). Israelites have seen this "great God, mighty and awesome" in action: by a mighty act of justice he delivered Israel from the superpower Egypt and exposed the weakness or perhaps non-existence of their gods (Ex 12:12 "I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD."). They have also seen his great power in the protection of them from numerous enemies, i.e. Balak and Balaam (Num 22-24), and in his supplying them with food, water and clothing over the forty years in the desert.

2) But there is more to know about this great, mighty and awesome God (10:17b, 18a):

Who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.
He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow

(executes, *‘asah*:H6213, justice, *mishpat*:H4941 for, RSV).

This awesome God is concerned with doing justice justly, i.e. he does not accept the “face” of the powerful (no partiality) nor does he accept gifts from the powerful (bribes). He is committed to the defense of the fatherless and widow. Literally, he “executes justice” on behalf of the fatherless and widow (RSV, NRSV, ESV). The powerful will not be able to resist his acts of justice just as Pharaoh was not able to resist the judgment of God.

Why has the God of gods and the Lord of Lords decided, at least in this case, *clearly to link* his greatness, his sovereignty in heaven and on earth with the issue of not accepting bribes so as to bring about justice for those who cannot pay a bribe, i.e the fatherless and the widow? The text does not explicitly tell us why these are linked, but it would appear that they are linked:

- a) because to do justice one must resist the taking of a bribe or showing “respect of face” (partiality) and as the God of gods he is *able* do that,
- b) because as God of gods he is powerful enough to execute justice on behalf of the powerless and
- c) because the justice of God in action on behalf of the oppressed, the marginals, the needy, in this case the fatherless and widow, is *central* to the character of God just as is his greatness, i.e. God of gods and
- d) because as God of gods and Lord of lords he shows his superiority to other “gods” and lords by doing justice to the marginals, which is something they do not do and indeed cannot do. We have already seen this sort of self-identification by the LORD in connection with the Exodus. When God is asked, as it were, who he is, the answer is that “I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Ex 20:2; Deut 5:6; cf Ex 6:6f). I am the God who does justice for the marginals.

3) But what perhaps comes as a shock to some who have read that God “loved them (forefathers), and he chose you, their descendants, *above all the nations*’ is that (10:18b):

(The LORD) loves the *alien*,
giving him food and clothing.

Just how and when the LORD gave food and clothing to the alien is not made clear in the text, unless the aliens in view are the Israelites themselves! The LORD loved Israelites when they were aliens in the desert and gave them food and clothing. Israelites in the desert, however, were not just *aliens*: they were *rebellious* aliens. So the LORD loved *rebellious* aliens.

4) Having reviewed these three facets of the character of God, we come to the “punchline” of the text (vs 19):

And you are to love those who are aliens,
for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.

The implication is that Israelites are not only to love the alien in their midst but even to love the *rebellious* alien in their midst. Of course, they are not to *excuse* the rebellious behavior of the alien any more than God excused the rebellious behavior of Israel. God dealt severely with rebellious Israel from time to time; but he also forgave them, as the Gold Calf incident clearly shows.

As the LORD loved aliens giving them food and clothing so Israel is to love the aliens remembering their roots, “for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt”. Israel is to feel (love) and act (judging justly, defending, providing food and clothing) like God. This is what it means to be god-like, godly, pious and spiritual or to use the most frequent of biblical terms, righteous.

5) What will happen if Israelites do not regard themselves as more loved by the LORD than the alien, if they circumcise their hearts, if they love the alien? The opening comment of this passage tells the reader what will be the outcome (10:13):

And now, O Israel,
what does the LORD your God ask of you but
to fear the LORD your God,
to walk in all his ways,
to love him,
to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,¹³ and
to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today
for your own good?

The obedience of Israel to the command to love the alien, along with other commands, leads to the creation of a *just*

society. And such a just society is “for you own good”. The implication of this kind of understanding about the centrality of loving and doing justice for the alien in our midst in our modern world hardly needs to be underscored. It is for their good. It is for our good. It is for the common good.

This is not the place to explore the relation of the terms “good” (*towb*:H2896) and “peace” (*shalom*:H7965), which often has the sense of prosperity and safety along with health; but it does seem that obedience to the Law which means that one does what is right or just *leads* to good, in this text, and to *shalom* in many other texts. Or put differently the fruit (result) of justice is *shalom* and good. God’s goal is not just the construction of a *just* society based on his Law but the construction of a just society which is full of goodness and *shalom*/peace, i.e. prosperity and safety.

4.2.3. Love and Justice, Love and Law

Once more we pause to underscore the place of love and law and love and justice. God loves the alien and does justice for the widow and fatherless. Understanding that “He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing” are *related* activities, we infer from the text that love is also the motivation for doing justice.

This link of love and justice can be seen in the Israelite who loves the alien. Loving the alien is commanded: “and you are to love those who are aliens” (Deut 10:19a; cf Leviticus 19:33, 34). Israelites as an act of obedience to the law are to *choose* to love the alien. Such love will lead them to keep the laws about the aliens. We have seen that there are *many* laws protecting the alien. One of those laws, the third year tithe, will lead the Israelite to giving *food* to the alien which is a matter of *justice* because it is the keeping of a commandment.

The climax of this passage is 11:1 where love and law are friends (11:1):

Love the LORD your God and

keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always.

4.2.4. Worship and Justice

The motivational foundation for doing justice is love. The LORD first loved Israel when Israel was an alien in Egypt and a rebellious alien in the desert. Therefore, Israel is to love the alien in their midst, even the rebellious one. Israel is to love because the LORD first loved them. Israel is called to reflect upon and indeed to bask in the love of God.

