

Lecture 11

JACOB AND THE ANGEL: STRUGGLE AND EMBRACE. ISRAEL AS THE ESSENCE THAT SEES GOD

We already discussed how Jacob worked for seven years, pasturing Laban's flock, since this was the only ransom he could give for his beloved, Rachel, for, as we know, Jacob had left his father's house without a thing. We also considered how Laban showed his deceitfulness by giving to Jacob Leah in place of Rachel, and how Jacob therefore had to work another seven years. Six more years Jacob served for his wages – a part of Laban's flock. These twenty years that Jacob spent in the foreign land have made for his inner growth, his spiritual ascent. The ladder, which Jacob had seen in the beginning of his journey to Mesopotamia, pointed to the spiritual ascension that awaited him in Laban's house.

We also mentioned that Jacob's children born of his two wives and two concubines stand for the steps of this spiritual ascension. After Rachel, formerly barren, had borne Jacob a son, Joseph, God told Jacob: "Now leave this land at once and return to the land of your birth" (Gen 31:13). For with Joseph's birth (whose name means "he adds," "he multiplies"), i.e. with entering the stage of constant multiplication of the fruits of the spirit, the earthly way of a spiritual person comes to an end: he should return to his heavenly homeland of which the Holy Land is an archetype.

Now Jacob takes his wives and children and secretly flees Laban, realizing that he will try to hold him back so that the blessing, which has been descending on him through Jacob, may not leave. Laban lived by this blessing, for it was only through Jacob that Laban's flock multiplied and his household increasingly prospered.

Laban pursues Jacob; he is ready to overtake him and to take vengeance for his sudden escape; for Laban, who personifies the opposite spiritual nature, inwardly hates Jacob, although the blessing has been descending on him through Jacob. Laban wishes to keep appropriating Jacob's spiritual strength and for this sake he desires to hold him captive. Jacob in his turn longs to become free, to flee to God's land that has been promised to him and his descendants. However, Laban, who has almost overtaken Jacob, has a wonderful dream by night:

But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night, and said to him, "Take heed that you say not a word to Jacob, either good or bad." (*Gen 31:24*)

Laban probably has never before met God – neither in dream nor in reality. Now for the first time the Lord appeared to him in order to give him a warning: “...say not a word to Jacob, either good or bad.” Can Laban, who personifies here evil nature, sincerely say anything good? Therefore, God forbids Laban to address Jacob with any words. When Laban overtakes Jacob and accuses him, that he left without saying a word and carried away his daughters and grandchildren like captives, he says the following:

It is in my power to do you harm; but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, ‘Take heed that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.’ (*Gen 31:29*)

Even after God’s appearance to him Laban does not repent and says: “It is in my power to do you (pl) harm...” Whom does “you” mean? His own daughters and grandchildren and his son-in-law Jacob. “...But the God of your father spoke to me last night,” goes on Laban. He does not recognize God as his God, he does not want to serve him and calls him “the God of your father.” Nevertheless, he is scared and does not have the courage to do Jacob any harm.

Thus, Jacob escapes great danger. Now he is a free man, the prince of the entire clan, the head of a big family, and the owner of huge flocks (it may be observed in passing that everything in the Bible has a symbolic meaning, and that material riches belonging to a righteous person quite often stand for spiritual riches).

When Jacob set out for Mesopotamia, fleeing his brother, has addressed God in his prayer and made a vow unto him:

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God’s house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one tenth to you.” (*Gen 28:20–22*)

Thus, he took an oath to serve God if God protects his life and gives him bread and clothing. However, we see that God gave Jacob much more. The darkness of fears and anxieties which came over him when he was leaving his father’s house, now has turned into the light of joy and hope as the psalm says:

They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright... (*Ps 112:4*)

The righteous clearly see that darkness turns into light in their way; their sufferings lead to joy, and things that formerly appeared to be evil bring deliverance:

I will turn the darkness before them into light... (*Isa 42:16*)

When Jacob crossed Jordan with only his staff, even then the Lord was his light. God appeared to Jacob a number of times, edifying him and giving him great promises. Now Jacob returns and sees that deep darkness

has turned into the clear morning (*Am 5:8*). In his life the saying of the prophet Micah comes true:

...When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. (*Mic 7:8*)

Even deep darkness becomes light for the faithful of God, and their sufferings and trials turn into the source of never-ending joy.

Jacob constantly feels that God helps him. However, an extraordinary trial still lies ahead of him, a very unusual fight still awaits him. In Chapter 32 of the Book of Genesis we find the description of Jacob’s struggle with an angel, which became one of the most famous Old Testament plots and is reflected in many works of art. In this connection, a reasonable question arises: how can man struggle with an angel, or, as some commentators put it, “struggle with God”?

Chapter 32 starts with the following words:

Jacob went on his way and the angels of God met him. (*Gen 32:1*)

These words have a special meaning. If anybody goes on his way, then guarding and directing angels of God will meet him. However, unfortunately, we frequently choose others’ ways, realizing neither our true vocation, nor the road that has been determined for us by the Most High — we go on these ways, being led by evil powers and deceptive intentions...

The Bible in general speaks a lot about the way of each person. For example, the psalmist pleads with God:

See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (*Ps 139:24*)

The way of a person can be dangerous even if he is not aware of it. This is what the Book of Job says about such dangerous ways:

The caravans turn aside from their course; they go up into the waste, and perish. (*Job 6:18*)

As soon as someone “turns aside from” the commandments, from God’s way, he finds himself in the “waste,” where there is no water — the Lord’s living word, no help from above, where people “perish” spiritually and physically. Therefore, the psalmist calls us to choose the right way:

“...To those who go the right way I will show the salvation of God.” (*Ps 50:23*)

Certain people assume that it is enough for someone to believe in God, to admit his existence mentally, in order to be saved. However, this is not so: God demands that we go on his ways. In the Bible the way of a righteous person and God’s ways are identified. The psalmist says:

I run the way of your commandments, for you enlarge my understanding. (*Ps 119:32*)

Human understanding is very “narrow,” it embraces only a very small part of existence. Only God is able to “enlarge” our understanding, so that the spiritual sense of the commandments may be reflected in our consciousness. On page ... we already mentioned mysterious words of King Solomon, that God has put the whole world into man’s heart (Eccl 3:11). The universe created by God has been entirely put into Adam’s heart. However, to realize this fact our understanding should “be enlarged,” and then it will become conscious of its great role, which consists in being the storehouse of the whole universe. Having grasped this role a person will never more oppose to his calling; he will submit himself to God’s will: “I run the way of your commandments, for you enlarge my understanding.”

This is exactly what happened to Jacob: his ways became God’s ways. It was not in vain that he had to spend twenty years at Laban’s house: during this time he experienced great spiritual changes. He acquired the ability to see and to hear the spiritual world; he “clung to” God; he began to exalt him and to tremble before God’s judgments, to fight with the evil inside and outside him. He became a virtuous and joyous man, receiving award from above, a living Temple, a dwelling-place for God’s Spirit. Finally, he started bearing varied spiritual fruits... All this, as we have seen, is symbolically reflected in the names of his sons.

Now he is again on the threshold of the land of Canaan — the Promised Land. “Jacob went on his way...” In order to enter his way everyone should experience a spiritual transformation and find himself. The prophets call us: “call them to mind,” “ponder it” (Deut 30:1, Ps 4:4 etc.). The best way for us is the way of uniting with the Lord and doing his will. Jesus Christ exhorted people:

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (*Mt 5:48*)

As long as we do not aspire the perfection of love, we are on someone else’s way — that is why we do not see angels. Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.

When Jacob saw them he said, “This is God’s camp!” So he called that place Mahanaim. (*Gen 32:2*)

The name מחניִים *ḥMacha`nayim* is a dual number of מחנה *ḥMacha`neh* — “encampment,” “camp,” that is, “two camps.” This is a place where “human camp” — Israel or Church — meets with “God’s camp,” i.e. with the angels glorifying the Creator. There men unite with the angels, giving praise to the Most High.

However, Jacob, who was glorifying God, now had to meet his brother Esau, who wished to kill him. Esau already knew about Jacob’s homecoming and waited for him. So Jacob sends his servants to inform Esau of his arrival:

“Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob...” (*Gen 32:4*)

Telling Esau that he has lived at Laban’s house, that he has gained some property and now is returning home, Jacob calls his brother “lord” and himself his “servant,” although the right of the firstborn has belonged to him for a long time. Is it only because of the fear of his brother’s revenge that he acts so? Certainly not. A spiritual person sees God’s image in every man, no matter to what extent this man could sink. For this reason he calls his fellowman “lord,” implying the higher essence of the person, which is created in God’s image, according to his likeness. He worships God, whose image is reflected, at least to a degree, in any person, even in the most degraded one.

Yes, to some extent Jacob is a servant (עֶבֶד *‘eved*); on this word see page...). The purpose of his service is to arouse the highest divine nature, staying in eclipse and oblivion, in every person with whom the Lord brings him together. In this sense, he is a “servant.” Jacob is a prototype of Jesus Christ, and as for Jesus, he said:

...Just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. (*Mt 20:28*)

Christ came to restore the trampled and darkened God’s image in everyone. Jacob says that he is Esau’s “servant,” for he is called to liberate Esau’s spiritual nature from the authority of evil powers.

Jacob ordered to tell Esau the above-mentioned words. After this the text says:

The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.” (*Gen 32:6*)

If a brother goes out to meet his brother, it is rather strange that he is accompanied by four hundred armed men. Jacob grasped Esau’s plan, for he was a prophet of God; he had God’s visions and heard the voice of the Most High. He knew that Abraham had been told from above:

...Your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years... (*Gen 15:13*)

Probably, Jacob saw in these four hundred people, who went to meet him together with Esau, the prototype of the four-century enslavement and oppression, predicted to Abraham. Indeed, Jacob did not yet know who exactly would become the oppressor of his children: perhaps, Esau and his descendants; and, perhaps, these four hundred soldiers, Esau’s servants, were the symbol of it? Therefore, Jacob makes every effort to appease his brother. First of all he addresses God for help:

And Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will do you good,’

I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan; and now I have become two companies.

Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I am afraid of him; he may come and kill us all, the mothers with the children. (*Gen 32:9–11*)

Then Jacob, hoping to calm down his brother's anger by presents, sends him a gift of 550 domestic animals:

...Two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams,
Thirty milch camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. (*Gen 32:14–15*)

Why did Jacob send exactly this number of domestic animals? The numerical value of the Hebrew verb תָּקַן *ta`kan* — “to straighten,” “to restore,” “to correct” — is precisely 550. Jacob tries “to correct” Esau's soul with the help of prayer and gifts, “to correct” that evil which produces enmity and hatred, and to restore brotherly relations with him.

Jacob spares no effort to meet Esau peacefully, to placate him. Now, a very unusual thing happens to him. Having sent his family across the stream, Jacob returns to the other side of the river, where he can be all by himself, obviously, for a prayer and meditation. When night fell,

Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.
When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.
Then he said, “Let me go, for the day is breaking.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go, unless you bless me.”
So he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.”
Then the man said, “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.”
Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there he blessed him.
So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.”
The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. (*Gen 32:24–31*)

It is a very unusual description, which is hard to understand at once. Who wrestled with Jacob? Some commentators state that it was God himself. However, can God struggle with any man and “not prevail against” him? Would God ask someone to let him go, “for the day is breaking”? In addition, the text does not say that it was God; it says “a man,” Heb. אִישׁ *eesh* — “a man,” “a male.” This term can denote not only people, but also angels. For example, the Book of the prophet Daniel says that Daniel saw an angel, who looked as “a man clothed in linen” (*Dan 10:5*). According to a legend, one of the categories of angels is called אֱשִׁימ *ee`shim* — literally, “men,” while the other categories are called cherubim, seraphim, ophanim etc.

What kind of an angel it was? Why did one of those angels, who were sent to the patriarchs for guidance, as we have seen before, begin to wrestle with Jacob all of a sudden? It was Esau's guardian angel, which did not want Jacob to enter the land of Canaan and to make use of the rights given

to him by his father. In the Book of Daniel we read that nations have their guardian angels; for example, Michael, the guardian of Israel, fought against the guardian angel of Persian kings (*Dan 10:13*). One of the angels describes the mentioned fight to Daniel:

“...Now I must return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I am through with him, the prince of Greece will come...” (*Dan 10:20*)

It appears that Greece, Persia, Israel and other nations have their angels, each of which is a protector of a particular nation. To this category of angels belonged the one who wrestled with Jacob — Esau's guardian. It is surprising that he failed to overcome Jacob. Jacob describes the situation this way: “I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.” Jacob always sought God's face; therefore, God helped him to do a supernatural thing — to overcome an angel by a prayerful effort. As for the angel, he admits Jacob's victory over him and says: “...you have striven with angels [or: “with spirits”] and with humans, and have prevailed.” This is a literal translation of the given verse. The word אֱלֹהִים *elo`him* means not only “God,” as in the beginning of the Book of Genesis, but also angels, the spiritual beings, having power and authority (cf. *1 Sam 28:13*, *Ps 82:6*). This word is the plural form of אֱלֹה *elo`ah*. In the story about Jacob's struggle the plural number is emphasized by the parallel use of the word אַנְשִׁים *ana`shim*, i.e. “men.”

The angel does not know Jacob's name and asks him: “What is your name?” God never asked Abraham or Moses what were their names; he himself gave new names to his servants, for example: “No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham...” (*Gen 17:5*). The angel did not know Jacob's name, for God had hidden this name from him, so that he might not do Jacob any harm. According to the most ancient views of the whole mankind, if a man knows someone's name, he has a certain power over him and can cause him harm. Having been defeated, the angel lost the opportunity to cause any evil, and Jacob tells him his name.

However, why does the angel say: “Let me go, for the day is breaking”? God, certainly, would not address a man in such a way: God is omnipotent! The point is that the angelic choruses should sing praises to the Most High at dawn. The Book of Job tells us that the angels “shout for joy” when “the morning stars” appear (i.e. before sunrise)

...When the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy... (*Job 38:7*)

Esau's guardian angel is afraid to be late for daybreak, he fears that he will not be in time for the song of praise; that is why he asks Jacob: “Let me go, for the day is breaking.” However, Jacob does not release him: “I will not let you go, unless you bless me,” i.e. unless you acknowledge my birthright, my right to the father's blessing and to the Holy Land. Then the angel names him “Israel” and explains it this way: “For you have striven with angels and with humans, and have prevailed.”

Had it been God and not the angel, the subsequent repeated blessing of Jacob with a change of his name would not have had sense. Indeed, when Jacob returned to the land of Canaan (Chapter 35), the following happened to him:

God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and he blessed him. God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall you be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So he was called Israel. (*Gen 35:9-10*)

It means that initially this name was given by the angel and only then by God, when he approved the angel's words. As for the angel, it was by God's will and not by chance that he called Jacob "Israel," having been defeated by him.

Now we shall put the following question. Surely, man cannot struggle with God, but can man struggle with an angel? We know that angels are exceptionally powerful. It is evident that the described situation occurred in a vision. It was not a physical fight, but an intense spiritual struggle, and Jacob was a winner. This struggle took place inside the forefather, in his spiritual world, for it is said: "Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak..."

"Jacob was left alone"... When a person is left alone, with whom else can he struggle in such a situation if not with himself? We remember that Esau is an external, carnal man, and Jacob is a spiritual man. Each of us has his "Esau" inside — a dangerous, vindictive, selfish and aggressive man, and has his "Jacob" — peaceful, "living in tents," heeding God's word. It is clear that two of them begin to struggle. How can "Jacob" overcome "Esau" in this struggle? First, he needs to overcome "Esau's guardian angel," i.e. to block up the internal source of evil intentions. Such source is bitter selfishness, which produces envy and hatred to the neighbor and the stranger alike. It is necessary to overcome Esau spiritually — only after that peace will be established in the person.

After Jacob's victory over the angel the two brothers meet and part peacefully: they do not hinder each other any more — everyone goes on his own way. For there is enough place in the land for both Jacob and Esau. There was a spiritual reason for what Esau was going to do — to oppose Jacob, to murder him, to exterminate or to take captive his children and wives. Not the land, but the birthright, the election and the blessing were the subject of their controversy. One of the first religious wars, the war between Jacob and Esau, was about to break out, for both of them pretended to the birthright. As we remember, the first murder on earth was also caused by religious motives. Having defeated "Esau" in himself, having defeated his angel, Jacob later gained an external victory as well; for the one who overcomes angels will overcome people too. The one who gains a spiritual victory in the same way wins at the external level. Thus, everything that is described here takes place inside a person and is a great exhortation for us.

When Jacob meets Esau, their meeting is very different from what he has expected: all his fears and anxieties miraculously vanish. It is a meeting

of two brothers, not two enemies. For "Esau," the animal nature of a person, being left without its destructive aggressiveness and malice, becomes peaceful and safe; it does not threaten "Jacob," the spiritual nature, any more.

Jacob led his children and wives to meet Esau.

He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother. But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. (*Gen 33:3-4*)

All Esau's rage disappeared, because the angel supporting him had been defeated earlier. The angel was compelled to bless Jacob, and therefore, later Esau blesses Jacob as well. This highly egotistic, carnal person, who tries to struggle with our spiritual nature, is not dangerous if his "angel" has been already defeated in us. In this case, the carnal person does not fight with the spiritual one; it simply performs its function, because flesh and its animal powers are necessary for our earthly life. But woe unto us if this "Esau" pretends to the birthright — it should belong to "Jacob," i.e. to the human spirit.

Now it becomes clear why Jacob addresses his brother, with whom he has just reconciled, with such words:

...If I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand... (*Gen 33:10*)

The spiritual man has something that he can give to the carnal man, for the great joy of spiritual life and the delight of abiding with God affect everything that constitutes a man, as David says:

Then my soul shall rejoice in the Lord, exulting in his deliverance. All my bones shall say, "O Lord, who is like you? You deliver the weak from those too strong for them, the weak and needy from those who despoil them." (*Ps 35:9-10*)

The soul, the interior and even the bones of a righteous person — everything rejoices together with his spirit. Thus, "the interior person" has something that he can offer to "the external person."

...Accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God — since you have received me with such favor. (*Gen 33:10*)

Here the original text uses the same word אלהים *elo`him* in the sense of "angel": "...like seeing the face of an angel..." In other words: "When we met I saw that your face was joyful, for I had seen earlier the face of your angel and had defeated him." For now Jacob realized with whom he had wrestled and what was the reason of a change in his relations with his brother. Having overcome the angel, he asked him: "What is your name?" We remember that the angel did not reveal his name to Jacob. Now, having met his brother (we should not forget that more than twenty years have

passed, and that Esau has changed very much), Jacob sees his features and understands with whom he wrestled: “...I saw your face like a vision of the face of an angel, and you received me with such favor...” — this translation is closer to the original. According to a legend, the guardian angel of a person has a similar appearance with him. That is why the past tense is used: “...you received me with such favor...”

Thus, Jacob acquires a new name — Israel, one of the most important names in the Bible. We shall consider the prototypical meaning of this name at several levels.

The name ישראל *Yisra`el*, Israel, is made up of two words: שרה *sa`rah* — “to struggle,” “to fight” (the form ישרה *yis`rah* means “[he] will fight”) and אל *El* — “God.” Israel is “God’s warrior,” the one who defeats, with God’s help, both the guardian angels of evil powers and people subjected to them.

Another meaning of the verb שרה *sa`rah* is “to reign,” therefore, Israel is also “God’s prince.” As early as the time of Abraham the Hittites told the patriarch: “...you are a mighty prince among us...” (Gen 23:6). Israel is the one that is called to proclaim God’s name to the nations, i.e. to reign on behalf of God, not physically, but spiritually, establishing the authority of the Most High. At the same time, the word יש *yesh* means “essence,” “life,” and the word שר *shar* means “singing.” Israel is “the essence singing praises to God.” In addition, the third and the fourth letters of the name ישראל *Yisra`el*, ר *reysh* and א *aleph*, also point to the verb ראה *ra`ah* — “to see.”

Putting together all the above listed meanings, we get: “the essence that fights, reigns, sings, sees God” — this is what Israel represents in a spiritual sense.

However, there is one more meaning of the given name: ישר *ya`shar* means “upright,” “righteous one.” Israel is “the righteous one of God.” It is also possible to translate otherwise: “God is righteous.” God shows his righteousness in the story of Jacob-Israel and his descendants, for in the Jewish history God fulfills his great promises most visibly, carries out his greatest prophecies. Actually, the whole history of the people of Israel is fulfillment of God’s prophecies, vindication of his great name.

