



*"...The heart of the sons of men
is full of evil,
and madness is in their heart
while they live..."
(Ecclesiastes 9.3)*

*Wherewith shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before the high God?
He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good;
and what doth the LORD require of thee,
but to do justly, and to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with thy God?
(Micah 6.6,8)*

the righteousness of being woke:
resisting the un-biblical anti-woke heresy

part 3

deuteronomy 6.²⁰⁻²³

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.

Introduction

In our first two homilies in this series entitled, "The Righteousness of Being Woke: Resisting the Un-biblical Anti-woke Heresy," we have strongly asserted and attempted to demonstrate that in calling Israel as His servant to the world, God called Israel to woke remembrance of the oppression it suffered at the hands of the Egyptians and of the emancipation from that oppression Yahweh accomplished.¹ God issued this call to woke remembrance even before He had accomplished his emancipation. In the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Israel was to every year dedicate several weeks to woke remembrance of its oppression and emancipation. As part of this feast, Israel was to celebrate the ordinance of Passover. This feast and ordinance, along with their remembrances, were to extend into perpetuity—"for ever."

On its very face, it would be nonsensical to maintain that Israel was to make remembrance of God's emancipation, not the Egyptian oppression from which Israel was emancipated. To remember one without the other would be like discussing one's rescue from a burning house

¹ The two preceding homilies examined the subject in light of Deuteronomy 4.⁹ and Exodus 13.³⁻¹⁰. The final homily will examine it in light of Luke 22.¹⁹⁻²⁰.

without ever remembering or mentioning the fact that the house was in flames. If one is rescued, they are rescued *from* something. That something from which one is rescued is an integral part of the story and is remembered and discussed right alongside any remembrance and discussion of the rescue. The two—Israel’s oppression under Egyptian tyranny and its emancipation through the outstretched arm of God—go together, hand in glove.

But we need not rely alone on simple, *prima facie* logic to understand that God demanded that Israel remember its oppression along with its emancipation. Nearly everything that God asked of Israel, nearly every commandment that he gave them, had as its acknowledged preamble the injustice, the violence, and the oppression that the nation had experienced in Egypt. Here, we offer a few examples of the woke remembrance that was at the very heart of Israel’s relationship with God and, indeed, influenced every human relationship.

Before doing so, however, we wish to remind the reader that in exploring Israel’s call to woke remembrance, we do more than examine history or explore ancient Israelite religion and modern Bible theology. We are attempting to address real and present issues facing America as it contemplates its future and what kind of nation it will be. America has always prided itself as a “city on a hill,” an example to the world, a nation beloved of God. If America truly wishes to be a nation that God honors and sustains, it must follow Israel’s example of woke remembrance. It was the apostle Paul who, reviewing the history of ancient Israel, reminded early Christians of scripture’s value and pertinence to life.

“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”²

America must accept the divine call to the same woke remembrance of injustice, violence, and oppression that Israel received. America’s called to woke remembrance, however, is not that of a past nation and the oppression it suffered, but of the injustices, violence, and oppression that it, itself, has committed against vulnerable populations (we are focusing on this series of homilies on America’s oppression of African-Americans, but remembrance and

² 1 Corinthians 10.¹¹

its attendant repentance of oppression toward other populations are also needed and necessary if our national future is to be secure and enduring).

Woke remembrance: foundational to divine stipulations—debt cancellation

We have discussed elsewhere in both meditation and homily the remarkable demand God made of Israel to engage in compassionate and dedicated service to the poor, including the use of periodic debt relief and debt cancellation measures utilized to address poverty and check aristocratic abuse, influence, and power (the fact that loans were to be granted interest free has been taken up elsewhere as well).

“At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And 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.”³

God is not stupid. He knows the heart of humankind and how difficult this could be. Indeed, my own conversations with economist and non-economist friends alike have served as proof of the difficulty of this stipulation and the hollowness of arguments against such policies. So, having given the stipulation, God issued this warning.

“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

³Deuteronomy 15.¹⁻². We will gladly stipulate that debt was likely not utilized and viewed the same in ancient Israelite society as it is in today’s modern western society. Nevertheless, we maintain that principles can be drawn from the ancient stipulations that can be applied to modern society. We have discussed these principles elsewhere.

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.’”⁴

In the same breath that God issued this stipulation concerning the willing and periodic cancellation of debt, he issued a stipulation concerning the cancellation/ release of slavery. Putting the two together in such tight literary association demonstrates, it seems to me, how closely God associates debt with slavery.

“And 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. And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: thou 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.”⁵

Having issued these two stipulations back-to-back, God then issued this reminder.

“And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee...” (Dt. 15.¹⁵).

