



edition: November 12, 2022

Table of contents

introduction 3

genesis 3.¹⁻⁵ 5

genesis 4.⁹— just scripture..... 7

genesis 6.^{5-6, 11-13}— just scripture 8

genesis 6.⁵ & 8.²¹ 9

genesis 12.¹⁻³— atonement..... 10

genesis 13.^{1, 5-12}— just scripture..... 12

genesis 15.¹— just scripture..... 14

genesis 26.¹⁻⁵ 15

genesis 26.⁶⁻¹¹— just scripture 16

genesis 26.¹²⁻¹⁶— just scripture 17

genesis 26.¹⁷⁻²⁵— just scripture 19

genesis 26.²⁶⁻³³ 20

genesis 29.¹⁵⁻³⁰ 22

genesis 29.³¹⁻³⁵ 24

genesis 30.¹⁻⁸ 25

genesis 30.⁹⁻²¹ 26

genesis 30.²²⁻²⁴ 28

genesis 31.⁴³⁻⁵⁵ 29

genesis 32.¹⁰ 30

genesis 33.¹⁰⁻¹¹ 31

exodus 20.¹⁷—just scripture..... 32

exodus 22.²¹⁻²⁴—just scripture 33

exodus 22.²⁵—just scripture..... 34

exodus 23.¹⁻²— just scripture..... 35

exodus 23.⁶⁻⁷— just scripture..... 36

exodus 23. ⁹ — just scripture.....	37
leviticus 16. ^{7-9, 15-16, 19}	38
leviticus 19. ⁹⁻¹⁰ — just scripture	39
leviticus 19. ¹¹⁻¹⁴ — just scripture.....	40
leviticus 19. ¹⁵ —just scripture.....	41
leviticus 19. ³³⁻³⁴ — just scripture.....	42
deuteronomy 1. ¹⁶⁻¹⁷ — just scripture	43
deuteronomy 5. ⁹⁻¹⁰	44
deuteronomy 5. ¹²⁻¹⁵ — just scripture	45
deuteronomy 6. ⁴⁻⁹ — atonement.....	46
deuteronomy 6. ²⁰⁻²⁵	48
deuteronomy 8. ²⁻³	50
deuteronomy 8. ¹⁰⁻¹⁸	51
deuteronomy 9. ^{4-6, 24}	53
deuteronomy 10. ¹⁷⁻¹⁹ — just scripture	54
deuteronomy 11. ¹⁸⁻²⁰	55
deuteronomy 15. ¹⁻⁴ — just scripture.....	56
deuteronomy 15. ⁷⁻¹¹ — just scripture.....	58
deuteronomy 15. ^{12-15, 18} — just scripture	60
deuteronomy 15. ¹⁹⁻²¹ — just scripture	62
deuteronomy 19. ¹⁹⁻²² — just scripture	63
deuteronomy 24. ¹⁴⁻¹⁵ — just scripture	64
2samuel 21. ¹⁻¹⁴	65
2kings 3. ²⁴⁻²⁷ — just scripture.....	67
ecclesiastes 4. ⁴ — just scripture	68
ecclesiastes 5. ^{10, 13} — just scripture	69

Introduction



The image of a small portion of Michelangelo's fresco, "Creation," found above serves as metaphor for this page's means and ends.

- ? How would you characterize God's arm in the fresco?
- ? How would you characterize Adam's arm?
- ? What is the message in Adam's limp wrist? In the fact that his arm rests on his knee?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we engage in scripture study and seek to understand scripture, scripture's divine author and our relationship to Him?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we seek God's enlivening, strengthening, and saving influence and presence in our daily lives?

Michelangelo reminds us of our desperate need for God's presence in our lives if we are to follow Him and be all that He hopes us to be. In relation to this page and its purposes, we are in need of God's help as we seek to understand and apply scripture.

The questions we posed and our brief commentary concerning the fresco represent an example of our approach to each scripture reading.

Scripture readings are accompanied by general and passage-specific questions to ponder along with brief comments. In addition to the passage-specific questions associated with each reading, the reader can apply the following **general questions** to most readings. These questions come from the purposes of scripture as identified in the introduction to our site, ponderthescriptures.com, found on the site's home page

- What does this reading reveal about the character of God?
- How and what does this reading testify of Christ?
- What wisdom and knowledge does this reading provide?
- How does this reading direct the way you think and act?
- Of what dangers does this reading warn? How does it help you avoid these dangers?
- How does this reading gladden your heart, encourage you, and give you hope?
- How does this reading expand your vision and increase your expectations of the possible?
- What does this reading discern or "read" about you?
- How will you apply this reading to your life, to how you relate with others, and to how you relate to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

It is not intended that the reader ponder every question. We introduce numerous and varied questions in hopes that readers will find a question or two that catches their imagination and interest, seems pertinent to their lives, and provides an opportunity for meaningful pondering and further spiritual insight. In addition, if the reader wishes, the many and varied ponder questions allow the reader to spend additional time to consider passages from various perspectives.

Finally, we suggest that during and after your reading and pondering experience you consider how you can incorporate your thoughts and feelings from the scripture reading into your personal prayer life. As you pray, share with Heavenly Father what you thought and felt as you studied and pondered. In your prayer, seek further insight from a God who is anxious to reveal himself, his will, and his interest in our lives. Incorporating your reading and pondering into your prayers can, we think, enliven a prayer life that can all too easily become mundane, mechanical, and rote.

Genesis 3.¹⁻⁵

¹But the snake, being more ingeniously devious than any other animal YHWH ^עלֹהִים had made, said to the woman, “It really is the case after all, then, that ^עלֹהִים said, ‘You are not to eat from every garden tree!’”

²The woman answered the snake, “We may eat the fruit of all the garden trees. ³However, concerning the fruit of the tree which in the middle of the garden, ^עלֹהִים has said, ‘You are not to eat it or even touch it, lest you die.’”

⁴The snake insinuated to the woman, “It isn’t because you will die, ⁵but because ^עלֹהִים knows that, upon eating it, your eyes will be opened, and you, like ^עלֹהִים, will understand what is good and what is evil” (author’s translation).

Questionary

For those who wish to compare translations, following is the King James Version.

¹Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”

²And the woman said unto the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: ³but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God hath said, ‘Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.’”

⁴And the serpent said unto the woman, “Ye shall not surely die: ⁵for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.”

Today’s reading contains one of the most famous stories in scripture.

1. My translation of the snake’s initial statement might seem convoluted and confusing. It is convoluted and confusing, and it is convoluted and confusing because the Hebrew is convoluted and confusing in order to capture the snake’s own deviously clever convolution and dishonest misdirection.
 - ? What would be the purpose of the snake in making an uncertain statement or asking a confusing question?
 - ? How does this ambiguity serve to draw the woman into conversation?
 - ? What does this suggest to you about the character of Satan and his attempted communications with us?
2. The woman speaks of the tree as being “in the middle of the garden.”
 - ? Look back in the text. Does it stipulate the location of the tree elsewhere?
 - ? What is the significance of the woman specifically locating the tree “in the middle”?
 - ? Consider: Why would a prohibited tree be placed “in the middle of the garden” where it cannot be avoided?
 - ? Consider, on the other hand: How would you feel if the woman’s notice of the tree’s central location was more about the woman’s obsession with the tree—she found herself constantly drawn to it?
 - ? How do we find ourselves sometimes focused on the evil that we should *not* do or the evil we should *not* have rather than on the good we can do and have?
 - ? How might this focus on the danger of evil rather than the benefits of good draw us to and make it more likely that we “partake” of evil?
3. In reporting God’s statement of prohibition against eating the fruit, the author/ editors record:

“YHWH ^עלֹהִים placed certain limits on the man saying, ‘You may eat from any of the garden trees, except for the tree that brings understanding of what is good and what is evil. Do not eat from this tree. Know this: if, at some point, you choose to eat from it, you will die’ (2.¹⁶⁻¹⁷, author’s translation).

 - ? How does the women’s explanation of God’s prohibition differ from God’s original

- prohibition?
- ? What, do you think, accounts from the difference?
 - ? Which is more likely: 1) God mentioned not touching the tree, but the authors/ editors chose not to record it, or, 2) It was an addition of the woman?
 - ? If the authors/ editors left it out, why did they not find it important enough to include? If the woman added it, what is implied about the woman's thinking?
4. The serpent provides an alternative explanation and motivation for God's prohibition.
- ? What, does the serpent suggest, is the real motivation for God prohibition concerning eating the fruit?
 - ? How does Satan invite us to question God's real interest in us today?
 - ? How do we demonstrate a lack of trust in God's genuine commitment to us?

genesis 4.⁹— just scripture

And the LORD said unto Cain, “Where is Abel thy brother?”

And he said, “I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?”

Q

uestionary

For what it is worth, here is the author's translation.

“YHWH asked Qayin, ‘Where is your brother, Abel?’

He replied, ‘I don't know. Am I responsible for my brother?’”

1. Never mind any of the possible “historical” first thoughts or utterances expressed by humankind in mortality. Textually speaking, Cain's arrogant response to God's question contains the first human words spoken outside the garden of Eden.
 - ? How real is Cain's “question”? What answer does his rhetorical question demand?
 - ? What message or messages do you think the writer of Genesis is sending when the first recorded “mortal thought and statement” is one that questions one individual's responsibility for the welfare of another?
 - ? What private attitudes and actions as well as public ideologies and policies in today's world duplicate the refusal to look after others?
 - ? Consider the American right's response to the coronavirus and its refusal to abide by behavior's known to protect everyone, especially society's vulnerable. How do these attitudes and actions replicate those of Cain?

genesis 6.^{5-6, 11-13}— just scripture

⁵And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

¹¹The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹²And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. ¹³And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

Questionary

- ? What do you imagine when you consider a society in which “**every** imagination... was evil **continually**”?
- ? When you imagine a world “filled with violence,” what do you see and feel?
- ? How closely or distantly do you feel our modern world is to the one described in today’s reading?
- ? How do you feel about God being violent in response to human violence?
- ? Can you explain the collapse of violent societies without implicating God in the violent collapse? How? What human mechanism would be at work?

Genesis 6.⁵ & 8.²¹

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.

Questionary

1. Today's reading represents the Lord's observation concerning the nature of mankind before the flood as well as his observation about mankind in general.
 - ? How do you feel about these observations?
 - ? Are they consistent with your own feelings and experiences? Why do you answer as you do?

2. Note the intense and superlative language found in verse 5.

Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was *only* evil *continually* (all the time).

- ? What is the impact of all this intense and superlative language?
- ? How do you feel about God's observation that men imagine evil "from his youth"?