Everything that we have said about the meaning of the patriarch’s new name, applies also to the nation that descended from him. This nation is called to fight in the name of God for spreading Monotheism in the whole world; it is God’s “warrior.” It is through the Jewish nation that the whole mankind has heard the teaching about the one God. God himself is revealed through this nation; it led many spiritual fights for preservation, establishment and spreading of Monotheism. All the three monotheistic religions that are engaged in mighty battles against dark powers are linked with each other, and their source is in Israel.

The people of Israel, whether they are respected or humiliated, should rule over evil spiritually, should continually overcome themselves in order to observe God’s commandments. For this reason they are also called “God’s ruler,” “God’s prince.”

Further, this nation is “God’s singer”: let us recollect that the rich musical tradition of the ancient Jews, the heritage of the Levites singing in the Jerusalem Temple, became a basis of modern ecclesiastical chanting in both Eastern and Western Churches.

Finally, the highest calling of this nation is “to see God,” i.e. to discern spiritual things. There is a prediction in the Scripture concerning the age when all the sons of Israel will become prophets (Num 11:29, Ezek 39:28–29, Joel 2:27–28).

As we have already mentioned, in the history of the people of Israel God’s righteousness was revealed most visibly; for God is impartial: “...from everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required...” (Lk 12:48). It has been given much more to Israel than to others — God revealed himself to them. For this reason throughout several millennia it has been required much more from Israel, than from any other nation. On the same day when God declared his commandments to Israel, he told about the punishment for their violation (Ex 20:5). God warned the Israelites:

...You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. (*Am 3:2*)

The centuries-old physical and spiritual history of the people of Israel is predicted by King David in one of his psalms:

You have made us like sheep for slaughter, and have scattered us among the nations...

<...>

...You have made us the taunt of our neighbors, the derision and scorn of those around us.

You have made us a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples.

All day long my disgrace is before me, and shame has covered my face at the words of the taunters and revilers, at the sight of the enemy and the avenger.

All this has come upon us, yet we not forgotten you, or been false to your covenant.

Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way, yet you have broken us in the haunt of jackals, and covered us with deep darkness.

If we had forgotten the name of our God, or spread out our hands to a strange god, would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart.

Because of you we are being killed all day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter. (*Ps 44:11–23*)

This psalm clearly states that all the sufferings of the people of Israel in their dispersion where they are a byword, a laughing-stock, scorn and disgrace, where they are exterminated, destroyed, persecuted, being the object of slander and lies — all these sufferings promote the spiritual growth of the people, their purification, their growing in love, their return to God. The same was true of Jacob the forefather: severe sufferings only strengthened him on God’s way. The same happens with whole nations and with every believer individually. When sufferings befall us, we address God most sincerely, with our whole heart. This is the hidden meaning of that

darkness of sufferings and trials, which embraces the nations: when we address God, then gloom turns into light for us.

Everything that we have said about Israel applies to the Church as well. The words of the mentioned psalm also refer to the spiritual descendants of Israel — the saints and martyrs of the Church of Christ: "...Because of you we are being killed all day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter." The Church, as well as Jacob-Israel, is called to fight in the name of God. The Church is called to dominate spiritually as Jesus bequeathed to apostle Peter: "Feed my lambs." (John 21:15). The Church sings praises to God and glorifies him. In the Church the name of God is vindicated, his righteousness is proclaimed. The sense of the existence of the Church consists in leading people in the straight way of God. All these images are present in the name "Israel."

In the New Testament we find the following definitions of Israel: "Israel according to the flesh" (1 Cor 10:18, footnote) and "Israel of God" (Gal 6:16), i.e. Israel according to the spirit. For example, in the Book of Romans we read that the Church joins in the promises given to Israel. It is explained how Gentile believers are grafted in the stem of ancient Israel and are united with God's people:

If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; and if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy. (*Rom 11:16*)

Thus, if "the part of the dough offered as first fruits," the root of Israel, is holy, then the branches also are holy; the whole nation is holy unless it is separated from the "root," the source of its life, the Holy Spirit.

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches... (*Rom 11:17-18*)

Some of the branches "were broken off" from the "olive tree of Israel" because of their unbelief in God, in his promises; these branches have dried up and lie on the ground near the olive tree. In their place God grafted in Gentile believers, having taken them from the "wild olive" — Gentile teaching in which they had stayed formerly. They began "to share the rich root of the olive tree" of Israel, i.e. joined in the Word of God, in the Holy Spirit and in the promises which had been given to the ancient patriarchs.

...If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. (*Rom 11:18*)

God's Spirit revives all the branches of the olive tree, both the natural and the grafted ones, and all of them are nourished by the same sap.

You will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."

That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe.

For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you.

Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.

And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.

For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree. (*Rom 11:19-24*)

Therefore, God has promised to give those Israelites who stay in unbelief, who have fallen and have become hardened, the opportunity to repent, to return to God's way, to be grafted back into their own stem of faith in order to "share the rich root" of the spiritual family tree that goes back to the patriarchs of the Jewish people. Then the Kingdom of God in its fullness will triumph on the earth; then all the peoples of the world will constitute one people — the people of God.

However, there is one more profound prototypical sense of the name "Israel." Israel symbolizes the internal person. Everything that we have discussed until now concerned the external history — the history of the ancient Jews, of the Church, of all mankind. Yet, the name "Israel" has a meaning that relates personally to us, to our internal life. Let us reflect on the name "Israel" from this point of view.

"God is righteous," *יֵשׁוּר אֱלֹהִים* *ya'shar El*, — such is the meaning of the name "Israel" that is fulfilled in the life of every genuine believer. For the straight ways of God become the ways of a righteous person, and the Lord's predestinations are carried out in his life. If we consider the name *יִשְׂרָאֵל* *Yisra'el* once more, dividing it into several parts: "yesh sar/shar roeh El," i.e. "the essence that dominates, sings, sees God," we will see those steps of spiritual growth that our internal person should successively pass in order to reach a state which Jesus Christ described this way:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (*Mt 5:8*)

Indeed, "seeing," "beholding" God is the fourth and the last of the spiritual steps, incorporated in the name "Israel." The first step is identifying oneself as an immortal spiritual essence — "yesh." The second one is a state of "sar," when this spiritual essence submits to itself all the lowest powers of a human being. The third step is a state of "shar": incessant glorifying God and "singing praises" to him. Finally, the fourth step is a state of "roeh El": "seeing" God. However, can anyone see God? For in the Scripture we find the following words about the Most High:

...It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see... (*1 Tim 6:16*)

Thus, it is clearly said that no human being can see God. Nevertheless, let us recollect once more the words from the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (*Mt 5:8*). The Book of Exodus says that when Moses and the elders went up on Mount Sinai, "they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement

of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness” (Ex 24:10). In the Book of Isaiah there is a description of a following vision:

...I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. (*Isa 6:1*)

We read in the Bible that the patriarchs, Moses, the elders, the prophets, the apostles, the saints, the pure in heart saw God... At the same time, the evangelist John says:

No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known. (*John 1:18*)

The Lord said to Moses:

...You cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live. (*Ex 33:20*)

Many righteous people in the Old Testament, when God appeared to them, said:

“Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (*Isa 6:5*)

How should we understand all this? The answer is that when we read that one cannot see God and live, a person in a fallen condition is meant, the one who is external, carnal or unspiritual, the one who considers everything spiritual to be foolishness (1 Cor 2:14). Such person “cannot see God,” for if it happens, the divine Light, the purest Spirituality will blind, destroy, burn him. The same revelation of God’s Face, the same act of seeing God produces an opposite effect on the wicked and the righteous, on carnal and spiritual people:

See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and the evil-doers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.

But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. (*Mal 4:1-2*)

“The sun of righteousness is rising”: God reveals himself to people. All the arrogant and the evil-doers are burned up by this sun like stubble. As for the spiritual people who seek God and revere his name, they see the sun of righteousness and receive “healing in its wings.” That is why those people who were forbidden by God to go up the mountain during the great Sinaitic Theophany are symbolically likened to animals, for in these people animal powers that constitute a carnal person dominate over the power of the spirit:

You shall set limits for the people all around, saying, ‘Be careful not to go up the mountain or touch the edge of it. Any who touch the mountain shall be put to death.

No hand shall touch them, but they shall be stoned or shot with arrows; whether animal or human being, they shall not live.’ (*Ex 19:12-13*)

“Whether animal or human being...” Animal is mentioned first, then comes human being. The meaning is that people in whom the animal nature dominates over the human nature should not approach “the holy mountain.” Jesus Christ meant such people when he taught:

Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you. (*Mt 7:6*)

It is evident that Jesus did not mean dogs or swine but those people who have likened themselves to dogs and swine. Therefore, God said through Moses: “...whether animal or human being, they shall not live...” Thus, the warning concerns only those people who live like animals. When the person starts his spiritual ascension, he is permitted to go up “the holy mountain”; therefore, we are told that Moses and the elders went up on Mount Sinai and saw the God of Israel. They were the people who represented true, spiritual, Israel, i.e. “the essence that sees God.”

Concerning the needs of the animal nature of a person Jesus said: “...your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (*Mt 6:32-33*). If everyone starts to seek the kingdom of God inside and outside himself, if the whole people strive for the kingdom of God, then everything material will be also given to them. If a person or the people forget God and begin to seek only bread and clothes, then bread and clothes will be taken away from them. God gave people the following promise concerning his holy words:

When ... you call them to mind...

<...>

...Then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you... (*Deut 30:1-3*)

Owing to the Fall, each one of us lost these “fortunes” of being close to God, which he had possessed originally. These very “fortunes” are restored to us if we repent.