Then, we have this important conclusion: “*therefore* I command thee this thing to day.”⁶

We must note that “this thing” refers to the two related stipulations concerning the cancellation of debt and slavery that were to take place every seven years. The conjunction, “therefore,” identifies the reason or purpose for the stipulations. “For this reason, because of this, I command thee this thing.” Israel was commanded to cancel debt and slavery because of their experience of servitude in Egypt. They knew what it was like to be under the thumb

⁴ Deuteronomy 15.⁵⁻¹¹

⁵ Deuteronomy 15:¹²⁻¹⁴

⁶ Deuteronomy 15.¹⁵

of an oppressor. They knew how painful and gulling and stressful injustice, violence, and oppression was. They were to remember their oppression and never, ever, do anything that might cause another human being to feel under their power what Israel felt under Egyptian power.

Thus, we see, as we have repeated several times in these homilies, that Israel's call to woke remembrance was less about the past, less about history, and more about the present and the future. Israel's woke remembrance served to end the errors of the past and create a happier, freer, more just present and future.⁷ The Lord's stipulations served to keep Israel from becoming Egyptian-like in its actions and impact on others—citizens and noncitizens alike.

Woke remembrance: foundational to divine stipulations—treatment of resident aliens

We find another example of woke remembrance as a means of controlling and directing private behavior and public policy in its stipulation concerning the treatment of resident aliens.

“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.”⁸

Israel knew what it was like to be a resident alien in a foreign country. The oppressiveness of its sojourn in Egypt remained at the heart of their national memory. Israel knew from personal and national experience how vulnerable such individuals and populations were. Indeed, the Psalmist spoke eloquently of the challenge of being made to feel unwelcomed and unwanted and of not belonging in a foreign land.

⁷ One can hope that those who today spout anti-woke heresies do not, themselves understand this present and future-looking aspect of “woke” remembrance. For, if they do understand it, then we must conclude that they use their anti-woke heresy to slyly justify and maintain in the present and into the future forms of oppression—similar to or even worse than those of the past.

⁸ Leviticus 19.³³⁻³⁴

I was in despair because I lived, an alien, in Mešek;
I lived a transient life in Qêdâr.
Many a year did I live
among them who distained peaceful coexistence—
though I spoke up for camaraderie,
they remained antagonistic.”⁹

Israel was to remember such feelings and the wrongs suffered as they lived as resident aliens in Egypt. The nation’s woke remembrance of their own vulnerabilities in Egypt (and elsewhere) were intended to keep them from doing to resident aliens living among them as they had had done to them in Egypt. Once more, we see the importance of woke remembrance. We see that woke remembrance was as much about the present and the future as it was about the past. It was a mechanism God used to keep the nation moral and ethical in its treatment of others.

Woke remembrance: foundational to divine stipulations—the sabbath

Many might see Israel’s over three thousand years of sabbath day observance and find in it the ultimate sign of the nation’s intense and enduring faithfulness to God. Here is the well-known stipulation as found in Deuteronomy.

“Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: but 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.”¹⁰

⁹ Psalm 120.⁵⁻⁷

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 5.¹²⁻¹⁴

And then this (unfortunately) lesser-known follow-up.

*“And 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.”*¹¹

We have highlighted two very important phrases. First, in keeping the sabbath day, Israel was to remember its servitude in Egypt. Why? What was the relationship between their past Egyptian oppression and their present and persistent observance of the sabbath? Second, it is precisely because of Israel’s servitude in Egypt and the Lord’s emancipation from that servitude, that “the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.”¹²

The command to keep the sabbath day was, therefore, one of the Lord’s ways of putting a stop to injustice, violence, and oppression. Israel knew what it felt like to be a slave, a laborer who was required to work, and work, and work without respite—“the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: and they made their lives bitter with hard bondage.”¹³ Israelites were never to treat those who worked in their midst the same. Those who served and worked for and among them—children, servants, even animals!—were, unlike them when they were in Egypt, to always be treated humanely. Those who labored were to be given time off to rest—a benefit the Egyptians never afforded Israel in its servitude. While the commandment to keep the sabbath day holy served many private and public purposes, one of its most important purposes was to keep Israel from becoming Egypt in its treatment of those who labor.

“But,” one might complain, “you have said nothing about keeping the sabbath day out of gratitude to God for his emancipation, for his having “brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm. That too was part of the remembrance.”

¹¹ Deuteronomy 5.¹⁵

¹² While exodus can lead us to think of the sabbath rest in terms of God’s rest after creation, Deuteronomy suggests that the stipulation is much more earthy and far more influential.

¹³ Exodus 1.¹³⁻¹⁴

Indeed. We should say a word or two about this part of Israel’s woke remembrance. The remembrance of God’s emancipation was, again, about more than remembering a past event and the grace found in it. This remembrance was God’s attempt, again, to shape the present and the future. What should happen when one remembered “that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm”? Thankfulness toward God, certainly. But that was but the beginning of what the Lord hoped would flow from the remembrance.