3. Though humankind, according to God, would be no different after than before the flood, yet, he would respond differently to human wickedness after the flood than he did at the time of the flood.
 - ? What changed? Why?

4. Consider the following passages, one from the Book of Mormon, one from the Pearl of Great Price, and one from the Lectures on Faith.

"For it is expedient that an atonement should be made; for according to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish; yea, *all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost*, and must perish except it be through the atonement which it is expedient should be made" (Al. 34.⁹).

"And the Lord spake unto Adam, saying: 'Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so *when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts*, and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good'" (Moses 6.⁵⁵).

"Question 17: Is it not also necessary to have the idea that God is merciful, and gracious, tong suffering and full of goodness?
It is. (3:20)

Question 18: Why is it necessary?

Because of the weakness and imperfections of human nature, and the great frailties of man; for *such is the weakness of man, and such his frailties, that he is liable to sin continuall...*"

- ? How closely do the observations made in these passages match those of Genesis?

Genesis 12.¹⁻³— atonement

¹Now the LORD had said unto Abram, “
Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred,
and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:
²and I will make of thee a great nation,
and I will bless thee,
and make thy name great;
and thou shalt be a blessing:
³and I will bless them that bless thee,
and curse him that curseth thee:
and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Sanctification: Imitating and living Atonement.” *

In our 1st series reading on this title, we learned that it is enough to believe and trust Jesus in order to be justified, or forgiven the sins that we inevitably commit. However, if we are to retain that remission of sins, we must do more than believe. We must act. We must become sanctified by striving to imitate Jesus’ at-one-ment in our daily lives. Today’s reading amplifies the sanctifying efforts in which we must engage if we wish to retain our remission of sins and form the sort of community to which Jesus’ at-one-ment points and for which it labors.

1. All too often when we focus on the “Abrahamic Covenant,” we focus on the personal blessings available to us. However, in today’s reading, the stronger emphasis in the discussion of “blessings” seems to be aimed elsewhere.
 - ? What is the principle blessing that comes into our lives as we act true to the “Abrahamic Covenant”?
 - ? Did you answer, “The greatest blessing that can come to me is being a blessing to others”?
 - ? Is so, why? If not, why?
 - ? To what examples in Abraham’s life can you point that show him seeking to be a blessing to others?
 - ? How did Jesus demonstrate that being a blessing to others was of more importance to him than being blessed himself?
 - ? What do you do as a private individual *to be a blessing* and bring blessedness to others?
 - ? What do you do in your public life, especially as a citizen, to be a blessing to others and to see that the institutions that hold power over people’s lives understand and act consistent with the fact that they exist to be a blessing?
2. Consider the following passages.
 - “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16.²⁴⁻²⁵).
 - “And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20.²⁷⁻²⁸).
 - ? How do these passages relate to today’s reading and the responsibility we have to live a life of atonement in imitation of the life of atonement that he lived?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”
“Justification: How We Repent and Change”
“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”
“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Genesis 13.^{1, 5-12}— just scripture

¹Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south....

⁵And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. ⁶And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. ⁷And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land.

⁸And Abram said unto Lot, "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. ⁹Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."

¹⁰And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. ¹¹Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. ¹²Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

Questionary

1. In today's reading, Abraham responds to the unhealthy economic competition that had developed between himself and his nephew.

? What is Abraham's response to the unhealthy economic competition?

? How do you feel about Abraham's willingness to lose "profits" rather than engage in unhealthy competition with an economic competitor?

? How practical, do you feel, would it be today to follow Abraham's example? What would following his example look like?

? What does Abraham's action suggest about his priorities in regard to "profits" verses morality and healthy human relationships?

? How does Abraham's rejection of "profits" at all cost demonstrate his faith in God?

? To what extent do our society's economic ideology and policies encourage, or not encourage imitation of such generosity?

2. In past Read, Ponder, Pray exercises we have examined the following passages.

"And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19.⁹⁻¹⁰).

"When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands.

When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow" (Leviticus 19.¹⁹⁻²¹).

"If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand;' and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the Lord against

thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land” (Deuteronomy 15.⁷⁻¹¹).

“Let them repent of all their sins, and of all their covetous desires, before me, saith the Lord; for what is property unto me? saith the Lord” (DC 117.⁴).

- ? How do these relate to today’s reading?
- ? What do all of these suggest about the Lord’s feelings about “economic profits”?
- ? How consistent with these principles are you—both privately and publicly as a citizen?
- ? How consistent with these principles are your culture’s economic policies and institutions?

genesis 15.¹— just scripture

After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying,
“Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield,
and thy exceeding great reward.”

Questionary

1. In Genesis 13.⁹, Abraham showed his faith in God’s watch-care over him by acting generously toward an economic competitor. In today’s reading, God assures Abraham that He, God, is Abraham real “reward” or “wage,” “salary.”
 - ? How satisfied are you with God, Himself, as your principle daily and life reward?
 - ? What is the nature of that “reward”?
 - ? What is the principle “reward” after which your society labors?

Genesis 26.¹⁻⁵

¹And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar. ²And the Lord appeared unto him, and said,

Go not down into Egypt;
dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of:
³Sojourn in this land,
and I will be with thee, and will bless thee;
for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries,
and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father;
⁴and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven,
and will give unto thy seed all these countries;
and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;
⁵Because that Abraham obeyed my voice,
and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

Questionary

Today's reading is the first of five taken from Genesis 26. We know far, far less about the life and times of Isaac than we do about his father, Abraham, or his son, Jacob/Israel. Genesis 26 represents most of the little we know of him and should be seen as representative of the sort of life he lived throughout his lifetime.

1. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all experienced severe draught and famine in their lifetimes. Yet, all three were “blessed” men.
 - ? What does this suggest to you about the nature of blessedness?
 - ? How blessed would you feel if you were threatened with draught and famine which bring tremendous insecurity?
 - ? How does Nephi's introduction of himself relate to these experiences of the patriarchs?

“I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days.
 - ? How do you balance “blessedness” in terms of temporal security in contrast to a “knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God”?

Both Abraham and Jacob went to Egypt to escape starvation during famine. Isaac was forbidden to go to Egypt.

 - ? Why, do you think, was Isaac forbidden while the other two were permitted to go to Egypt?
 - ? What, if anything, does this tell you about revelation and the applicability of one revelation given to one person at one time to another person at another time?
2. Yahweh renewed with Isaac the covenant which he had made with Abraham.
 - ? What, to your mind, are the principle aspects of the covenant?
 - ? What does it mean to you that “in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed”?
 - ? What role do you play in being a blessing to the nation in which you live?
 - ? How well are you fulfilling that role?
 - ? What could you do to be a greater blessing to the nation in which you reside?

Genesis 26.⁶⁻¹¹— just scripture

⁶And Isaac dwelt in Gerar: ⁷and the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, “She is my sister:” for he feared to say, “She is my wife;” lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon.

⁸And* when he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife. ⁹And Abimelech called Isaac, and said, “Behold, of a surety she is thy wife: and how saidst thou, ‘She is my sister?’”

And Isaac said unto him, “Because I said, Lest I die for her.”

¹⁰And Abimelech said, “What is this thou hast done unto us? One of the people might lightly have lien with thy wife, and thou shouldest have brought guiltiness upon us.”

¹¹And Abimelech charged all his people, saying, “He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.”

Qquestionary

In addition to being a just scripture reading, today’s reading is the second of five taken from Genesis 26. We know far, far less about the life and times of Isaac than we do about his father, Abraham, or his son, Jacob/Israel. Genesis 26 represents most of the little we know of him and should be seen as representative of the sort of life he lived throughout his lifetime.

In the first reading from Genesis 26, Isaac had been forced by famine to enter Philistine lands and reside there as a refugee/immigrant without legal protections. There, Yahweh renewed with Isaac the covenant that he had previously made with Abraham.

1. Isaac and his wife, Rebecca, had an experience very similar to that of Abraham and Sarah in Egypt (Gen. 12.¹⁴⁻²⁰) and in Gerar (Gen. 20).
 - ? What do you think when you consider the apparent common nature of this particular behavior?
 - ? What does it tell you about the nature of monarchy and unchecked political power?
 - ? What does it tell you about the nature and vulnerability of refugees, immigrants, foreigners, and minorities in Isaac’s time?
 - ? What does it tell you about the nature and vulnerabilities of refugees, immigrants, foreigners, and minorities that Isaac would resort to lying about the relationship between himself and his wife?
 - ? If this lie served to protect Isaac, how well did it serve Rebecca?
 - ? How do you feel when you contemplate a man or woman having their spouse taken from them because of the absence of legal protections for refugees/immigrants?
 - ? What is the nature of vulnerabilities for refugees, immigrants, foreigners, and minorities in your nation?
 - ? How do you feel when you contemplate the vulnerabilities of refugees, immigrants, foreigners, and minorities in today’s world?
 - ? In what ways do you either contribute to their vulnerabilities or seek to relieve them of such vulnerabilities?

Genesis 26.¹²⁻¹⁶— just scripture

¹²Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the Lord blessed him. ¹³And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: ¹⁴for he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him. ¹⁵For all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth. ¹⁶And Abimelech said unto Isaac, "Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we."

Questionary

Today's reading is the third of five taken from Genesis 26. We know far, far less about the life and times of Isaac than we do about his father, Abraham, or his son, Jacob/Israel. Genesis 26 represents most of the little we know of him and should be seen as representative of the sort of life he lived throughout his lifetime.

In the first reading from Genesis 26, Isaac had been forced by famine to enter Philistine lands and reside there as a refugee/immigrant without legal protections. There, Yahweh renewed with Isaac the covenant that he had previously made with Abraham. In the second reading, Philistine political readers took advantage of Isaac's refugee/immigrant and unprotected status by kidnapping his wife.

1. After reporting that Isaac, the refugee/immigrant, has experienced success in his adopted country, the inspired writer informs us that "the Philistines envied him."
 - ? What comes to your mind when you consider this envy of the foreigner?
 - ? Why is suspicion and envy of immigrants/foreigners such a common occurrence?
 - ? How is suspicion and envy of immigrants/refugees/foreigners manifest in your society?
2. After reporting the Philistine suspicion/envy of the foreigner, Isaac, the inspired writer reports how the Philistines suspicion/envy resorted to violent economic sabotage in hopes of impeding Isaac's success.
 - ? What form did the violent economic sabotage take?
 - ? How does your society impede the progress of refugees/immigrants/foreigners/minorities?
 - ? How do not only individual prejudices but, just as importantly, public policies seek to impede the progress of refugees/immigrants/foreigners/minorities?
 - ? What do you do individually and as a citizen to resist such private prejudices and unjust public policies as impede the success of refugees/immigrants/foreigners/minorities?
 - ? What do you do to actively advocate and work for the success of refugees/immigrants/foreigners/minorities?
3. Finally, the Philistine king expels Isaac from Philistine because, he says, "thou art much mightier than we."
 - ? Where and when else do we heard a similar concern in the Old Testament?