When Israel enjoys the love of God, they will come before him with the basket of firstfruits and the third year tithes as an offering of thanksgiving for the LORD’s love and blessing. Obedience to the laws about firstfruits and third year tithes which among other things directly benefit the marginals by giving them food. These are matters of justice or doing what is right. Therefore, again we assert that *worship of the LORD is the foundation of doing justice for the marginals*. Those who really enjoy the love and blessing of the LORD will honor him not only with the offering of their firstfruits and tithes but also with their love for the marginals. Also, Israel will become like the One it worships, whose essential character is justice and righteousness motivated by love. He is the God who “executes justice for the fatherless and widow and loves the alien giving him food and clothing” (my translation). This essential character of God sets him aside (makes him holy) from all of the other gods.

5. Aliens and ANE Laws

When this passage is set in the larger context of the ANE, we find nothing like this *love* for the alien on the part of a god nor a command to *love* the alien as oneself in the laws of the ANE. Blenkinsopp (2004, 84) states that “The injunction to love the alien is quite remarkable in the context of religious thought and practice in antiquity”.¹⁸ Baker (2009, 187) informs us that these laws about the foreigner are “unparalleled elsewhere in the ancient Near East”.

6. Summary statement about laws concerning aliens

Notes

- ¹ Deuteronomy 15 about the seventh year release of debt and slaves is not mentioned here because the alien is not specifically mentioned in the text.
- ² Admittedly this numerical relation between slaves and aliens is a guess.
- ³ Very simply stated the feasts as noted here were in the order of the Hebrew calendar which begins with Nisan (March), 1) Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex 12:3-20; Lev 23:6; Deut 16:1-8) in March-April, 2) Pentecost, Feast of Weeks, Day of Firstfruits, Feast of Harvest (Ex 23:16; 34:22; Num 28:26, Lev 23:16) in May-June and 3) Day of blowing trumpets (Rosch ha-shanah) Tishri 1st (Num 29:1; Lev 23:24), Day of Atonement (Yom Kipur) Tishri 10th (Lev 23:26-31; Ex 30:10) and Feast of Tabernacles/Booths Tishri 15-21 (Lev 23:34; Num 29:12-38; Ex 23:16; 34:22; Deut 16:13) (September-October). Here I have followed the article on “Feasts” in the NBD, 3rd, 365-367. For a much fuller account see Armerding, “Festivals and Feasts”, DOTP, 300-313.
- ⁴ See Houston (2009, 4) who in turn cites MacDonald (2008) and MacDonald (2008).
- ⁵ On the details of the debate see Baker (2009, 239-248).
- ⁶ I do realize that the “all” does not directly include women, but women were embedded in their husband and therefore shared in his honor.
- ⁷ For curse see the wider context of this chapter (29:14-28) and McConville’s (2002, 411), Nelson (2002, 341), NJB “sworn with imprecation”, NLT “including the curses” and TNK “with its sanctions”.
- ⁸ See Deut 14:21 for what may appear to be a contradiction. On this see McConville (2002, 25) for the different perspectives of Leviticus and Deuteronomy.
- ⁹ The word *‘abad* might also mean perishing. Because of the famine Jacob was near to perishing before going down into Egypt. See McConville (2002, 376) on the meaning of the term. He opts for “wandering”.
- ¹⁰ There are a few books that attempt to tell the whole story from a biblical theology point of view. At another point I shall give a bibliography of key texts and an assessment of their varied contributions.
- ¹¹ Later we shall try to make some calculations about just what percentage of a faithful Israelites wealth went to others. The tithe at 10% is just the beginning.
- ¹² One might think that they feel *thankful*, but at least that specific English term is rarely used in the law (Lev 7:12, 13, 15; 22:29). It is in the Psalms, where emotions are to the fore, that thankfulness comes into its own.
- ¹³ We are not using the term “redistributed” because this assumes that first all of the wealth was “distributed” to the head of the household and then he redistributed this wealth. It is probably nearer the truth of the matter that as the wealth (crops) was collected, it was shared out among the whole household based on their needs. No one in the household was going to go hungry or naked.
- ¹⁴ Wealthy is obviously a relative term. It also is a term that must be understood within its own social world(s). It is beyond the scope of this talk to explore such matters, but we will need to be careful not to read back into the text meanings that we associate with wealth. One thinks of the comments in the *Number One Ladies’ Detective Agency* stories about the father of Ma Ramotswe who was very “wealthy” because he had many head of cattle. Is that our image of wealth? Furthermore, at least in the early settlement period of Israel (Joshua to Samuel), there is very little evidence that anyone had much more than anyone else. It is not until the monarchy in the 10th century (Solomon) and the continuing shift of economic resources in the 8th (Isaiah) and 7th (Jeremiah) centuries that one begins to have “wealth” in the sense that some have many, many more times the resources than others, e.g. much larger and better houses, etc. We shall eventually come to all of this.
- ¹⁵ A great deal has been written about love your neighbor (see bibliography in Hartley, 1992, 301f) but I can find nothing specifically on “love him (alien) as yourself”.
- ¹⁶ Nelson (2002, 135); Block (2012, 268) marks off 10:12-11:1 as a section with 11:1 as the climax or summary. McConville (2002, 198) who surveys a number of attempts at organizing 10:12-11:32 makes 11:1 the beginning of a new section. Perhaps 11:1 is some sort of *bridge* between two sections?
- ¹⁷ For other occurrences see NRSV Joshua 22:22; Ps 84:7; 136:2; Dan 2:47; 11:36. Again, we observe that the “great theological statements” about the character of God are not given in the abstract but are articulated in the midst of bringing justice and love to those on the margins.
- ¹⁸ I owe this citation to Baker (2009, 185). I have cited it in the collected essays of Blenkinsopp.