God hoped that in remembering his emancipation, the one remembering would remember how good it felt to be emancipated. They would remember the freedom and joy and comfort that accompany emancipation. And they would wish everyone to experience the same thing. This was Alma the younger’s response to his own emancipation from the pain of sin.

“Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing... that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste.”¹⁴

So too, was it Enos’s response to his emancipation from sin.

“When I had heard these words I began to feel a desire for the welfare of my brethren...”¹⁵

Now, this, truly, is the spirit of sabbath rest! Everyone wishes and deserves to feel God’s emancipation—whether it is from personal sin or national oppression. The sabbath day observer, then, will wish to conduct his or her life in such a manner as to contribute to the emancipation of all those within his or her power to influence and effect. The greatest expression of appreciation for God’s emancipation are the prayers we offer and the labor we perform to help others experience God’s emancipation in their own lives. Yes, the stipulation to keep the sabbath day holy is a call to become an emancipator. Its goal is a more just society.

¹⁴ Alma 36.²⁴

¹⁵ Enos 1.⁹

It is with deep sadness that we observe how many think of the sabbath purely in terms of the (spiritual) benefits that accrue to themselves for their observance. This self-centeredness is, itself, contrary to the spirit of the Divine stipulation—a stipulation that puts the needs and desires of the less fortunate at the forefront of one’s sabbath day observances.

What mean the testimonies? ...we were pharaoh’s bondmen

There are many other examples that highlight the tight connection that exists between God’s stipulations and Israel’s experience of oppression in Egypt. Israel’s experience of oppression in Egypt was to be remembered and was to influence nearly every human relationship. God gave stipulations concerning how a lender was to use the “pledge” that the poor offered as collateral for a loan.¹⁶ He gave stipulations about the pay of “hired servants. “Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy... Thou shalt give him his hire.”¹⁷ God stipulated that his people not “pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless,” and not “take a widow’s raiment to pledge.”¹⁸ All these and many others came with the reminder,

“But thou shalt remember that thou was a bondman in Egypt and the LORD thy God redeemed thee thence; therefore I command thee to do this thing.”¹⁹

Each of these stipulations might occasion their own homily or meditation—both about the behavior itself and its application to modern society. But, we will conclude this homily with the passage that heads it.

“And 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?” Then

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 24.¹⁰⁻¹³

¹⁷ See Deuteronomy 24.¹⁴⁻¹⁵

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 24.¹⁷

¹⁹ See Deuteronomy 24.¹⁸

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: and the Lord shewed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes: and he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he swore unto our fathers.

The Israelite—ancient and modern—is asked to consider his child’s question, “What are all God’s commandments, ordinances, and stipulation about? Why do we observe them?” The caring and inspired parent is to answer, first, “We were Pharaoh’s bondmen in Egypt.”

Yes, the parent goes on to remind the child of the wonders God performed in emancipating Israel from the injustice and violence of its oppressive slavery. This is certainly part of the remembrance that God desires and commands. But the preamble to the emancipation is the oppression, and this must be remembered, no matter how much the remembrance gulls the mighty oppressor who prefers the slumber of forgetfulness to the wakefulness of remembrance or the liveliness of repentance and reform. It is the woke remembrance of past and present injustice, violence, and oppression and God’s emancipation from such wrongs that drives the desire and increases the ability to live as God directs, thus creating more just individuals and a more just society.

Conclusion

God called Israel to woke remembrance of its oppression in Egypt and God’s powerful outreach to it in the form of emancipation from that very oppression. The remembrance was the foundation upon which its loyalty and discipleship to God was based—both individual and societal. It was foundational to the sort of individuals and society the future would produce. The woke remembrance was to be continual and ongoing, even eternal.

If America has any hope of being what its mythology claims it to be, then Americans, and most especially Americans who think of themselves as biblical and Christian, must apply and accept for themselves the call to woke remembrance of oppression. They must call upon

others to join them. Sadly, all too often, America has acted the part of oppressor. This is particularly so in regard to its treatment of African-Americans. But like Egypt that hardened its heart against acknowledgement and remembrance and repentance, millions of Americans refuse to remember themselves or countenance those who follow God's call to woke remembrance and its attending meaningful repentance.

It is a great irony, and tragedy, that too many of those millions who rail most against the woke remembrance of America's oppression of African Americans often claim the name "Christian." They often think of themselves as some kind of new Israel. Supposedly, then, they know their Bible and the calls that God issued to his people in it. Their call for slumber rather than wakefulness, then, is unbiblical. Their slumber of forgetfulness is an act of heresy and apostasy against God's call to woke remembrance and repentance and advancement. Their damning slumber is, as we have pronounced before, the very sleep of hell.

"O that ye would awake; awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe. Awake!"²⁰

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

²⁰ 2 Nephi 1:13-14