In Exodus, we hear Pharaoh demand that something be done with the Israelites because "the people of Israel are more and mightier than we" (1.⁹).

- ? Are there populations in your society that induce such fear by the dominant population due to the foreigners' increasing numbers, influence, and successes?
- ? How did such experiences affect Israel as it became a nation with its own dominate population?
- ? After considering Israel's and Israel's ancestors treatment as refugees/immigrants/foreigners what do you think and feel as you consider the Bible's repeated demands that refugees/immigrants/foreigners (strangers) be treated justly? Following are just a few examples.

“Thou shalt neither vex a *stranger*, nor oppress him: for ye were *strangers* in the land of Egypt” (Ex. 22.²¹).

“Also thou shalt not oppress a *stranger*: for ye know the heart of a *stranger*, seeing ye were *strangers* in the land of Egypt” (Ex. 23.⁹).

“And if a *stranger* sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the *stranger* that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were *strangers* in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (Lev. 19.³³⁻³⁴).

“For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the *stranger*, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the *stranger*: for ye were *strangers* in the land of Egypt” (Deut. 10.¹⁷⁻¹⁹).

“When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the *stranger*, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands.

When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the *stranger*, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the *stranger*, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing” (Deut. 19.¹⁹⁻²²).

“For if ye throughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye throughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; if ye oppress not the *stranger*, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever” (Jer. 7.⁵⁻⁷).

“Thus saith the Lord; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the *stranger*, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place” (Jer. 22.³).

“See how each of the princes of Israel who are in you uses his power to shed blood. In you they have treated father and mother with contempt; in you they have oppressed the *foreigner* and mistreated the fatherless and the widow” (Ez. 22.⁶⁻⁷ NIV).

- ? What do you think and feel when you consider the frequent association that the Lord makes between foreigners/refugees/immigrants and widows and orphans?
- ? What do these populations have in common?
- ? How would you feel if we suggested that the demand for just treatment of foreigners could be thought of not only as an “Article of Faith,” but of part of the nation’s “Constitution”?

Genesis 26.¹⁷⁻²⁵— just scripture

¹⁷And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. ¹⁸And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them. ¹⁹And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water. ²⁰And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, "The water is ours:" and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him.

²¹And they digged another well, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah.

²²And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.

²³And he went up from thence to Beer-sheba. ²⁴And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said,

"I am the God of Abraham thy father:
fear not, for I am with thee,
and will bless thee,
and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake."

²⁵And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.

Qquestionary

Today's reading is the fourth of five taken from Genesis 26. We know far, far less about the life and times of Isaac than we do about his father, Abraham, or his son, Jacob/Israel. Genesis 26 represents most of the little we know of him and should be seen as representative of the sort of life he lived throughout his lifetime.

In the first reading from Genesis 26, Isaac had been forced by famine to enter Philistine lands and reside there as a refugee/immigrant without legal protections. There, Yahweh renewed with Isaac the covenant that he had previously made with Abraham. In the second reading, Philistine political readers took advantage of Isaac's refugee/immigrant and unprotected status by kidnapping his wife. In the third reading, the Philistines, envious of Isaac's success, sought to impede his progress through economic sabotage.

1. In our previous reading from Genesis 26 (verses 12-16), we learned how the Philistines sabotaged Isaac's efforts to thrive in the Philistine culture and economy. In today's reading, we learn that they had practiced the same form of refugee/immigrant/foreigner sabotage in Abraham's life and during his stay in Philistine.
 - ? What form did this economic sabotage take in Abraham's lifetime?
2. After Isaac and those associated with him had found water, "the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, 'The water is ours'" and confiscated the wells.
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate the "natural citizenry's" contention that possessions acquired by refugees/immigrants/foreigners are in affect stolen from the natural citizenry?
 - ? What examples of this attitude, this envy, the possessiveness can you point to in today's society?
 - ? How would you feel if we suggested that the desire to withhold health care benefits from "illegals" is an example of this "stingy" attitude on the part of the "natural citizenry"?

Genesis 26.²⁶⁻³³

²⁶Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath one of his friends, and a Phichol the chief captain of his army. ²⁷And Isaac said unto them, “Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you.”

²⁸And they said, “We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee: and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee; ²⁹that thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace: thou art now the blessed of the Lord.”

³⁰And he made them a feast, and they did eat and drink. ³¹And they rose up betimes in the morning, and swore one to another: and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace.

³²*The same day, Isaac’s servants came, and told him concerning the well which they had digged, and said unto him, “We have found water.”

³³And he called it ‘Shebah:’ therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba unto this day.”

Q

uestionary

Today’s reading is the fifth of five taken from Genesis 26. We know far, far less about the life and times of Isaac than we do about his father, Abraham, or his son, Jacob/Israel. Genesis 26 represents most of the little we know of him and should be seen as representative of the sort of life he lived throughout his lifetime.

In the first reading from Genesis 26, Isaac had been forced by famine to enter Philistine lands and reside there as a refugee/immigrant without legal protections. There, Yahweh renewed with Isaac the covenant that he had previously made with Abraham. In the second reading, Philistine political readers took advantage of Isaac’s refugee/immigrant and unprotected status by kidnapping his wife. In the third reading, the Philistines, envious of Isaac’s success, sought to impede his progress through economic sabotage. In the fourth reading, Isaac, having moved to a new location and finding water resources, is accused, essentially, of theft, taking water from the “natural citizenry.”

There are frequent and diverse discussions conducted on the topic of covenants and oaths—the “Baptismal Covenant,” the “Abrahamic Covenant,” the “Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood,” “Temple Covenants,” etc. Such discussion can sometimes feel esoteric and divorced from real life. One way to avoid such unhelpful discussions and better understand the basic meaning and function of oaths and covenants is to examine the concept outside a purely “religious” context and examine it in a mundane and secular setting (or at least as secular a setting as is possible in the ancient way of thought). Today’s reading provides one such mundane example of oaths and covenants. Our next reading from Genesis, 31.⁴³⁻⁵⁵, will further explore the use of covenant in a secular setting.

Previous to today’s text, Genesis reported on the dysfunctional relationship that existed between Isaac and the Philistines, among whom he lived as a refugee due to famine. Consistent with the normal ill-treatment of refugees, immigrants, foreigners, and minorities, Isaac was first taken advantage of. Attempts were made to lessen his chances for success. Then, when he found success, he was envied and accused of taking resources from legitimate Philistine citizens. Finally, he was forced into exile.

1. In today’s reading, those who had exiled Isaac from their society came to him seeking better relations with him.
 - ? What was the reason that Isaac’s former enemies gave for seeking better relations with him?
 - ? How do you feel about these reasons?
 - ? Whose interests did a covenant between the former adversaries serve for Isaac? For the Philistine nobles?
 - ? What insights into the nature of covenants do you have after reading this passage and considering the proceeding questions?
 - ? What thoughts and feelings do you have when we point out that the purpose, objective, roll of covenant in this account was peace between parties that were previously at enmity with each

- other?
- ? What thoughts and feelings do you have when we suggest that the establishment of peace between individuals and nations is, in fact, the central feature and chief purpose of covenants. That all covenants, in fact, serve as “peace treaties” in form or another?
 - ? What thoughts and feelings do you have about Isaac’s willingness to enter into peace with those who had been persecuting him as they had, as described in our previous readings?
2. King Benjamin taught that “the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever...” (Mosiah 3.19).
 - ? How do the covenants that you have and do make serve to establish peace between you and your God?
 - ? In God’s making a “peace treaty” with you and you with him, whose enmity is being turned to peaceful feelings?
 - ? How would you feel and what so you think when we suggest that God feels no enmity toward us, but that it is we, the nature man/woman, who feels enmity with him?
 - ? How do we demonstrate enmity with God?
 - ? How is attributing God with feelings of enmity toward us, itself, an act of violent enmity toward God? An attack upon his very character?
 3. As part of establishing the covenant between Isaac and the Philistine nobles, Isaac “made them a feast, and they did eat and drink.”
 - ? What role does “table fellowship” or the sharing of a meal play in the making of covenants and establishing peaceful relations?
 - ? What do your own “table fellowship” habits suggest about the meaning behind “table fellowship” for you?

The New Testament Gospels report on Jesus sharing table fellowship on numerous occasions and with a variety of individuals and classes of individuals.

- ? How do such habits on the part of Jesus serve as a sign of his “peace” with them?
 - ? What do you think and how do you feel when we suggest that in engaging in intimate table fellowship Jesus was forming a sort of covenant relationship with his dinner partners?
 - ? What role does “table fellowship” play today, in your life in your relationship with the Savior and the covenants that exist between you and him?
 - ? How does the sacrament (communion) serve as a form of “table fellowship”?
 - ? How present is he when you partake of the bread and water, the food of the covenant meal?
4. The text tells us that “they [the Philistine nobles] departed from him in peace.
 - ? After reading and pondering today’s passage, what thoughts and feelings do you possess about this simply stated conclusion to the events reported in it?
 - ? How at peace are you with your God?
 - ? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? If you are not at peace with him, how can you maintain the idea that you are a covenant keeper?

Genesis 29.¹⁵⁻³⁰

¹⁵And Laban said unto Jacob, “Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? Tell me, what shall thy wages be?”

¹⁶And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured. ¹⁸And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, “I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter.”

¹⁹And Laban said, “It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me.”

²⁰And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.

²¹And Jacob said unto Laban, “Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her.”

²²And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. ²³And* in the evening, he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in unto her. ²⁴And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah Zilpah his maid for an handmaid. ²⁵And* in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, “What is this thou hast done unto me? Did not I serve with thee for Rachel? Wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?”

²⁶And Laban said, “It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. ²⁷Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years.”

²⁸And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also. ²⁹And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid. ³⁰And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years.

Questionary

This reading is the first of five readings in which we explore the character of Jacob’s family and familiar relationships. The following questions are those one might ask whether this narrative reports actual historical occurrences or not.