In order to restore these “fortunes” it is necessary to start seeking God with one’s whole heart. In the Old Testament the heart is believed to be a receptacle for thought, feelings, intentions, volition, desires and passions. To seek God with one’s whole heart means to seek him with all one’s thoughts and feelings, volition and desires... For example, David says:

With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments. (*Ps 119:10*)

The psalmist David is always as sincere as one can be: if he states that he seeks God with his whole heart, we trust him. There were not a few righteous persons in history, which sought the Most High with the whole heart:

...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. (*Deut 6:5*)

For that reason it is said: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God”; it is possible to “see with one’s heart” only when it is purified of everything that is not seeking God. People seek lots of things in their life: they seek saturation, satisfaction of their physical needs, various pleasures, delights, contentment, honor, glory... However, they are in effect spiritually dead until they start seeking God. This very essence which is implied by the word “yesh” in the name “Israel” and which is able to see God is identical with the internal person. Gradually, in the process of his spiritual growth, a person first ceases to identify himself with his body, then with his soul, i.e. with the sphere of feelings, will, desires etc. At a higher level he ceases to identify himself with his mind as well, with his knowledge, with his experience that he has gained during his earthly life. Finally, he “turns to his heart” — he starts to recognize himself as “yesh,” the immortal essence, the absolute “self” which longs for God as its source. Neither the strongest physical thirst, nor the strongest emotional desire of the person in this world can be compared to the thirst for God in its authoritativeness and might:

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.
(Ps 42:1)

The deer longs and thirsts quite differently as compared with man. If man is tormented by thirst and suffers much, there is still his willpower, the opportunity to restrain, to control himself. We know various cases of heroism when people suffering from thirst in the waste, nevertheless had the power to go the whole way, to carry out their calling. But deer is an animal that is entirely submitted to its internal impulses. When the deer thirsts in the waste, it directs all its energy to the search for water; all its essence is seized with one desire — to slake its thirst. It appears that the spiritual longing can and should have similar force: “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Ps 42:2). It was in such a state that the forefather Jacob gained victory over the angel.

Thus, let us list once again the principal semantic layers present in the description of Jacob’s destiny. The literal sense of its events serves as a prototype, first, of the history of Jacob’s descendants, the Jewish people; second, of the Church history; and, last, of the history of the internal person, “the essence that sees God.” Without understanding this history of the human spirit, the first two semantic layers lose their meaning. For the Church history or the history of the people is impossible without the history of those individuals that constitute them. Before all those things that we have considered are carried out at the level of one people, the whole Church or the whole mankind, they should be fulfilled in the inner world of every individual person.

All biblical stories telling us about the ways of patriarchs, their wanderings, meetings, fights and reconciliations, describe our own inner world. In order to comprehend this truth in its entirety, it is necessary to get a grasp of each word. We frequently read the text inattentively, not paying attention to the biblical figures of speech, to the context, to the interrelation of various descriptions; and all these things have the inmost

meaning. In fact, the Bible is the code of both our common destiny and the life of each of us. Learning to read the Bible properly, we learn to read and to understand better what is written in the book of our own life, to grasp the things that happen to us day by day. For everything around us is just symbols, indications, images, and reflections of the supreme world. When we begin to understand these symbols, indications and images better, when we have the right attitude towards them, we enter the dialogue with our Lord, with the higher spiritual realm; then what it is written in the Epistle to the Hebrews comes true:

...But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels...
...And to the spirits of the righteous made perfect... (Heb 12:22-23)

It is obvious that we are not the first on this way — many people have passed it before us, starting with patriarchs. If we imitate them as far as possible, if we walk step by step on their earthly roads, we will gradually come to the same place where they came. Where are they now? We can judge about it from the words of Jesus Christ:

I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven... (Mt 8:11)

Thus, if we follow in the footsteps of the righteous patriarchs, we will enter this Kingdom after them...

Lecture 9

A NEIGHBOR AND A STRANGER. ENEMIES BECOME BROTHERS

We start reading Chapter 23 of the Book of Exodus. Unlike previous chapters, it begins not with juridical prescriptions, but with purely moral ones; a person breaking them is not brought before a court. The words of this chapter are addressed directly to one's conscience. Most likely, such sequence of prescriptions has certain logic: educational process usually starts with prohibitions and encouragements, and only later one is trained to follow moral precepts voluntarily. In this way the ethical consciousness of a child is being formed: first, the norms of decency and coexistence are being imposed on him (or her), and gradually he (or she) becomes a conscious follower and adherent of them. Likewise the Israelites, being prepared by initial precepts of God's Law to make ethically right choice, now receive instructions which promote the development of subtle ethical intuition, life governed by conscience, inner and not only external righteousness. A certain role in the process of transition from adopting the commandments to their fulfillment is ascribed to punishments coming from above:

The rod and reproof give wisdom... (*Prov 29:15*)

Wisdom comes to the people through punishments and rebukes, letting them see the fine line between appropriate and inappropriate things, between something that is permitted and something that is not.

The first verse of this chapter reads:

You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness. (*Ex 23:1*)

The words "you shall not spread" translate Hebrew *לֹא תִשָּׂא* *lo ti'sa*. It is forbidden to spread false (the word *שׁוֹא* *shav* means both "emptiness," "vanity" and "lie," "false allegation") rumors, as well as to assist "the wicked," to be more precise, "the evildoer" (*רָשָׁע* *ra'sha*), in his plans, talks and deeds. The words "to act as a malicious witness" render the Hebrew phrase *לִהְיוֹת עֵד חָמָס* *lig'yot ed cha'mas*, which literally means "being the witness of violence," that is being a silent bystander of someone's criminal acts. Thus God's Law requires from each person, first,

to impede spreading any kind of lies; second, to hinder evil acts, and third, not to stay indifferent when the rights of other people are being flouted, but to make every effort to prevent anything like that.

If the majority of people persistently obeyed just this triple precept of all God's Law, not a single social or personal misdeed would ever produce any widespread impact or have long-term consequences. Having just sprung out any evil would immediately fade away, getting no encouragement from people around and, more than that, facing proper counteraction on their part. This is true in our days as much as it was so in ancient times, and turns out to be even more topical, because in our age of advanced information technologies and hitherto unknown technical inventions any evil gets far more chances to get wide public recognition.

The next command of the Law reads as follows:

You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing; when you bear witness in a lawsuit, you shall not side with majority so as to pervert justice... (*Ex 23:2*)

These precepts, provided they are being carried out, become the most effective counteraction against any kind of totalitarianism, hinder its spreading. What enormous significance have they got in our age! All the most horrible events of the 20th century, including mass exterminations of people and entire nations, took place by tacit and sometimes boisterous approval of the multitude, when huge raving crowds could not conceal their joy. However, God's Law unequivocally forbids joining the majority in wicked acts, whatever reason underlies such decision — panic, misinterpreted patriotism, etc. The major tragedies of the 20th century would have been impossible if a significant number of people had kept no more than this very precept.

The following words gain particular significance in our previous context:

...Nor shall you be partial to the poor in a lawsuit. (*Ex 23:3*)

It seems that judges, on the contrary, tend to be prejudiced in favor of a rich person, who, at least, is able to give a bribe. But God's Law is such that one cannot add or take away anything from it (*Deut 4:2, 12:32*). In previous centuries, this prohibition could be perceived as a warning not to be biased in a lawsuit in favor of the poor, out of compassion, but to observe justice. However, after "proletarian revolutions" with their partiality toward "the poor" and persecution or even total destruction of "the rich," we get a chance to see the commandment from a different perspective. Historical experience enriches us because it reveals new facets of God's word, new implications of ancient commandments. The command "not to be partial to the poor," however, should be considered along with another one:

You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in their lawsuits. (*Ex 23:6*)

Probably, this precept is of more universal character than the previous one, and together they embrace all those cases of legal proceedings when the property status of the defendant can have influence on the court. Being observed continually the two mentioned commands could serve the restoring of righteous judgment all over the world, in all nations.

Two more verses are found in between the given ones:

When you come upon your enemy's ox or donkey going astray, you shall bring it back.

When you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden and you would hold back from setting it free, you must help to set it free. (*Ex 23:4-5*)

In verse 4 the word “enemy” translates Hebrew אֵיב *oy`ev*, “the one who is at enmity with somebody,” while in verse 5 we have שׂוֹנֵא *so`neh*, i.e. “the one who hates.” Although the affinity of the meanings of both words is evident, the first one implies a state of an actual quarrel, while the second one describes one's inner disposition, a hostile attitude. Yet, whatever is the degree of your hostility towards the described person, the commandment obliges you to give him a helping hand and thus make the first step toward reconciliation. However, not only reconciliation, but also relief of animals' portion is meant here. Animals entrust their masters with the responsibility for their lives and do not participate in their enmity. There are many cases in the Scripture where God's care for animals is manifest. For instance, commenting upon the Forth Commandment of the Decalogue Moses says:

...Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work — you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you... (*Deut 5:13-14*)

An ox and a donkey are mentioned here along with people as creatures that need and deserve rest (cf. *Ex 23:11*). More examples describing care for animals can be found in the Pentateuch; for instance, the command to release a bird sitting on the eggs by the road (*Deut 22:6-7*), which we are going to discuss while studying the Book of Deuteronomy. According to the command given in our verses, *Ex 23:4-5*, reconciliation with the enemy should harmonize with one's concern for animals: in the presence of lower creatures people are supposed to call to mind their unity, their mission in this world and put an end to their hostility. This command deserves admiration all the more so, as it equates an enemy with a brother. For in the other place the Torah says:

You shall not see your neighbor's donkey or ox fallen on the road and ignore it; you shall help to lift it up. (*Deut 22:4*)

The Hebrew original has אָחִיךָ *a`cheecha* — “brother.” Thus, one's enemy should be treated in the same way as one's brother! The laws of such

kind were originally intended to prepare the mentality of the people for the future evangelical revelation, which states:

...Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. (*Mt 5:44-45*)

Having instructed the people in righteousness, having “polished” their conscience, the Law gets back to practical issues relating to rendering justice. One of them is of truly great significance for all times:

Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and those in the right, for I will not acquit the guilty. (*Ex 23:7*)

The command “to keep far from a false charge” has many implications, one of them being the following: as soon as even the slightest possibility of unfair conviction emerges, one should refrain from pronouncing the sentence. Especially it concerns the death penalty, when the consequences are irremediable. If there is still a chance that the sentence can bring about death of “the innocent and those in the right,” the Law commands to avoid it or to “keep far” from executing such sentence when it is already passed. It is better to save the life of a guilty man than to let an innocent person perish. Talking about the offender who escapes punishment because of lack of evidence, the Lord warns, “I will not acquit the guilty” (Hebrew text has רָשָׁע *ra`sha* — “evildoer”). Hence, the Most High himself will inflict punishment on a wicked man who escaped condemnation.