1. With Jacob working for him, Laban asked Jacob, “What shall thy wages be?” In response, Jacob replies that he wishes Rachel as his wage.
 - ? What do you know about how couples were married in those times and what financial considerations come into play? If you are unsure, or have questions about how Rachel could be thought of as “wage” for Jacob, take some time to do a little research on ancient marriage, bride prices, etc.
2. On the wedding night, Laban substituted Leah for Rachel.
 - ? What questions do you have in your mind about this substitution?
 - ? One question might be, how did Jacob not know of the substitution until the morning after?
 - ? How do you feel about Laban’s excuse/ justification: “It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn”?
 - ? What does it say about Laban that he didn’t explain this to Jacob seven years earlier when they entered the agreement?
 - ? What does it say about Jacob that he did not consider this custom when he initially made the agreement?
 - ? What role did Leah play in this deceptive substitution, especially in remaining incognito on her wedding night?
3. Jacob had to leave his homeland and escape to Laban’s homeland because of Esau’s threat on his life.
 - ? Why did Esau wish to kill Jacob? If you are unsure, review Genesis 27.

Jacob, with his mother, Rebecca’s complicity, substituted himself for Esau by masquerading as

his older brother in order to take his older brother's blessing.

- ? How are Rebecca and Jacob's treatment of Isaac similar to how Laban and Leah treated Jacob?
 - ? How are Jacob's masquerading as Esau and Leah's masquerading as Rachel similar, and even identical?
 - ? What would you think and feel if we suggested that perhaps the Biblical author is subtly demonstrating that Jacob is simply experiencing a version of the "law of restoration" in which he is having it measured out to him as he measured it out to others?
4. After one week of marriage with Jacob, Leah is made to endure Jacob marrying her sister, Rachel, entering her bed, and showing favoritism to Rachel.
- ? How would you feel if you were Leah?
 - ? How likely is it that Rachel and Leah, along with their respective handmaidens will enjoy a harmonious relationship?
5. We have already seen how favoritism in Isaac's family sowed hard feeling in the family. Now, Jacob is making the same error.
- ? How do you feel about the fact that Jacob apparently learned nothing from his parents' poor example?
 - ? What would you think and feel if we presented this as an example of the sins of the parents being passed on to their children.
 - ? How, do you think, will this blatant favoritism impact the family as it grows?

Genesis 29.³¹⁻³⁵

³¹And when the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren. ³²And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name “Reuben:” for she said, “Surely the Lord hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me.”

³³And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, “Because the Lord hath heard that I was hated, he hath therefore given me this son also:” and she called his name “Simeon.”

³⁴And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, “Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons:” therefore was his name called “Levi.”

³⁵And she conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, “Now will I praise the Lord:” therefore she called his name “Judah;” and left bearing.

Questionary

This reading is the second of five readings in which we explore the character of Jacob’s family and familiar relationships. The following questions are those one might ask whether this narrative reports actual historical occurrences or not.

1. It is extraordinary to hear it reported that Leah was hated and that God acknowledged the fact.
 - ? How do you feel about Leah being “hated.”
 - ? How do you feel about Jacob and his conducting himself in such a way in his relationship with Leah as to make her feel “hated”?
2. As children begin to be born into this dysfunctional family, they are often given names that reflect the dysfunction.
 - ? How does Reuben’s name reflect the family dysfunction?
 - ? We can assume that Jacob and Leah have now been married for close to a year, if not longer. How do you feel knowing that after all that time, she is still longing to feel loved by her husband and is “afflicted” by the emotional distance that exist between herself and Jacob?
3. At the birth of her second son, Simeon, the fact that she is “hated” by her husband continues to weigh on Leah. We can probably assume that it has been at least two years since the wedding.
 - ? How do you now feel about Jacob the man, Jacob as a husband, Jacob as a man of God?
4. With Levi’s birth, some three to four years after her marriage, Leah continues to hope that “Now, finally, my husband might feel some attachment to me.”
 - ? What are you now thinking and feeling about Leah, Jacob, and their family?
 - ? During all this time, what do you image the relationship to be between Rachel and Leah?
5. With the birth of the fourth son—five, six, seven years into her marriage with Jacob—Leah commits herself to “praise the Lord.”
 - ? What does this reaction to the birth of Judah suggest to your mind about Leah?
 - ? How would you respond to a suggestion such as, “Leah had come to realize that while she might not find what she wanted and needed from her husband, she could find what she wanted and needed in God”?
 - ? If we think in such terms, how does her attitude demonstrate a trust in God rather than “the arm of flesh” for her sense of self and worth?

Genesis 30.¹⁻⁸

¹And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, “Give me children, or else I die.”

²And Jacob’s anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, “Am I in God’s stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?”

³And she said, “Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her.”

⁴And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her. ⁵And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son. ⁶And Rachel said, “God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son:” therefore called she his name “Dan.”

⁷And Bilhah Rachel’s maid conceived again, and bare Jacob a second son. ⁸And Rachel said, “With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed:” and she called his name “Naphtali.”

Questionary

This reading is the third of five readings in which we explore the character of Jacob’s family and familiar relationships.

1. In our previous two readings in this series (29.¹⁵⁻³⁰ and 29.³¹⁻³⁵), we have explored the tensions that existed in Jacob’s family—tension between Jacob and his father-in-law, Laban; tensions between Jacob and his first wife, Leah; and tensions between Leah and Jacob’s second wife, Rachel. We looked specifically at the birth names of Leah’s children to understand the nature and feelings of the familiar tensions.
 - ? How does this reading expand upon the nature, feelings, and scope of the tensions that existed within Jacob’s family?
 2. We read that “Rachel envied her sister” and that “Jacob’s anger was kindled against Rachel.”
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate the persistence of the family tensions and that that even the relationship between Jacob and his favorite wife, Rachel, was invaded by tension and hard feelings?
 3. Upon having her first child through Bilhah, Rachel felt that “God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son.”
 - ? What does this tell you about Rachel’s feelings toward God, her thoughts about his feelings toward her, and relationship she had with God before the birth of this son—and so, for a decade or more?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate that Rachel, at least, felt for many, many years tension in her relationship with God?
 4. With the birth of her second child through Bilhah, Rachel named her second child through Bilhah, Naphtali, consistent with her the nature of her feelings and her relationship with her sister, Leah: “With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed:” If we accept the implied chronology of the narrative, Rachel would have felt and expressed such feelings of conflict with her sister some 10-15 years after her marriage to Jacob.
 - ? In light of these feelings, what do you see when you imagine interactions between Leah and Rachel?
 - ? How do you feel knowing that the family conflicts were so pervasive and long-lasting?
- ? After this and the previous two readings from Genesis 29, how do you feel about Jacob’s family?
 - ? What does God’s choice of this family to represent him to the world say about God and the individuals through whom he chooses to work?

Genesis 30.⁹⁻²¹

⁹When Leah saw that she had left bearing, she took Zilpah her maid, and gave her Jacob to wife.

¹⁰And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a son. ¹¹And Leah said, "A troop cometh:" and she called his name "Gad."

¹²And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a second son. ¹³And Leah said, "Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed:" and she called his name "Asher."

¹⁴And Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest, and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them unto his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Give me, I pray thee, of thy son's mandrakes."

¹⁵And she said unto her, "Is it a small matter that thou hast taken my husband? And wouldest thou take away my son's mandrakes also?"

And Rachel said, "Therefore he shall lie with thee to night for thy son's mandrakes."

¹⁶And Jacob came out of the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said, "Thou must come in unto me; for surely I have hired thee with my son's mandrakes."

And he lay with her that night. ¹⁷And God hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived, and bare Jacob the fifth son. ¹⁸And Leah said, "God hath given me my hire, because I have given my maiden to my husband:" and she called his name "Issachar."

¹⁹And Leah conceived again, and bare Jacob the sixth son. ²⁰And Leah said, "God hath endued me with a good dowry; now will my husband dwell with me, because I have born him six sons:" and she called his name "Zebulun." ²¹And afterwards she bare a daughter, and called her name "Dinah."

Q

uestionary

This reading is the fourth of five readings in which we explore the character of Jacob's family and familiar relationships. In our previous readings, we saw how every relationship Jacob had—with his father-in-law, Laban, his wife, Leah, his wife Rachel—was strained. In addition, the relationship between Leah and Rachel was strained. Often, the strained relationships were depicted through the names that mothers gave to their children.

1. In today's reading, which took place many years into the marriages between Jacob and Leah/Rachel, we see evidence of the strained relationship between Leah and Rachel and watch it pull their children into the fray.
 - ? How do you feel about Rachel when you hear the rawness of her complaint, many years after the marriages, "Is it a small matter that thou hast taken my husband?"
 - ? What do you think and feel and when you hear Rachel complain, "Therefore he shall lie with thee to night."
 - ? What, do you feel, do these words reflect about the relationship between Leah and Rachel?
 - ? What does it tell you about the relationship between Leah—a, now, 15 year or more wife of Jacob—and Jacob that Rachel feels that she has to "hire" or "buy" Jacob's time, affection, and sex: "Thou must come in unto me; for surely I have hired thee with my son's mandrakes."
 - ? What do you think and feel when you read that upon becoming pregnant from this night of intercourse, Rachel sees her pregnancy as part of a translation rather than love. "God hath given me my hire."
 - ? How does the entire episode change for you when you realize that the "mandrakes" were considered an aphrodisiac?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you realize that Jacob only slept with Leah because, in their minds anyway, he was drugged?
 - ? Are we to wonder if Jacob has ever had sex with Leah for any reason other than sexual desire devoid of love? Why do you answer as you do?
2. Sometime after this episode, Leah became pregnant once more. Upon giving birth, she thought and hoped, "now will my husband dwell with me, because I have born him six sons"

- ? How do you feel about Leah and Jacob, each, as you hear Leah still longing to earn the love and respect of her, perhaps, twenty-year husband?

Genesis 30.²²⁻²⁴

²²And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. ²³And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, "God hath taken away my reproach." ²⁴And she called his name "Joseph;" and said, "The Lord shall add to me another son."

Questionary

1. In this series of readings encompassing Genesis 29.¹⁵- 30.²⁴, we have explored the stressed feelings and tense relationships that existed in Jacob's family, especially as they are reflected in the naming of children. While Joseph's name does not reflect these family stresses and tensions, Rachel's expression of relief at finally having a child is reflective of how she has felt over the period of her marriage—some 20 years, if the chronology is to be trusted—"God hath taken away my reproach."

? What do you think of when you think of "reproach?"

"Reproach" can be what one person directs at another—"scorn, insult, mockery." It can also be what an individual feels in themselves—"shame, humiliation."

? How do each of these apply to Rachel?

? What do you think and feel when you consider that Rachel has lived so long under a sense of "reproach?"

? Whose "reproach" has she felt—sister's, husband's, God's, her own, others, all of the above? Why do you answer as you do?

? How do the following statements suggest that Rachel would have ascribed her infertility to God and so may have felt that He was reproaching her thereby?

The text says that soon after Jacob and Rachel were married, "When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was a barren." Later, when Rachel complained to Jacob about her infertility, Jacob responded, "Am I in a God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?"