Further, we read a very significant instruction concerning bribes in court:

You shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the officials, and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. (*Ex 23:8*)

The word “cause” translates Hebrew דָבָר *da`var*, which can be also rendered as “word.” The phrase “those who are in the right” implies צְדִיקִים *tzadi`kim*, the righteous, such as the judges should be. The verse teaches that even the words of the righteous judges can be “perverted,” “tangled” (for such is the meaning of the verb סָלַף *sa`laf*) because of bribery. God's Law considers human weaknesses and provides such conditions for human activities, which make observing the commandments easier.

Continuing the discussion of matters relating to judgment, the Scripture teaches to protect the rights of a resident alien, which are wholly equated with the rights of a native resident (cf. *Ex 12:49*, *Lev 24:22*):

You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. (*Ex 23:9*)

The word נֶפֶשׁ *nefesh*, “[animal] soul,” denotes the whole range of negative emotions that can overshadow the life of an alien if he is mistreated by those around him. This is one of the implications of the

commandment relating to interpersonal relations that Jesus Christ regarded as of paramount importance:

In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. (*Mt 7:12*)

Continuing expressing its concern about the destitute, the Law now speaks not only about aliens, but also about “needy” people in general (Heb. אֲבִיּוֹן *‘ev’yon*) means “beggar,” “hungry,” from the verb אָבַה *‘a’va* — “to want,” “to crave,” that is literally, “starving”):

For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard. (*Ex 23:10-11*)

While the first tithe was to be given to the Levites who instructed the people in the Law, and was also intended for maintaining the Temple, “the second” tithe was to be set apart from the harvest during six non-jubilee years and was meant for the poor (Deut 14:28-29, 26:12-13). But on the seventh, “sabbatical,” year the fruit of the land lying fallow belonged to everybody regardless of social differences. This seventh year serves as a prototype for the Kingdom of God after six thousand years of human history, a prototype of the seventh millennium — the age of justice and universal happiness (Isa 11:6-9, 65:17-25, 66:22-23; Rev 21:1-5; 22:1-5).

This context helps to understand both literal and prototypical meaning of repeating the commandment of the Sabbath day:

Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed. (*Ex 23:12*)

The description of the Sabbath day shows that God’s compassion embraces animals as well as people. The prophet Isaiah tells the same thing:

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den.

They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (*Isa 11:6-9*)

All ethical laws set forth in Chapter 23 are concluded with a call for the strictest adherence to monotheism:

Be attentive to all that I have said to you. Do not invoke the names of other gods; do not let them be heard on your lips. (*Ex 23:13*)

The words “be attentive” translate Hebrew תִּשְׁמֶר *‘tisha`meru* — “guard yourself,” “be careful,” “take care of yourself.” A more precise rendering is

“be careful in all that I have said to you...” That is, both individual and social life of the Israelites should be enclosed within the blessed bounds of the Law given to them and should not overstep these bounds. In this way the integrity of each individual and the people as a whole will be “guarded.”

Indeed, as long as the commandments of God’s Law were kept, the people experienced spiritual and material prosperity; going astray from them, “overstepping” their bounds gave effect to the curses that guarded the “fence” of the Law like watchful sentinels and struck anyone who abandoned this blessed shelter:

Do not go out into the field, or walk on the road; for the enemy has a sword, terror is on every side.

<...>

I have made you a tester and a fortress among my people so that you may know and test their ways. (*Jer 6:25-27*)

This is why the prophet Isaiah calls those who destroy “the fence” of God’s Law and overstep its bounds בְּנֵי מִשְׁחָתִים *‘ba nim mashkhi`tim* — “sons who destroy”; NRSV reads, “children who deal corruptly”:

Ah, sinful nation, people laden with iniquity, offspring who do evil, children who deal corruptly, who have forsaken the Lord, who have despised the Holy One of Israel, who are utterly estranged. (*Isa 1:4*)

The verse from the Book of Exodus under consideration forbids mentioning “the names of other gods.” The Hebrew original reads: “the name [שֵׁם *‘shem*] of other gods,” because the essence of idolatry remains the same despite the difference of the names. A person (or entire people) either serves the Lord or not, either keeps his commandments, or rejects them.

As we have already mentioned, God is a Lawmaker; he and his Law constitute a single entity. Denying one of its parts immediately entails rejecting another. When the people had to make a choice, when they hesitated whether to accept God’s will or to follow pagan lifestyle, the prophet described them as “limping”:

Elijah then came near to all the people, and said, “How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” The people did not answer him a word. (*1 Kings 18:21*)

In a sense it is better to be deluded for a while and then return to the Lord with your whole heart in sincere repentance, than to consider yourself innocent in God’s eyes while rejecting his commandments:

...I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.’ You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. (*Rev 3:15-17*)

After the command to follow the One Lord and his Law, the Torah calls the people to devote to God their entire life symbolically expressed by the year cycle. This call is echoed in the description of the major festivals of the year:

Three times in the year you shall hold a festival for me. You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread; as I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. No one shall appear before me empty-handed.

You shall observe the festival of harvest, of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall observe the festival of ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor. (*Ex 23:14-16*)

Three festivals — מועדים *moa`dim* (the word is found in Gen 1:14) — are timed to three culmination points of the agricultural year cycle, three harvest seasons in the Holy Land: the Passover (“the Festival of Unleavened Bread”) is timed to barley harvest, Pentecost (“the Festival of the first fruits”) is timed to wheat harvest, the Feast of Tabernacles is timed to “ingathering at the end of the year” (cf. Lev 23:4-21, 33-43; Ex 23:16, 34:18-23; Deut 16:1-17). For this reason three times a year an Israelite has to come to the Temple with “the first fruits” of each harvest, devoting them to the Lord as a sign of his gratitude to the Originator of existence (Ex 22:29, 23:19; Lev 23:10-11). This means that the ultimate significance of the labor of a person who offers “the first fruits” and tithes of his harvests to the Lord consists in sacrificial service. Offering “the first fruits” of the harvest the person symbolically consecrates all the fruits of his labor to the Lord. Dedicating the principal days of the agricultural year to the Lord an Israelite “offers,” “gives away” all the days of the year during which he toiled preparing the festival sacrifices; in the same way, Sabbath celebration facilitates deep contact with God during weekdays.

However, in addition, these three festival seasons symbolize three stages of human lifetime: youth, maturity and the end of life. The Passover corresponds to the first call of God, perceived in youth — the call to “free oneself from Egyptian bondage,” that is from the state of being enslaved by animal nature, by sin. “The Exodus from Egypt,” release from the “pharaoh’s” control, i.e. the control of the undermost egocentric self, and following the call of supreme, divine “Self,” is associated with eating unleavened bread and abstaining from yeast. As we know, one of the implications of this prohibition consists in the fact that yeast signifies evil desires and inclinations that “spoil” blamelessness and purity of one’s life (Mt 16:6, Lk 12:1). That is why talking about those who have utterly distorted their spiritual image and showed disloyalty to their calling, the Lord says through the prophet Zephaniah:

At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs, those who say in their heart, “The Lord will not do good, nor will he do harm.” (*Zeph 1:12*)

The English word “dregs” renders Hebrew שומר *shemer* which is used here to mean “yeast.” Yeast symbolizes turbulence of passions. It is youth that can be characterized by high risks of getting indulged into the sinful desires of human egocentric nature; it is the “spring time” of our life that especially needs self-control, “unleavened bread.” Apostle Paul warns about this:

Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (*1 Cor 5:7-8*)

Pentecost corresponds to maturity. The festival is timed to summer period (it is celebrated on the 6th of Sivan, corresponding to May-June), when the nature is in full bloom. This is the time when a person reaps “the first fruits” of his labor, harvests what was sown in his youth (Ex 23:15). It was on the day of Pentecost that the people heard the Ten Commandments spoken by the voice of God from Mount Sinai (Ex 19:1-11). The spirit that has reached maturity starts comprehending the Law of God, the Decalogue, with its 613 precepts and statutes, for at this stage human mind acquires the ability to perceive the many-sided meaning of God’s will concerning his life.

Finally, the Festival of Tabernacles corresponds to old age. It is timed to autumn period (15th - 22nd of Tishri always fall on September-October) and signifies “ingathering of the harvest,” summing up at the end of the year. The life of a righteous person who keeps the commandments ends in happiness and joy, produces fruit in abundance, and his old age is the threshold and the anticipation of passing to the higher world, joining “the spirits of the righteous made perfect” (Heb 12:22-23):

The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God. In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap, showing that the Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him. (*Ps 92:12-15*)

This is why the Feast of Tabernacles is noted for special celebration and rejoicing:

Now, the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall keep the festival of the Lord, lasting seven days; a complete rest on the first day, and a complete rest on the eighth day.

On the first day you shall take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days.

You shall keep it as a festival to the Lord seven days in the year; you shall keep it in the seventh month as a statute forever throughout your generations... (*Lev 23:39-41*)

It is stressed that this “rejoicing” should involve relatives and members of household as well as poor people, the Levites and the strangers — the

fellow-heirs of the eternal life for which a person is getting prepared in his declining years:

You shall keep the festival of booths for seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your wine press.

Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns.

Seven days you shall keep the festival for the Lord your God at the place that he will choose; for the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all your undertakings, and you shall surely celebrate. (*Deut 16:13-15*)

The concluding words of the precept relating to celebration suggest the all-embracing blessing (“...the Lord your God will bless you... in all your undertakings...”) and continual joy (“...and you shall surely celebrate”). Finally, leaving homes and dwelling in tabernacles (booths) for seven days points to the future exodus to the other life, resettlement of human spirit into the eternal dwelling places (Lk 16:9; Jn 14:2):

...You shall live in booths for seven days; all that are citizens in Israel shall live in booths, so that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. (*Lev 23:42-43*)

As to the command “not to appear before God empty-handed” (Ex 23:15), it implies not only literal “first fruits” and tithes of the harvest, but also the obligation of a believer to bear spiritual fruit to the Lord at every stage of his life:

...So that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God... (*Col 1:10*)

The following command may be referred to the critical periods of transition from one age to another:

Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord God. (*Ex 23:17*)

Having passed through some certain age period and entering the next one a person should examine the fruits of his labors and “offer them to the Lord”. The phrase “shall appear” renders Hebrew יראה *year'eh*, which means “[let him] appear,” “[let him] become seen,” “[let him] turn visible.” At this moment the person should feel as if “the Lord’s face shines upon him,” as if he stands in his presence (Num 6:25; Ps 80:7)

...For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God. (*Jn 3:20-21*)

However, the precepts relating to the festivals contain some other important instructions, such as:

You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the fat of my festival remain until the morning. (*Ex 23:18*)

It is clear that the Passover sacrifice is meant; by the time of its offering all yeast is supposed to be removed from the houses (Ex 12:15). The liturgy should be conducted in purity; and yeast, as a symbol of sin and vice, must be removed. The Passover night appointed for eating the paschal lamb is a symbol of “an acceptable time, a day of salvation” (1 Cor 5:7-8, 2 Cor 6:2). It should be fully devoted to the divine service: “in the morning,” when “the sun of righteousness” is rising (Mal 4:2), in other words, when the Kingdom of God has come, it will be too late for eating the supper of God’s salvation...