? Have you ever felt God's "reproach"? What was the cause and how did you overcome such feelings?

? After reading this series of readings (Genesis 29.¹⁵- 30.²⁴), how do you feel about God's selection of Jacob/ Israel to be His servant to the world?

? What does this selection tell you about God?

? What does this selection tell you about God's commitment to making Himself known through whatever servants he can find.

Genesis 31.⁴³⁻⁵⁵

⁴³And Laban answered and said unto Jacob, “These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle, and all that thou seest is mine: and what can I do this day unto these my daughters, or unto their children which they have born? ⁴⁴Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee.”

⁴⁵And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. ⁴⁶And Jacob said unto his brethren, “Gather stones.”

And they took stones, and made an heap: and they did eat there upon the heap. ⁴⁷And Laban called it ‘Jegar-sahadutha:’ but Jacob called it ‘Galeed.’ ⁴⁸And Laban said, “This heap is a witness between me and thee this day.”

Therefore was the name of it called ‘Galeed;’ ⁴⁹and ‘Mizpah;’ for he said, “The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another. ⁵⁰If thou shalt afflict my daughters, or if thou shalt take other wives beside my daughters, no man is with us; see, God is witness betwixt me and thee.” ⁵¹And Laban said to Jacob,

“Behold this heap, and behold this pillar,
which I have cast betwixt me and thee;
⁵²this heap be witness, and this pillar be witness,
that I will not pass over this heap to thee,
and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm.
⁵³The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father,
judge betwixt us.”

And Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. ⁵⁴Then Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount. ⁵⁵And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed, and returned unto his place.

Q

uestionary

1. In this reading we focus on the meaning and significance of covenants. Upon the presence of hard feelings and the danger of conflict between Jacob and his father-in-law, Laban, suggest that the two mean “make a covenant.”
? What is the purpose and hope of the covenant?
2. In making the covenant, the two men agree that
“I will not pass over this heap to thee,
and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm.”
?
? What additional insight does this agreement give you into the intentions of the covenant between Jacob and Laban?
? If we accept that the forms and purposes of covenants between humans inform the form and purposes of covenants made between humans and God, what could we say is the fundamental intent of covenants between man and God?
? What do you think and feel when you consider that a covenant with God has as a prime objective the establishment of peace and the removal of enmity between God and man?
? In your mind, is there a state of peace (and cooperation) between yourself and God?

genesis 32.¹⁰

I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant....

Questionary

- ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate a prayer, such as this one uttered by Jacob, in which one acknowledges that they have not “earned” all the goodness God shows them, as opposed to prayer in which one seeks blessings because of their “worthiness”?

genesis 33.¹⁰⁻¹¹

¹⁰And Jacob said... “I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand: for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me. ¹¹Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.”

Questionary

Today’s scripture represents a few of the words Jacob spoke to his brother, Esau, after a long absence. The reunion has much to teach us, especially in light of their history.

- ? What does it say about the importance of our relationships that Jacob saw God’s face in his brother’s face?
- ? Given Jacob’s earlier willingness to lie and cheat in order to falsely acquire his brother’s “birthright,” what does it say about the new Jacob that he now feels that he “has enough”?

Exodus 20.¹⁷—just scripture

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

Questionary

1. The Lord admonishes, “cease to be covetous; learn to impart one to another” (DC 88.¹²³).
 - ? How does imparting to others help to battle the sin of covetousness?
2. In Colossians 3.⁵, the apostle Paul identifies covetousness with idolatry.
 - ? How is covetousness indicative of one who worships false gods?
 - ? What societal evils are a consequence of covetousness?
 - ? What thoughts and behaviors accompany covetousness?

Exodus 22.²¹⁻²⁴—just scripture

²¹Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

²²Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. ²³If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; ²⁴and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.

Questionary

Given America's current immigration policies—policies that breach international law, traditional American values, basic human decency, and divine mandates—today's reading seems appropriate and pertinent.

1. In today's reading, Yahweh identifies three classes found in society that come under Yahweh's special protection.
 - ? What are those three classes?
 - ? What do these three classes have in common?
 - ? Take a moment to list one or two ways that each of these classes are vulnerable to being taken advantage of, mistreated, and oppressed.
 - ? What does it mean to "vex" or "oppress" an immigrant?
 2. When instructing ancient Israel in regard to issues related to social justice, it is very, very common for Yahweh to remind them, as he does here, that "ye were strangers in the land of Egypt."
 - ? Why do you think Yahweh so often reminds Israel of their own oppressive experience?
 - ? What is the significance of this reminder?
 - ? What does it mean for American's today as they consider their treatment of immigrant
 3. Yahweh warns Israel that "if thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot..." Consider this "in any wise."
 - ? In what ways can vulnerable immigrants be afflicted?
 - ? How is our American society doing in this regard?
 - ? How do feel about Yahweh's assurance that he hears when afflicted and oppressed peoples cry out to him?
 - ? Is it possible that immigrants—such as those DACA children who were brought here, have never known anything else, and have no claim on any other country or have any other country to claim them—have cause to feel oppressed, cry to God, and, thereby, bring God's correction upon America?
 - ? How might you respond to such affliction of the stranger?
- ? How does the Lord's stipulation in today's reading concerning strangers jive with what we are witnessing in American immigration policies and on the nation's southern border?
 - ? What does this reading suggest that we can expect by way of future consequences for the oppression that is taking place there?

Exodus 22.²⁵—just scripture

If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.

Questionary

- ? What is it about lending money at interest, do you think, that the Lord finds objectionable?
- ? What does the Lord's prohibition against lending money at interest suggest about how God expects us to feel about and act toward our fellowmen and women?

Exodus 23.¹⁻²— just scripture

¹Do not spread false reports. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness.

²Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd (NIV).

Questionary

- ? What sort of testimony would a “malicious witness” offer in hopes of “help[ing] a guilty person”... libeling the innocent, offering false praise, evidence for the guilty?
- ? What does “siding with the crowd” look like?
- ? In what ways are we witnessing such wrong doing in today’s legal and political environment?

Exodus 23.⁶⁻⁷— just scripture

⁶Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits.

⁷Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the innocent (NIV).

Questionary

- ? What types of political and judicial activities and behavior constitute “bribery”?
- ? What examples have you seen in your society in which justice for “poor” and “innocent” people has been subverted with money, power, and prestige?

Exodus 23.9—just scripture

Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Questionary

- ? What is the significance of “knowing the heart of a stranger”?
- ? How do you think God feels about America’s treatment of the “stranger”?

Leviticus 16.^{7-9, 15-16, 19}

⁷And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. ⁸And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat. ⁹And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD's lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering.

¹⁵Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat: ¹⁶and he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

¹⁹And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.

Questionary

1. Today we will focus principally on the “mercy seat” upon which blood is sprinkled. We will ask you to take off your “literalist” hat and become a poet for today’s reading.
 - ? What do you picture when you think of the “mercy seat”?The “mercy seat” is essentially the “lid” on top of the “chest” or ark.
 - ? What is suggested by calling it a “seat”?
 - ? What do we do with “seats”?
 - ? Who sits on this seat?
2. The “mercy seat” is the place where Yahweh, King of Israel, sits when he enters the tabernacle or temple.
 - ? What might be a better word for this “seat”?
 - ? What thoughts come to mind if you think of the “mercy seat” sitting atop the “ark” as a “throne”—the throne of God?
 - ? What do you think and how do you feel when you consider that God is sitting on his throne when blood is splattered all over it?
 - ? What does God look like after this ceremony?
 - ? What does this teach you about the character of God?
3. It was common practice in the ancient Near East for rulers to name their throne. Much thought went into the name. The name of a throne spoke to the expectations and character of the one who sat on the throne. Throne names could be quite long, including dozens of adjectives. Usually these names focused on the power of the king and the effect his power would have on those over whom he ruled.

We can imagine, then, Yahweh giving serious thought to the name of his throne. What does he want it to say about him? What effect does he want it to have on those over whom he reigns?

 - ? So, what does it suggest about God that he settled on the name “mercy” for his throne?
 - ? How is “mercy” a demonstration of power?
 - ? Think of all the other possibilities he could have chosen for the name of his throne. For example, he might have chosen “justice.”
 - ? Why “mercy”?

Leviticus 19.⁹⁻¹⁰— just scripture

⁹And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. ¹⁰And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God.

Questionary

1. As we have observed before, although the particulars of this passage may not be applicable to our day and society, there are principles that can be drawn from the particulars. Consider the instruction that in harvesting their crops, farmers are to leave a portion of their crop unharvested in order to provide for the poor and foreigners. Of necessity, of course, this cuts into the farmer's "profit margin."
 - ? How do you feel about the Lord's instruction that the farmer "suffer a loss of profit" so that the poor and foreign born can be cared for?
 - ? Does this seem unreasonable? Impractical? Just? Fair?
 - ? What does this suggest about the Lord's expectations of those who would be his disciples?
 - ? What does this suggest about the Lord's attitude toward "profit" and how he expects disciples to view "profit"?
 - ? What does this suggest concerning the Lord's expectations concerning the farmer's attitude toward the poor and foreign born?
 - ? Based upon this instruction with its implied divine expectations, how are you personally measuring up to the Lord's value system?
 - ? Based upon this instruction with its implied divine expectations, how is our modern society measuring up to the Lord's value system?
 - ? What type of "public policy" could and should you encourage and support so that our society reflects such godly instruction and expectations?
 - ? What can you do now to encourage such "public policy"?
2. Today's reading ends with "I am the Lord your God."
 - ? What is the relationship between this final declaration and the generous and moral economic principles expounded in today's reading?
 - ? What is the relationship between this final declaration and the faithful worship of God?

Leviticus 19.¹¹⁻¹⁴— just scripture

¹¹Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another.

¹²And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

¹³Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.

¹⁴Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD.

Questionary

- ? Why, do you think, does God consider delaying, withholding, and even underpaying worker's wages to be fraud and robbery?
- ? What does such fraud or robbery look like in today's society?

Leviticus 19.15—just scripture

Do not act with inequity in any legal procedure. You are not to give advantage to the vulnerable, or show favoritism toward the influential. You are to adjudicate each citizen's case with justice (Author's translation).

Questionary

- ? How well is the American legal system abiding by this Biblical mandate?
- ? What can you do as one, lone citizen to encourage and demand justice in the American legal system?