The choicest of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk. (*Ex 23:19*)

We have already discussed the first part of this verse. Concerning the prohibition of boiling a kid in its mother’s milk, it is found in the Torah three times in different contexts. Here and in Ex 34:26 it accompanies the command of bringing “the first fruits” to the Temple, while in Deut 14:21 this precept is placed among dietary laws. Besides ethical significance, which instructs people to be merciful towards animals, it forbids a Canaanite ritual, which, as it was clarified in the 20th century after decoding the Canaanite texts from Ugarit, was a part of the harvest festival reproducing the “sacred wedding ceremony” of gods. This is why the commandment stresses the necessity of participating in the Lord’s festivals and avoiding pagan celebrations. At the same time this prohibition, if considered in the context of Deut 14:21 as a hygienic prescription, reflects God’s concern for our health.

Concluding social, ethical and ritual laws listed here the Lord says about his special angel, who is sent to assist and “supervise” the people of Israel:

I am going to send an angel in front of you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Be attentive to him and listen to his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression; for my name is in him. (*Ex 23:20-21*)

We remember that Hebrew מלאך *mal'akh* as well as Greek αγγελος *angelos* means “messenger,” “emissary,” and “angel” as a spiritual being. The angel mentioned here is endowed with a special triple mission (unlike ordinary angels who, according to tradition, are entrusted with only one assignment). First, he must “guard” the people on the way (Hebrew שומר *shamar* — “to guard,” “to protect”); second, he must “bring” them to the Holy Land, i.e. assist them in conquering it; and third, he is to proclaim the Lord’s will to the people (“listen to his voice”), at the same time reprimanding them for disobedience (“he will not pardon your transgression”). The word “transgression” renders Hebrew פשע *pesha*, derived from the verb “to overstep,” “to diverge,” “to rise against,” and “to defy authority.” What is meant here is not just a transgression, i.e.

violation of some commandment due to human weakness, carelessness or the influence of evil passions, etc.; such transgressions are atoned by the sacrifices (Lev 4:2, 35; 5:17–18). But the sin of rebellion against the Lord, of the conscious and daring confronting him, is equated with the blasphemy and is not forgiven till the moment of sinner’s death:

And speak to the people of Israel, saying: Anyone who curses God shall bear the sin.

One who blasphemeth the name of the Lord shall be put to death; the whole congregation shall stone the blasphemer. Aliens as well as citizens, when they blaspheme the Name, shall be put to death. (*Lev 24:15–16*)

Both the literal blasphemy spoken against the name of the Most High and the intentional mocking of his commandments entails death of the violator:

But whoever acts high-handedly, whether a native or an alien, affronts the Lord, and shall be cut off from among the people.

Because of having despised the word of the Lord and broken his commandment, such a person shall be cut off and bear the guilt. (*Num 15:30–31*)

It is for such actions with regard to the Lord and his commandments that the curses of the Law befall the people:

But if you will not obey me, and do not observe all these commandments, if you spurn my statutes, and abhor my ordinances, so that you will not observe all my commandments, and you break my covenant, I in turn will do this to you: I will bring terror on you; consumption and fever that waste the eyes and cause life to pine away. You shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. (*Lev 26:14–16*)

If we compare these words with the warning of the Gospels,

Therefore I tell you, people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (*Mt 12:31–32*)

we will see that the words of Jesus concerning blasphemy against the Spirit refer to the same kind of violation — a high-handed contempt for the commandments, blasphemy against the Creator and deliberate violation of his will.

The angel sent by the Lord is endowed with exceptional power in order to accomplish his three missions. For this purpose the Lord puts his name inside him: *כי שמי בקרבו* *ki she`mi be-kir`bo* — “for my name is in him.” The prophet Isaiah refers to this angel as “the angel of the Lord’s presence,” i.e. a mediator between the Lord and his people, who is always in the presence of the Lord:

In all their distress he was distressed; the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. (*Isa 63:9*)

In Jewish interpretation, the words “my name is in him” are to be understood taking into account gematria, i.e. the sum of the numerical equivalents of the letters that make the angel’s name, which is identical with the numerical meaning of God’s name. The aggadic materials call this angel *מטטרון* *Meta`tron*; this name probably goes back to Greek *Μεθάρωνος* *Meta`tronos* — “[the one standing] near the [Lord’s] throne.” In other words, the closest angel to the Lord is meant. The numerical meaning of his name written in Hebrew is

314 (מ + ט + ט + ר + ו + ך = 40 + 9 + 9 + 200 + 6 + 50 = 314), and it is equal to the gematria of the name “Shaddai” (i.e. “the Almighty” or “the All-sufficient”): ש + ד + י = 300 + 4 + 10 = 314. The deepest mysteries of the spiritual world are connected with this angel; he is repeatedly mentioned in the Old Testament (in our commentary see also pp. ...).

But if you listen attentively to his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy of your enemies and a foe of your foes. (*Ex 23:22*)

The angel functions as God’s spokesman, accurately conveying the words of the One who send him. It is evident from the fact that the first and the third person singular are interchanged in the text: “his voice” refers to the angel, “I say” — to God. The same is true of the next verse:

When my angel goes in front of you, and brings you to the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and I blot them out... (*Ex 23:23*)

— “[He] brings you,” but “I blot them out.”

Concerning the “blotting out” of the nations that inhabited the land of Canaan, here the destruction of their *kingdoms* is implied, the strongholds of demonic cults that were accompanied with human sacrifices (Lev 18:21, 20:1–5; Deut 12:31; 2 Kings 23:10; Jer 7:31). As to their *inhabitants*, according to God’s Law, they had either to turn to the true God and to enter God’s community as full members, if such was their desire; or, in case they wished to keep worshipping idols, to be driven out from the Holy Land. By no means their “total extermination” is implied here, as some commentators misinterpret the verse. This question undoubtedly needs further consideration.

In the given verse the words “I blot them out” translate Hebrew *והכחדתי* *ve-hicheh-chad`tiv* — from the verb *כחד* *ka`chad* — “to blot out,” “to obliterate,” “to conceal.” Here the “obliteration” of the remains of the Canaanites’ bloody idolatry is implied (cf. v. 24), but not the extermination of the population of the Canaanite states. Concerning their inhabitants the Pentateuch and other books of the Bible again and again speak of “driving them out,” but not of “destroying” them. The phrase “to drive out” translates the verb *גרש* *ga`rash* — “to banish,” “to send away.” The same verb was used in the description of Adam’s expulsion from the garden of Eden and in the story of Cain’s expulsion from the face of the Lord (Gen 3:24, 4:14). The noun derived from this verb, *גרשושה* *gru`sha*, in the Scripture (Num 30:10, Ezek 44:22 etc.) stands for a divorced woman, i.e. a woman sent out by her husband (Deut 24:1). Just as in the above-

listed cases those driven out were not put to death, in the same way the inhabitants of Canaan were to remain alive, but in case they opposed the word of God they were to leave the Holy Land:

If you will diligently observe this entire commandment that I am commanding you, loving the Lord your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to him,

Then the Lord will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and mightier than yourselves. (*Deut 11:22-23*)

This verse speaks not only of “driving out” of the nations, but also of their “dispossession” by Israel. The text implies those of the Canaanites who wish to join Israel, who give up the abominable worship of idols, having repented of it, and wholeheartedly accept God’s Law.

Having listed all possible kinds of sexual immorality connected with shrine rituals characteristic of the Canaanite cults the Most High says:

Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, for by all these practices the nations I am casting out before you have defiled themselves. (*Lev 18:24*)

Here again expulsion and not extermination is implied. The same phrase is repeated in the description of various types of black magic that were practiced by the inhabitants of Canaan:

For whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord; it is because of such abhorrent practices that the Lord your God is driving them out before you. (*Deut 18:12*)

As to the Amorites and other nations of Canaan, we read that they are *driven out* before the Israelites:

Observe what I command you today. See, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. (*Ex 34:11*)

Notice that the expulsion is described not as an instantaneous act (which one could expect following the theory of “extermination” of these peoples by the Israelites), but as a gradual process:

The Lord your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you will not be able to make a quick end of them, otherwise the wild animals would become too numerous for you. (*Deut 7:22*)

The question to God raised on behalf of the whole nation concerns expulsion of the Canaanites and not their destruction:

If you say to yourself, “These nations are more numerous than I; how can I dispossess them?” (*Deut 7:17*)

Taking into account all the above-mentioned excerpts, we can conclude that total extermination is by no means implied here. Let us look, however, at how the Lord’s commands concerning the conquered nations of the Holy

Land were carried out in practice (later we shall discuss how they were treated on the battlefield, in wartime). In the Book of Joshua we read:

They did not, however, drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer: so the Canaanites have lived within Ephraim to this day but have been made to do forced labor. (*Josh 16:10*)

While the Pentateuch includes God’s commands concerning those Canaanites who do not want to give up their detestable cults, in the Book of Joshua we find the description of how these instructions are carried out. Once again, we read about expulsion, not destruction:

But the people of Judah could not drive out the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem; so the Jebusites live with the people of Judah in Jerusalem to this day. (*Josh 15:63*)

As to the fate of those Canaanites who were involved in idolatry, the Lord himself, while giving promises to Joshua, repeats the same things that he has frequently told Moses, Joshua’s great teacher and the leader of the people, preceding him:

...All the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon to Misrephoth-maim, even all the Sidonians. I will myself drive them out from before the Israelites; only allot the land to Israel for an inheritance, as I have commanded you. (*Josh 13:6*)

Giving authoritative orders to the heads of the tribes that were subordinate to him, Joshua speaks of the expulsion of pagan inhabitants of the land, accepting it as a natural thing, and not of their extermination:

...But the hill country shall be yours, for though it is a forest, you shall clear it and possess it to its farthest borders; for you shall drive out the Canaanites, though they have chariots of iron, and though they are strong. (*Josh 17:18*)

Finally, because of their sins, the people of God could not banish all the Canaanites entirely from the Holy Land. The Scripture describes it in such detail that we have not a slightest doubt concerning the fate of those who continued to resist God’s will:

Yet the Manassites could not take possession of those towns; but the Canaanites continued to live in that land.