Leviticus 19.³³⁻³⁴— just scripture

³³And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. ³⁴But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Questionary

1. God forbids his people to “vex” foreigners residing among them.
 - ? What does it mean to you to “vex”?
2. The Hebrew word could be translated as “suppress,” or “oppress.”
 - ? What connotation does “oppress” have for you? What about “suppress”?
3. God’s injunction to his people in relation to their treatment of foreigners among them goes beyond that of forbidding mistreatment. It also requires that “thou shalt love him as thyself.”
 - ? What would private actions and public policies look like in order to be in conformity with this injunction?
 - ? How well do you follow these two injunctions in your private life— 1) do not “vex” foreigners living among you, 2) but treat them as you would want to be treated if you were a foreigner?
 - ? How well do you follow these two injunctions in your public life, or your role as a voting citizen?
 - ? Do you encourage and support government leaders and institutions that govern consistent with these two injunctions?
 - ? How well does your society and government do at following these divine injunctions?
4. God gives the following reason for Israel needing to obey these injunctions: “for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.”
 - ? How does Israel’s experience as refugees in Egypt inform their understanding of the foreigners that are among them?
 - ? Why does their own experiences as refugees in Egypt require that Israelites avoid—privately and publicly—vexing foreigners among them, but treating them as they would be treated as foreigners?
 - ? LDS people were once treated poorly, even to the point of forcing them to leave the United States and escape into the territories. How should this experiences inform and shape the way they treat oppressed peoples, especially foreigners?
 - ? How do you feel about God’s demand that a resident alien is to be treated as a citizen?
 - ? How closely is the U.S. following such an injunction?

deuteronomy 1.¹⁶⁻¹⁷— just scripture

¹⁶And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him. ¹⁷He shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man...

Questionary

- ? How are the legislators who create laws, the judges who rule on them, and the attorneys who use the laws in our culture doing in treating persons of all classes with equity and justice?
- ? To what specific examples would you point to justify your answer to the previous question?
- ? What can you do as a citizen to demand strict equity and justice in the legal system?

deuteronomy 5.⁹⁻¹⁰

⁹Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, ¹⁰and shewing a mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

Questionary

Consider the utter disproportionality between “visiting... iniquity... unto three or four generations” and “shewing mercy unto thousands of [generations].”

- ? What does the disproportionately short consequences for iniquity compared with the disproportionately long consequences for obedience suggest about God’s merciful disposition?

Deuteronomy 5.¹²⁻¹⁵— just scripture

¹²Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee. ¹³Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: ¹⁴but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. ¹⁵And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.

Questionary

1. God ask that we “keep the sabbath day to sanctify it...”
 - ? What does it mean to you to “sanctify” the sabbath?
 - ? If we understand “sanctify” to mean, “make distinct, or set apart,” how do you make the sabbath distinct from the other six days of the week?
2. The Lord says, “Therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.” “Therefore,” signifies the reason that Israel is to keep the sabbath day. Now, in Exodus, Israel was to observe the sabbath in imitation of God’s rest at the end of his creative efforts. However, Deuteronomy suggests a different reason:

“Thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm.”

 - ? What does this reason for observing the sabbath suggest about the sabbath?
3. The sabbath is a reminder of Israel’s captivity in Egypt and the emancipation that Yahweh effected in the national history. Israel is now instructed to act in behalf of others (even animals!), as God acted in its behalf. They are to be liberators.

“Thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.

The observance of the sabbath is, then, much more than a kind of legalistic consideration about what we do and don’t do on the sabbath. Observance of the sabbath is, at least in part, a social and economic issue. “Because I emancipated you from your Egyptian labor, you are to free those who work for you of their labor one day a week.” Taking a day off work to permit others a day off has implications for one’s priorities.

 - ? How does observance of the sabbath day reflect one’s priorities for achieving a just society over those of personal gain and profit?
 - ? How is our society doing in reflecting appropriate social priorities through sabbath day observance?
 - ? What can you do, not only to observe the sabbath in your own life, but to encourage society to use the sabbath day as means of developing a just society by easing the labors of laborers?

Deuteronomy 6.⁴⁻⁹— atonement

⁴Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: ⁵and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. ⁶And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: ⁷and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. ⁸And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. ⁹And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us.” *

One of my central understandings of Jesus Christ and his ministry is that he and it represented a witness of God’s feelings of connectedness, attachment, linkage, participation, and unity with humankind. Rather than understanding the basic meaning of at-one-ment to be something like “expiation,” or “propitiation” or “sacrifice,” etc., I understand its basic meaning as “connectedness,” “attachment,” “unity,” “oneness,” etc.

1. Today's reading is the great Jewish Shema! (Hear!), perhaps one of the most influential pieces of literature in human history. It is often found at the entrance to a Jewish home, serving as a simple reminder of the central place God is to occupy in the believer’s life.
 - ? What evidences would others find in your life that God and the things of God are central to your life?
 - ? How does the way you spend your time, emotional energy, or material resources demonstrate your priority to serving and worshiping him?
2. The first line is perhaps most commonly understood to assert that Yahweh is the sole God—in its minimalistic reading, Israel’s only God (henotheism), and in its maximalist reading, the only God of all humanity (monotheism). But both readings, it seems to me is too narrow. Thus, I translate the passage as follows:

“Hear O Israel: Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one.”

- ? In addition to possibly meaning there is no God but Yahweh, what might it mean to say that Yahweh is “one”?
- ? How else might we speak of the “oneness” of God?
- ? How might this be related to the idea of “Atonement,” or “at-one-ment”?
- ? How would you feel and what would you learn about God, if we read the great Shema as a witness of God’s unity or connectedness with, or attachment to all creation, particularly to humanity?

“Hear O Israel: Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is a connected Being.”

- ? How did Jesus express his sense of connectedness with humanity during his earthly ministry?
- ? How has he demonstrated his sense of and commitment to oneness, unity, and connectedness with you?

- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Deuteronomy 6.²⁰⁻²⁵

²⁰And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, “What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded you?”

²¹Then thou shalt say unto thy son, “We were Pharaoh’s bondmen in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand: ²²and the Lord shewed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes: ²³and he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers. ²⁴And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. ²⁵And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us.”

Questionary

1. “What are the commandments all about?” That’s the question the child put to the parent.
? How would you answer this question?

My experience has been that if this question is asked of nearly any LDS parent, teacher, or priesthood leader, their first reaction, the very first thing out of their mouth is, “Because you will be blessed.” It is somewhat embarrassing, really. I guess the assumption is that unless we are assured that there is something in it for us, we will not be quite so excited about keeping the commandments and may just pass on the obedience thing. But, Moses has a different response about why we obey God.

- ? What is wrong with this assumption concerning our narrow self-interests?
? How would you feel about the suggestion that we should do the right thing, because it is the right thing, whatever the short-term or long-term consequences?
? Or, put a different way, we do the right thing because doing the right thing is consistent with our nature, of who and what we are?
? So, what does Moses suggest ought to be the first thing out of one’s mouth in answering this question?
2. So, Moses answer is: “We were Pharaoh’s bondmen in Egypt and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand...”
? How do you feel about obeying God because of benefits already granted through his own actions rather than in anticipation of future benefits granted because of our actions?
? What is the saving benefit that God has already bestowed upon you that is analogous to his deliverance of Israel from servitude?
3. Moses reminded his people that “the Lord shewed signs and wonders” in rescuing them from slavery.
? What is the Lord’s “sign and wonder” performed for our deliverance from our spiritual bondage?
4. Without denying that there are potential benefits flowing from obedience, Moses here suggest that one obeys God first and foremost out of gratitude for past benefits. In delivering us from sin through the wonder of the Atonement, he has already given us the very best he has to offer. We obey out of gratitude for Christ’s wondrous deliverance, accomplished “with a mighty hand.”
? How do you feel about this notion of obeying God for benefits already bestowed rather than potential future blessings?
? If this is somewhat a different focus than you have possessed in the past, how can you shift focuses to be more consistent with Moses’ “first words”?
5. Consider the statement that our obedience “shall be our righteousness.”
? What does this mean to you?
? What would you think and how would you feel if we translated the idea as follows: we obey

- because “it is the right thing for us to do”?
- ? Does this change your sense of the passage?

deuteronomy 8.²⁻³

²And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. ³And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.

Questionary

Consider Moses' statement concerning manna: "Which thou knewest not, neither did thy father know." Israel, then, did not understand what manna was, where it was from, etc., etc. Now consider Jesus' statement: "I am the bread of life."

- ? How would you feel about the suggestion that part of the reason Jesus likens himself to manna is that he, like it, is not understood?
- ? How is he and his work beyond our comprehension?

Deuteronomy 8.¹⁰⁻¹⁸

¹⁰When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. ¹¹Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: ¹²lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; ¹³and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; ¹⁴then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; ¹⁵who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; ¹⁶who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; ¹⁷and thou say in thine heart, “My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.” ¹⁸But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.

Questionary

1. We saw in our *Read, Ponder, Pray* for Deuteronomy 6.²⁰⁻²⁵ that faithfulness toward God was based upon his past benefits of emancipation and wilderness care rather than upon anticipation of future benefits. The truth is, according to the Old Testament, observance of the law out of gratitude for past benefits is a sign of proper worship of God while observance of the law for the purpose of acquiring future benefits is a sign of idolatry.
 - ? How do you feel about having idolatry described in this way?
2. In today’s reading, Moses once again reminds the Israelite that they must “remember” the emancipation and wilderness care effected by God as they enjoy economic wellbeing.
 - ? What does it mean, here, to “remember”?
 - ? How is it more than simply “calling something to mind”?
 - ? Why is it so important to remember God’s past benefits, especially those surrounding his deliverance of us?
3. When we read the scriptures, we must pay attention to every word. No word is too small or insignificant to carry a punch and be pregnant with meaning. Consider the following contrasting word, “but.”

“...thou say in thine heart, ‘My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.’ **BUT** thou shalt remember the Lord thy God...

 - ? What is the import and meaning of this “But”?
 - ? How is an attitude that “my power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth” indicative of forgetting God and reflective of idolatry?
 - ? How are individuals and societies likely to utilize their wealth if they truly believe that they only possess their wealth because God bestowed it?
 - ? How are you, and your society doing at remembering how we have “gotten the wealth” that we enjoy?
 - ? Do the uses to which we as individuals and society put our wealth demonstrate our awareness of our dependence upon God, or might we find in our attitudes toward our wealth that we believe “my power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth”?
2. The manna, which sustained Israel for 40 years is described as that “which thy fathers knew not.” This is quite remarkable when you think about it. According to the text, Israel ate manna for 14,600 days without ever once understanding what manna was and how it came to be. Yet, it delivered them from death and nourished them daily.
 - ? How does this reality apply to today’s reading?

? How do you feel about God taking care of Israel in such a fashion while Israel remained ignorant concerning the nature of their “salvation”?

In John 6, Jesus declares himself to be the “bread from heaven” (manna) sent by God to spiritually nourish and deliver his people.

? Is there a sense in which our source of salvation, Jesus, remains largely unknown and misunderstood even by those of us who live by “partaking of him”?

? How would such “ignorance” on our part “humble” and “prove” us?

? What does this suggest to you when it comes to the meaning of having “faith in Christ”?

? What have you heard wealthy and successful Americans say that is something akin to “My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth”?

? This is a lie and indicative of both self-deception and “atheist” attitudes no matter the economic system or era. Why is this such a dangerous, false, and ungodly attitude?

? How do individuals, institutions, and society act as if their benefits are theirs and come from their own efforts and genius?

deuteronomy 9.^{4-6, 24}

⁴Speak not thou in thine heart... “For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land:” but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord doth drive them out from before thee. ⁵Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land....

⁶Understand therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people.

²⁴Ye have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you.

Questionary

- ? How do you feel about and how do you explain the fact that God blessed a people who were “rebellious... from the day that [God] knew [them]?”
- ? How might this knowledge impact our own sense of ourselves when we feel that God has blessed us?

Deuteronomy 10.¹⁷⁻¹⁹— just scripture

¹⁷For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: ¹⁸He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. ¹⁹Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Questionary

1. In today's reading, Yahweh is credited with several commendable actions. Take a moment to identify them.

? How are your feelings for God effected by your awareness of these attributes?

In regard to the last attribute—he “loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment”—Israel is invited to imitate God. It is reasonable to conclude that we are invited to imitate him in each of his societal actions:

- There are to be no legal injustices due to the influence of money.
- Vulnerable portions of the population should receive equal treatment in the legal system.

? How consistent with this divine principles is your community—local, state, and nation?

2. In addition to showing compassion to foreign residents because of God's example, Israel is also asked to show compassion to foreign residents because they themselves were once oppressed foreign residents. They therefore know how oppression feels and should know better than become oppressor.

? ? How do the following words spoken by King Benjamin related to this part of Yahweh's message?

“Perhaps thou shalt say: The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just—but I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God. For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind?”
(Mosiah 4.¹⁷⁻¹⁹)

? Why is God so anxious to take up the cause of orphans, widows, and immigrants?

? In light of the way they are treated in our society, who is likely to take up their cause if not God?

? Does God only work personally in behalf of these vulnerable populations, or is he, to some degree, reliant upon those who think of themselves as his disciples?

deuteronomy 11.¹⁸⁻²⁰

¹⁸Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. ¹⁹And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. ²⁰And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates...

Questionary

If we place Yahweh's words "as frontlets between [our] eyes, everything we see is seen, as it were "through the lens" of his word as found in scripture.

- ? How well do you do this—see things through God's eyes?
- ? How can you do so more consistently and accurately?

Deuteronomy 15.¹⁻⁴— just scripture

¹At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. ²And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD's release. ³Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release; ⁴save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it...

Questionary

Today's reading includes economic stipulations that, while perhaps not directly applicable to our modern economic system, may contain principles that can guide us in our modern private and public economic lives.

1. The Lord stipulates that all debt acquired over the course of seven years is to be forgiven a fellow Israelite.
 - ? How would you feel as the lender if asked to cancel someone's debt before it was paid off?
 2. Today, we would almost certainly worry that such a policy would create "sloth" on the part of the debtor. "What," we might ask, "is to keep the debtor from being slow to repay, knowing the year of release is approaching?"
 - ? Do you suppose such concerns were felt back then as well?
 - ? What does this economic policy suggest about the attitude of the two—debtor and lender—toward each other?
 - ? What does this suggest concerning the attitude of a lender toward money and profit?
 - ? Given the seeming impracticality of doing this in today economic environment, what does it suggest about modern day relationships?
 3. There seems to have been a different policy for a fellow Israelite and a non-Israelite.
 - ? Why do you think there was a difference?
 - ? How do you feel about the difference?
 - ? Would you be more comfortable with such an economic practice if it were based upon a covenant that both debtor and lender had made with God?
 - ? What principle do you learn from this passage?
 - ? Are there any attitudinal adjustments you could make to be more consistent, at least, with the economic principles behind this practice?
- ? How does the following quote relate to today's passage and principles found in it?
- "Peer through the lens of neoliberalism and you see more clearly how the political thinkers most admired by Thatcher and Reagan helped shape the ideal of society as a kind of universal market (and not, for example, a polis, a civil sphere or a kind of family) and of human beings as profit-and-loss calculators (and not bearers of grace, or of inalienable rights and duties). Of course the goal was to weaken the welfare state and any commitment to full employment, and – always – to cut taxes and deregulate. But "neoliberalism" indicates something more than a standard rightwing wish list. It was a way of reordering social reality, and of rethinking our status as individuals....
- "In short, 'neoliberalism' is not simply a name for pro-market policies, or for the compromises with finance capitalism made by failing social democratic parties. It is a name for a premise that, quietly, has come to regulate all we practice [sic] and believe: that competition is the only legitimate organising [sic] principle for human activity" (Stephen Metcalf, "Neoliberalism: the idea that swallowed the world," theguardian.com—The Long Read).
- ? How could today's scripture be applied to current financial challenges related to the coronavirus?

- ? How do you feel about the Lord's requirement that debts be canceled periodically?
- ? What "reasonable" economic and moral objections might be expressed in relation to such cancelation of debt?
- ? How would the Lord respond to such objections to show that the policy is not, in fact, as "objectionable" as might appear?
- ? How could this be applied to current financial challenges related to the coronavirus?

Deuteronomy 15.⁷⁻¹¹— just scripture

⁷If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: ⁸but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. ⁹Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand;’ and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee. ¹⁰Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. ¹¹For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.

Questionary

Today’s reading, the second from Deuteronomy 15, relates, like the first reading (vs. 1-4), to questions of loaning money and the release of debts.

1. Today’s passage provides several “do’s and don’ts” in relation to how individuals and societies are to think about and treat the poor.

“Thou shalt not”

“Harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor”

“Thine eye be evil against thy poor brother

“Heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him”

“Thou shalt”

“Open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land”

- ? Note the focus on several body parts: “heart,” “hand,” and “eye.” Do you have any thoughts about the significance of this bodily multiplication?
 - ? How do you and society “perceive” the poor?
 - ? How do you and society “feel about” the poor?
 - ? How do you and society “act toward” the poor?
 - ? How do you feel about the counsel that we not only not be stingy toward the poor, but actually be abundantly generous (“open thine hand wide”)?
 - ? How can one “grieve” when assisting the poor?
2. Again, although the particulars of Israelite economic law are different than ours, principles can be drawn from them. For example, every 7 years all debts acquired by fellow Israelites were to be cancelled—keep in mind, in addition, that loans were to be interest free. Today’s passage counsels that the monied interests were not to withhold loans to the poor because the year of cancellation was approaching.
 - ? What does this suggest about the attitude the monied interests were to have about loans provided to the poor?
 - ? How do you feel about Yahweh’s expectation that the wealthy would be more concerned with seeing that the poor have their needs met than getting every penny of a loan back?
 - ? Years ago, I had a friend who was a well-known economist. He never tired of telling me that such policies as interest-free loans and cancellation of loans was foolish. Do you find yourself agreeing with him?
 - ? What seems to be God’s principle concern—care for the poor or “fairness” toward the wealthy?
 - ? How might today’s reading be applicable in the age of coronavirus and the payments individuals are struggling to make due to job losses, etc?
 - ? How well is your nation doing at being true to the spirit of this divine direction?

- ? How do you feel about the Lord's assertion that he has given wealth to some for the specific purpose of having them care for the needy—for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee?
- ? What do you make of the fact that there is no instruction given to the wealthy/lender concerning the need to establish the "worthiness" of the poor for the assistance offered the poor or the money lent?
- ? How do you feel about the Lord's requirement that loans made to the poor be cancelled periodically?

Deuteronomy 15.^{12-15, 18}— just scripture

¹²And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. ¹³And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: ¹⁴thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. ¹⁵And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day....

¹⁸It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free from thee; for he hath been worth a double hired servant to thee, in serving thee six years: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest.

Questionary

Today's reading is our third from the fifteenth chapter of Deuteronomy. The first two readings (15.¹⁻⁴ & ⁷⁻¹¹) addressed attitudes and actions surrounding the lending of money and the release of debt. The direction was entirely directed at the lender, presumably because the lender possesses all the power in the lending/borrowing relationship.

1. Interestingly, while the lender is counseled to not withhold loans because the time of release is approaching, the borrower is given no counsel. He might have been counseled to not slow or even cease repayment as the period of release neared, but he wasn't. No doubt Yahweh would want such uprightness on the part of the borrower, but the text is quiet about this—and is addressed nowhere else.
 - ? Why, do you think, the counsel was only directed at the lender?
2. Today's reading addresses the release of slaves. We will not address the question of slavery and the Lord's condoning of it in Old Testament times. It may seem strange to examine such a passage in a time and place where slavery is not practiced. But, don't get hung up on the slave aspect of this verse, but consider:
 - ? Is there a principle that can be drawn from this passage that is applicable to our modern world and your life?
3. As was the case with lending, so here the counsel is all directed at the party that possesses all the power—the slave-holder. Yahweh encourages the slave-holder to adopt certain attitudes and actions at the time he releases the slave.
 - ? What are those attitudes and actions?
4. Consider the following desired attitudes and actions on the part of the slave-holder.
 - Thou shalt not let him go away empty
 - Thou shalt furnish him liberally
 - It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free
 - ? What does this suggest concerning the attitude that Yahweh hopes the ex-slave-holder will have toward the newly released slave?
 - ? How do you feel about Yahweh's requirement that the ex-slave-holder, essentially, help the ex-slave establish himself as a freeman?
 - ? How, do you suppose, did the ancient slave holder feel about this stipulation? Did he think it just?
 - ? As we have asked in the previous readings from this chapter, what does this suggest concerning the attitude Yahweh expects of the slave-holder in relation to money, profits, etc.
 - ? What modern day applications might you make from today's reading?
 - ? What priorities are we to possess when it comes to individuals' needs and dignity verses profits?

- ? Could this be applied by employers toward their employees? If so, how?
 - ? How consistent with the principles are you? How consistent is our Society?
 - ? What could you do to encourage more consistency with such principles in our society?
5. As is so often the case when counseling certain attitudes and actions, Yahweh demands that “thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee.”
- ? Why was this remembrance so vital?
 - ? Could we relate it in any way to the oft-quoted sentiment: “There, but for the grace of God, go I”?
 - ? If we considered the modern debt culture, how might we “let [debtors] go free,” not “empty,” but “furnished liberally so that they might get a new start?”
 - ? What does God expect in the relationship between the rich and powerful, and the poor and vulnerable?

deuteronomy 15.¹⁹⁻²¹— just scripture

¹⁹All the firstling males that come of thy herd and of thy flock thou shalt sanctify unto the LORD thy God: thou shalt do no work with the firstling of thy bullock, nor shear the firstling of thy sheep.