But when the Israelites grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not utterly drive them out. (*Josh 17:12-13*)

Even the giants, the descendants of the one-time powerful tribe of the sons of Anak (from Heb. *אֶנָּךְ* *a’nak* — “necklace”; according to a legend, the Anakim were men of great stature with excessively long necks on which they wore necklaces made of human bones; on the sons of Anak see also p...), were not destroyed by Joshua’s warriors, but expelled:

And Caleb drove out from there the three sons of Anak: Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak. (*Josh 15:14*)

In the Book of Judges we find the enumeration of the many Canaanite tribes and settlements that were not expelled by the Israelites (notice how often and how persistently the phrase “to drive out” is used here):

The Lord was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain, because they had chariots of iron.

Hebron was given to Caleb, as Moses had said; and he drove out from it the three sons of Anak.

But the Benjaminites did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have lived in Jerusalem among the Benjaminites to this day.

<...>

Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; but the Canaanites continued to live in that land.

<...>

And Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer; but the Canaanites lived among them in Gezer.

Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites lived among them, and became subject to forced labor.

Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco, or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, or of Achzib, or of Helbah, or of Aphik, or of Rehob; but the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out.

Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, but lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became subject to forced labor for them. (*Judg 1:19-33*)

In the subsequent periods many Canaanites still lived among the Israelites: they were the descendants of those people who had renounced evil cults and had received the Lord and his teaching. For example, King David bought a plot of land, the site of the future Temple, on the holy Mount Moriah from Araunah who belonged to the Jebusites, one of the strongest nations inhabiting Canaan (2 Sam 24:18). After David's conquest of Jerusalem, Araunah still possessed the land in the holiest place for the Israelites:

Araunah said, “Why has my lord the king come to his servant?” David said, “To buy the threshing floor from you in order to build an altar to the Lord, so that the plague may be averted from the people.”

Then Araunah said to David, “Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him; here are the oxen for the burnt offering, and the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood.”

All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king.” And Araunah said to the king, “May the Lord your God respond favorably to you.”

But the king said to Araunah, “No, but I will buy them from you for a price; I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. (*2 Sam 24:21-24*)

Araunah the Jebusite wants God's mercy to descend upon David; for the Lord's sake he tries to give a piece of holy ground to the king without taking a charge, and he burns with desire to offer a sacrifice to the Lord! Such is the disposition of those people from the nations of Canaan who joined the Lord's covenant with their whole heart, having clearly seen the difference between the light of the true faith and the darkness of pagan delusion.

Already in the time of Joshua aliens from among the Canaanites who joined Israel of their own free will were so numerous that in the description of the solemn ceremony — the reading of the blessings and the curses of the Law — they are mentioned before the citizens:

All Israel, alien as well as citizen, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark in front of the levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded at the first, that they should bless the people of Israel. (*Josh 8:33*)

First comes “alien,” and only after him “citizen” is mentioned.

Hence, as far back as the time of Joshua's campaigns the inhabitants of the Holy Land turned to the Lord in great numbers, joined the Israelites to constitute one people with them. This is also proved by the results of archaeological excavations, which demonstrate that the process of the Israelite settlement was gradual and relatively peaceful. Moreover, the Israelites and the Canaanites became related with each other, lived side by side, had common forms of agriculture and cattle-breeding and, finally, merged into a single entity. The prohibition to marry the Canaanites (Ex 34:15-16) concerns only those of them who persist in paganism. The same motivation is given in the context of the prohibition:

You shall not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to their gods, someone among them will invite you, and you will eat of the sacrifice.

And you will take wives from among their daughters for your sons, and their daughters who prostitute themselves to their gods will make your sons also prostitute themselves to their gods. (*Ex 34:15-16*)

The story that Rahab (Canaanite cult-prostitute in a pagan shrine) told to Joshua's spies in Jericho shows that a great number of Canaanites were prepared by the course of historic events to renounce idolatry and to receive Israel's God:

...And said to the men: “I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you.

For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.

As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below. (*Josh 2:9-11*)

The extraordinary miracles and signs performed by the Most High in Egypt, by the Red Sea and in the Wilderness of Sinai, made such an impression on the nations inhabiting the Holy Land that many of them were ready to repeat Rahab's words: "...there was no courage left in any of us because of you. The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below." Let us say once again that such Canaanites who joined the Israelites in immense numbers shared the same rights with "native" inhabitants in the conquered land (Ex 12:49; Lev 19:34, 24:22).

One more question remains for discussion, concerning the meaning of the phrase used in the Scripture with regard to the conquered Canaanite cities: *וַיַּחַרְמוּ... לְפִי חֶרֶב* (*va-ya`ku... le-phi `charev*) — "attacked... with the edge of the sword." We find this phrase, for example, in Josh 8:24. The given text speaks of the war against the resisting citizens of Ai, i.e. against the warriors (in Canaan women could be warriors as well; for instance, Astarte, the most prominent goddess of the Canaanites, was always portrayed as a female warrior). However, on another occasion, where the "destruction" of Jericho is spoken of, the superficial reading leaves an impression that all citizens were destroyed, irrespective of sex or age:

Then they devoted to destruction by the edge of the sword all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys. (*Josh 6:21*)

Notice that the Hebrew original of this verse does not mention destruction, but a curse (*וַיַּחַרְמוּ... לְפִי חֶרֶב* *va-yachari`mu... le-phi `charev*) — "they made accursed [everything in the city]... by the edge of the sword." It is said (as in other similar places describing the conquest of the cities) that they "made accursed [everything] under the threat of the edge of the sword," not that they "destroyed... by the edge of the sword." The verb *חָרַם* (*cha`ram*) — "to make accursed" — has an original meaning "to expel," "to ban," "to seclude," that is consistent with the instruction concerning *expulsion* of those Canaanites who refused to join the covenant. Jericho and Ai were among the cities that persistently resisted the Israelites regardless of manifest miracles and signs of the Lord (Josh 2:9–11). This testified to the fact that their citizens did not wish to renounce the inhuman Canaanite cults and therefore, together with their herds (Josh 6:21), they were subject to expulsion "under threat of the edge of the sword," i.e. to "cherem" — "banning," "excommunication," "exclusion" from the citizens of the Holy Land. According to the testimony of Josephus Flavius, a famous Jewish historian of the 1st century AD, up to his time in some countries neighboring Judah as well as in some Phoenician colonies located far from Palestine, one could still find stone pillars with inscriptions in the Phoenician (Canaanite) language, saying that they had been erected by those who had fled Joshua's army.

The same expression, "struck it with the edge of the sword," is found in Josh 10:30 (cf. Josh 10:28, 32–33, 35, 37, 39). In all these cases the verb *וַיַּכּוּ* (*va-ya`keh*) is used — "and he struck," literally, "he hit," "he broke," i.e. conquered (the city). As to the citizens who violently opposed him and who had united in order to repel Joshua (Josh 10:3–5, 33), they were driven out, expelled "under threat of the edge of the sword," i.e. were exposed to

"cherem" (Josh 10:28, 35, 37, 39, 40). It is no accident that throughout this excerpt it is emphasized that "he left no one remaining" in every such city (Josh 10:28, 30, 33, 37, 39, 40). In the light of everything that we have said above, this does not imply total extermination of the citizens, but their expulsion.

Of great interest is the testimony of the Scripture concerning the war that the Canaanite kings declared upon those cities, which allied with the Israelites and renounced pagan practices. Among such cities was the city of Gibeon, of which we learn that it

...Was a large city, like one of the royal cities, and was larger than Ai, and all its men were warriors. (*Josh 10:2*)

In such cases, the cities that joined the covenant with the Lord turned to the Israelites for help (Josh 10:6). Very interesting documents proving this story were discovered in the royal archive of Tell el-Amarna, Egypt. The Canaanite kings, vying with one another, wrote letters to pharaoh, in which they asked protection from "the Habiru," which can easily be identified with *עַבְרִים* (*iv`rim*) — "the Hebrews." The pharaoh, however, refused aid, as one could expect in the light of the events, described in the Bible — the ten plagues that had come down upon Egypt and death of the pharaoh's predecessor in the Red Sea. These letters from Tell el-Amarna belong to the period of Joshua's conquest of the Holy Land. However, one detail mentioned in the correspondence is of special importance for us: it appears that a vast number of Canaanites sided with "the Habiru," especially those of them who were the poorest and the most oppressed. They "opened the city gates" before "the Habiru," rising against their own rulers! This fact can be easily explained from a psychological point of view, if we compare the rights that were granted to slaves and to the poor by God's Law, with the rights of the same social groups in the city-states of Canaan, where human sacrifices were practiced. Even the king of Tyre, whose lands were not the object of the Israelites' invasion, wrote to pharaoh that fearing "the Habiru" and those local farmers who sided with them, he cannot leave the city where he is shut "like a bird in a cage." The ruler of Jerusalem ("Uru-Shalayim") Abdi-hepa ("Hepa's slave," which points to the connection of the bearer of this name with the nation of the Hivites — *חִוִּי* *hi`vi*; see Ex 23:28) writes to the pharaoh: "Let the king know everything: the lands are being destroyed, people are rising against me. The regions of Gezer, Ashkelon and the mountains of Lachish gave them [i.e. "the Habiru"] food, oil and everything necessary... This was done by Miliku and the sons of Laba'ya, who give the king's land to the Habiru..." The second letter of the same Abdi-hepa is still more "hopeless": "Let the king take care of his land [the Canaanite rulers were often Egypt's vassals]... The region of Seir up to Granate opposes me, Carmel is lost... The Habiru are appropriating royal cities, and not a single governor is left [to the pharaoh]..."