²⁰Thou shalt eat it before the LORD thy God year by year in the place which the LORD shall choose, thou and thy household. ²¹And if there be any blemish therein, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it unto the LORD thy God.

Questionary

Today's reading is the last of four from Deuteronomy 15.

1. We might use today's passage to focus on sacrifice. For example, we could focus on the fact that sacrifices are to have no blemishes—this in “similitude” of Jesus and his sinless life. O.K. I guess. But this feels like just a bit of “hiding” from what seems to be the principle thrust of the passage. It is important to note that the rest of this chapter concerns economic matters: the lender's attitudes and actions in relation to the cancelation of borrowers' debt, and the slaveholder's attitude and actions in relation to the release of slaves. The lender, for example, is as much civil servant as he is a member of a “profit industry.” Money and profit concerns are to be of secondary concern to the needs of the individual and his or her “rights” for human security and dignity. With this economic focus in mind,
 - ? What are the “profit implications” for the “business owner” if he does not utilize his very first bull for work that is performed on the farm, or does not shear the first sheep born in his flock?
 - ? What if his first bull or sheep turns out to be his only new bull or sheep? Surely such a possibility existed and was a real concern.
 - ? What principles and personal priority emphasis does today's reading suggest?
 - ? How would you apply these principles and priority questions to your own life?
 - ? Why do you think Yahweh is so interested in assisting his people to possess and act upon selfless economic ideals?
 - ? Does it suggest anything concerning the natural order of things? If so, what?

Deuteronomy 19.¹⁹⁻²²— just scripture

¹⁹When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands.

²⁰When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

²¹When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

²²And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing.

Questionary

Today, we examine a passage with implications concerning economic principles and attitudes related to the just society. Again, although the specific practices may not apply to our economic system, we may draw principles from the practices.

1. In a previous reading from this same chapter, verses 9-13, we saw that farmers were not to harvest all their crops, but leave a portion for the poor to harvest for their own desperate needs. In today's reading, we learn that the Lord not only required farmers to leave a portion of their crops unharvested, but that after they have harvested a field, they were not to go back through the fields to collect what their harvesting had missed, leaving even what was missed to the poor.
 - ? What principles do you see active in this instruction?
 - ? What do you think God hoped the farmer would learn about and feel toward the poor by observing this principle?
 - ? What do you think the farmer would learn about God and his feelings toward the poor by observing this principle?
 - ? What do you think God was teaching farmers, and society in general, about the Lord's feelings about profits and profit margins, especially in regard to their relation to caring for the poor?
 2. Today's reading speaks of "strangers, orphans, and widows."
 - ? What do these groups have in common that they are considered together?
 - ? In addition to these, what other classes of people are likewise vulnerable to insecurities and abuse in our society today?
 3. Consider the injunction: "remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing." Note especially the "therefore."
 - ? What does one's having been subject to hardship and vulnerabilities have to do with the necessity of taking care of others experiencing hardships and vulnerabilities?
 - ? In what way is the now successful farmer like the present vulnerable "stranger, orphan, and widow"?
 - ? What does this teach/remind one about the nature of "dependence," "independence," and "interdependence"?
 - ? What could you do for vulnerable individuals and groups that is consistent with the principles being taught in today's reading?
- ? What does it say about the Lord's assumptions concerning his people's material and financial priorities that he expects his people to put the good of the poor above their own personal maximum profits?

Deuteronomy 24.¹⁴⁻¹⁵— just scripture

¹⁴Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: ¹⁵at his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be sin unto thee.

Questionary

1. There is, of course, an important and essential historical and “literal” reading to this text.
? But, what general principles can be drawn from the historical reading and applied to modern life?
 2. Take a few moments to consider and wrote up a general principle and modern application that can be drawn from this text.
? What do you think is meant by the observation that the poor “setteth their hearts upon their hire”?
 3. The poor “depend upon a just wage” and the faithful and timely disbursement of such funds. God expects employers to provide such just wages in a timely fashion so that the poor do not find themselves in even temporary want. Just wages allow workers to live secure and dignified lives. In our day, this would be called, perhaps, not a “minimum wage,” but a “living wage.”
? How is our society doing in this important aspect of “following God’s commandments”?
 4. On the “just reporting page of this site, the reader can find a story entitled, “Rigged: Forced into Debt, Worked to Exhaustion, Left with Nothing” (17 June 2017).
? How would this story be different if the Lord’s counsel found in Deuteronomy 24.¹⁴⁻¹⁵ were observed by the companies in question?
 5. Immigration has been for some time been a hot topic. Many immigrants, including those who come illegally, are often hired by U.S. businesses to work, often, “low wage jobs.”
? Would today’s passage have anything to say to U.S. businesses and business men/women?
 6. There is simply no doubt that the Lord hears the complaint of those poor, whose employers do not provide such just wages. There is simply no doubt that “it be sin unto” such employers. Neither is there any doubt that “it be sin unto” a government, its elected officials, and an electorate that votes officials into office that do not legislate for such just wages. Finally, and most shameful of all, there is no doubt that “it be sin unto” a supposed Christianity that does not loudly and incessantly agitate for such just wages.
? What responsibility do you have for seeing, and what can you do to see that U.S. businesses treat wage workers consistent with divinely inspired counsel?
- ? The Lord’s law has very specific directions concerning how a wage earner is to be treated by his or her employer. How well is your society keeping these directions?
- ? What responsibility do you have to safeguard the interests of the wage earner in your society?
- ? Are you acting and advocating for the observance of Biblical stipulations concerning treatment of wage earners?

2 Samuel 21.¹⁻¹⁴

¹Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David inquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, “It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.”

²And the king called the Gibeonites, and said unto them; (now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; and the children of Israel had sworn unto them: and Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah.) ³Wherefore David said unto the Gibeonites, “What shall I do for you? And wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the Lord?”

⁴And the Gibeonites said unto him, “We will have no silver nor gold of Saul, nor of his house; neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel.” And he said, “What ye shall say, that will I do for you.”

⁵And they answered the king, “The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel, ⁶let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul, whom the Lord did choose.”

And the king said, “I will give them.”

⁷But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the Lord’s oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. ⁸But the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bare unto Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite: ⁹and he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before the Lord: and they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest.

¹⁰And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night. ¹¹And it was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done.

¹²And David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabesh-gilead, which had stolen them from the street of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them, when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa: ¹³and he brought up from thence the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son; and they gathered the bones of them that were hanged.

¹⁴And after that God was entreated for the land.

Questionary

This text is a strange one and abounds with difficulties. Nevertheless, it is part of scripture and so cannot, must not be ignored because, for all its strangeness, there is much we can learn from it. Above all, it can provide keys to how one reads scripture more generally.

1. We are informed that after three years of famine, David asked the Lord about the cause of the famine.
 - ? How do you feel about David’s question? What sort of answer was he looking for?
 - ? How do you feel about the fact that David seemed to be looking for human conduct to explain the drought?
 - ? How do *you* explain weather and climate events—rain, hot weather, cold fronts, dry spells, natural catastrophes, etc.?
 - ? Do you ask God for explanations of weather and climate events, expecting human behavior to be part of the explanation? Why do you or do you not ask such questions with such expectations?
2. David is answered that “It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.” The Bible does not record this event from the reign of Saul. But we can say this: Saul reigned

from around 1050 to 1010 BC. David reigned from around 1010 to 970 BC. So, based on the fact that the final redactor of the book would have us believe that the famine and David's desire to know the cause of it came toward the end of his reign, we can say that some 25 to 35 years lapsed between Saul's sinful massacre of Gibeonites and the punishment of famine.

- ? How do you feel, in the first place, about God using a natural disaster to punish sin... any sin?
 - ? Do you believe he does so? Why or why not?
 - ? How do you feel about God waiting for a generation, and until the guilty party is long gone, before leveling punishment?
 - ? How would you feel about God, Himself, and about you being punished for something you didn't do, but that someone else did, say, 30 or 40 years ago did?
 - ? How do you feel about innocent people paying for the guilt of others?
3. Without objection from David, the Gibeonites plan and then fulfil their desire to have the seven victims hung "unto the Lord" or "before the Lord."
- ? What does this "unto the Lord" and "before the Lord" mean to you?
 - ? Do you believe that these deaths were, in fact, the Lord's will? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What do you see in your mind, when you contemplate the seven bodies hanging from a tree at the end of a top as an exhibit to God?
 - ? How do you feel about a theory of atonement that has innocent people pay for the sins of the guilty?
 - ? How is a theory of atonement that has an innocent Jesus paying for the guilt of others more rational or reasonable or acceptable or godly than what we are reading in today's reading? (this is not meant as a denial of Jesus' atonement but as a question about one of the common theories of his atonement... there are other theories.)

2kings 3.²⁴⁻²⁷— just scripture

²⁴And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them: but they went forward smiting the Moabites, even in their country. ²⁵And they beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it; and they stopped all the wells of water, and felled all the good trees: only in Kir-haraseth left they the stones thereof; howbeit the slingers went about it, and smote it. ²⁶And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through even unto the king of Edom: but they could not. ²⁷Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there was great indignation against [anxiety in] Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to their own land.

Qquestionary

- ? Why do you feel that the Israelites, who supposedly did not believe that Moab's god, Kemosh, was really a god, became anxious after witnessing the king's human sacrifice and abandoned their war against Moab?
- ? How do you feel about the fact that whatever Israel or you think about Moab's god and the unacceptable nature of human sacrifice, the human sacrifice achieved its purpose?
- ? This story suggests that even if there is no god—assuming Chemosh is not really a god—human sacrifice can take place and achieve its ends?
- ? What forms of human sacrifice are taking place in American culture today—remember, one need not have an actual god present for there to be human sacrifice that achieves its ends?

Ecclesiastes 4.⁴— just scripture

And I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person's envy of another. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Questionary

- ? It seems that many of those who have classically spoken and written on the subject of capitalism agree with the “preacher’s” sentiments that envy is the greatest motivator for acquisition and material gain. How do you feel and what do you think when you contemplate this assertion?
- ? How free are you from envy?

Ecclesiastes 5.^{10, 13}— just scripture

¹⁰Whoever loves money never has enough;
whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income....

¹³I have seen a grievous evil under the sun:
wealth hoarded to the harm of its owners... (NIV)

Questionary

- ? What does it mean to “hoard” wealth? What is it about “hording wealth” that makes it such a “grievous evil”?
- ? When does one have “enough”?