Thus, we see that the Israelite settlement of the Holy Land was largely supported by the oppressed part of local population.

"Well," someone can object, "we have been convinced that there was not such a thing as total extermination of local population. We even agree that

the Canaanites who joined the Israelites enjoyed the same rights. Nevertheless, there are two more questions to consider: for what reason were these Canaanites, who chose to keep their religious beliefs, driven out from their own cities? And why their kings were executed, as is quite clear from the Scripture (Josh 8:29; 10:1, 22-30; 12:7-24)?”

There is only one possible answer. Already to Abraham a promise was given that after oppression in a foreign land his descendants would return to the Holy Land:

And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. (*Gen 15:16*)

The last words deserve special attention: it is said that “...the iniquity [Hebrew עֲוֹן *a`von* — “sin”] of the Amorites [the latter word denotes here all the inhabitants of Canaan] is not yet complete”. This means that there is a certain “limit” of iniquity and sin, and if a person or a whole people overstep it, they are destined to bear severe punishment. In the days of Abraham there were still many righteous people in the land of Canaan, who listened to the preaching of the great patriarch and were eager to obey God’s will. Some of them were in “union” — religious covenant — with God and with Abraham’s clan and some joined the patriarch’s family (cf. Gen 14:13, 18-20; 17:12). However, archaeological and historical data show that as early as the time of Abraham the most abominable cults of all that existed in that epoch and later began to spread. These were satanic cults, as we would call them today. They reached their fullest development by the time of the Israelite Exodus from Egypt, as it had been predicted in the prophetic vision given to Abraham (Gen 15:16). It was by the time of the arriving of Abraham’s descendants in the Holy Land that the iniquity of its inhabitants was close to being complete... The worship of Baal, Astarte, Molech and other gods was linked with human sacrifice, especially with the sacrifice of children in the fire, including one’s own firstborn:

You must not do the same for the Lord your God, because every abhorrent thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods. They would even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods. (*Deut 12:31*)

God’s Law prohibited such actions and demanded the death of anyone who was involved in this practice:

Say further to the people of Israel: Any of the people of Israel, or of the aliens who reside in Israel, who give any of their offspring to Molech shall be put to death; the people of the land shall stone them to death.

I myself will set my face against them, and will cut them off from the people, because they have given of their offspring to Molech, defiling my sanctuary and profaning my holy name.

And if the people of the land should ever close their eyes to them, when they give of their offspring to Molech, and do not put them to death, I myself will set my face against them and against their family, and will cut them off from among their people, them and all who follow them in prostituting themselves to Molech. (*Lev 20:2-5*)

For ages human sacrifice was also practiced by the Phoenicians, the Moabites and other nations neighboring the Holy Land.

In addition, temple prostitutes, male and female, were an integral part of Canaanite religion. They had sex with each other and with people coming to the shrines, by the “sacred poles” and in the “sanctuaries” (Lev 20:6; Deut 23:17; 1 Kings 14:24, 15:12; Isa 57:3 etc.). All kinds of black magic were also widely spread among the nations of Canaan that tightly connected all the population of the country, from little children to old people, with dark, unclean, demonic spirits:

No one shall be found among you who makes a son or a daughter pass through fire, or who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or one who casts spells, or who consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead.

For whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord; it is because of such abhorrent practices that the Lord your God is driving them out before you. (*Deut 18:10-12*)

The land of Canaan became indeed the stronghold of evil: of bloodshed, cult prostitution, black magic, and misanthropy of all kinds...

What was the original plan of Providence concerning the Holy Land? From the most ancient times it was prepared for the people of God — the descendants of Shem (Gen 9:26) as a place from which the purest knowledge of God would emanate, as a place of the future birth of Messiah, a place where “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6, Isa 2:3, Mic 5:2) would abide. Talking over the Third Day of creation, we paid attention to the fact that “the dry land” mentioned in Gen 1:9-10 designates the original single continent, the shape of which is now being reconstructed on the basis of various data, including the outline of present continents that once separated. In the very center of this primordial continent was the Holy Land, which until now is situated at the meeting-point of three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa. In this the providential design concerning “the holy center” of the Earth was revealed, for it is from there that the knowledge of God was to spread to all the corners of the world:

Thus says the Lord God: This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her. (*Ezek 5:5*)

When the lands and the countries were divided among the descendants of Noah, this land, according to a legend, was given to the descendants of Shem; however, the sons of Ham conquered it and unlawfully forced out the Semites beyond its bounds (Gen 10:15-31). The Most High permitted the Canaanites who were the descendants of Ham to possess this land, watching if they would serve him, if they would agree to become his servants. According to the prophecy spoken through the forefather Noah, the Canaanites always face an option: whether to serve God or to serve Shem, whose children will repossess the Holy Land in case “the iniquity” of the sons of Ham “is complete.” It is said through Noah:

“Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave.” (*Gen 9:26*)

This is exactly what happened: the iniquity was complete and the Israelites, the descendants of Shem, regained the heritage of their forefather, who was a priest among the sons of Noah. Thus, the Holy Land once again started performing the duties that had been entrusted to it. It was the first country that had to cleanse itself from the most repulsive forms of idolatry that had developed in it because of the resistance of unclean spirits (*Ezek 28:1, Eph 6:12*).

...However, let us go back to the question concerning those kings that were killed by Joshua’s warriors. They acted as chief priests of those city-states that were governed by them, that is, they were immediate initiators of bloodshed going on in pagan shrines: with their own hands they murdered numerous infants, children and grown-ups who were offered as sacrifices to their bloodthirsty deities. The custom of child sacrifice performed by the king was still in effect, for example, in Moab centuries later:

When the king of Moab saw that the battle was going against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through, opposite the king of Edom; but they could not.

Then he took his firstborn son who was to succeed him, and offered him as a burnt offering on the wall. And great wrath came upon Israel, so they withdrew from him and returned to their own land. (*2 Kings 3:26–27*)

These kings–priests were direct mediators between their own nation and unclean spirits; their authority was based on black magic and was supported by it (cf. *Deut 32:16–17*). It is clear that they resisted the spreading of genuine faith most vigorously and obstinately. Not in the slightest were they ready to submit themselves to Joshua son of Nun (*Josh 10:1–4*). In various places on the territory of Palestine and Syria, especially under the foundations of city walls, archaeologists discovered jars with the bones of children who had been offered as sacrifices. Thus, execution of the Canaanite kings, who were butchers, sorcerers and infanticides, was God’s just punishment; it was carried out in accordance with the direct instructions of the Lord (*Deut 7:24–25*). This execution turned out a blessing for the nations that suffered under those brutal tyrants.

Thus we have seen that the “destruction,” mentioned in the Torah and in the Book of Joshua with regard to the Canaanite city-states, by no means designates “total extermination” of their inhabitants, but the destruction of ungodly state system, the abolition of demonic idolatry and punishment of the kings-priests whose hands were constantly stained with human blood. Those citizens who agreed to submit to the Lord’s will joined the Israelites, those who did not agree were expelled from the Holy Land. The same expulsion can befall even the Israelites if they fall away from the Lord in future:

But just as all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the Lord will bring upon you all the bad things, until he has destroyed you from this good land that the

Lord your God has given you.

If you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God, which he enjoined on you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land that he has given to you. (*Josh 23:15–16*)

It is evident that the expression “until he has destroyed you from this good land” implies expulsion of the people, just as it happened later in history, not its total extermination. In the same way the Lord “drove out,” “expelled” the Canaanites from before the Israelites, he did not “exposed them to genocide,” according to those commentators who do not go carefully into the Scriptures or do not want to. It is clearly stated that

...The Lord has driven out before you great and strong nations; and as for you, no one has been able to withstand you to this day.

One of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the Lord your God who fights for you, as he promised you. (*Josh 23:9–10*)

Hence, with God’s help, on the basis of the Holy Scripture we refuted the horrible myth according to which the Most High allegedly demanded “the total extermination” of the Canaanites, encouraged “genocide” against them. Therefore, we deprived the opponents of biblical truth of their favorite argument concerning the alleged “injustice” of the Lord’s judgment and the “inhumanity” of the precepts of God’s Law.

However, let us go back to the Book of Exodus.

...You shall worship the Lord your God, and I will bless your bread and your water; and I will take sickness away from among you. (*Ex 23:25*)

“The blessing of bread and water,” mentioned here, means that God will impart such properties to the food, which are most useful for the body, and therefore help one to get rid of sicknesses. The Lord will fulfill this blessing if the people serve him alone, if they direct all their efforts to doing his will. The Hebrew text of the last part of this verse *והסרתִי מחלה מקרבך* *va-hasi`roti macha`la mikir`becha* may be interpreted in two ways: either as “I will take sickness away from among you” or as “I will take sickness away from inside you.” In the latter case, we see a specific connection between the purification of one’s inner world from wickedness on the one hand and disappearance of sicknesses, which result from sin, on the other.

No one shall miscarry or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. (*Ex 23:26*)

This verse proves that both the spontaneous abortion (miscarriage) and barrenness are the consequences of sinful deeds. Sins have a fatal effect not only on those who commit them, but also on their descendants (cf. *Ex 20:5*) By his sins a person can reduce the “number of his days” that have been destined for him, and by his righteous deeds he can “fulfill” them. Already in the Fifth Commandment it is said that our days can be made long if we honor our parents (*Ex 20:12*). A sincere repentance before God can increase

the duration of one's life, as we can read in the Book of Isaiah about King Hezekiah:

Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah:
"Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the Lord, the God of your ancestor David: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life... (*Isa 38:4-5*)

The longevity can be a reward for one's righteous way of life, as David's Psalms say:

When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them.

With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation. (Ps 91:15-16)

cf. Ps 92:12-15.

The gift of long life is connected with three aspects: first, with the love for God, i.e. complete devotion to him; then, with obeying his commands; and last, with holding fast to him, i.e. with reaching spiritual unity with him, with gaining the Holy Spirit. These three aspects of righteousness are listed in the Book of Deuteronomy in connection with the promise of longevity:

...Choose life so that you and your descendants may live,
Loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to you ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. (*Deut 30:19-20*)

Choosing the right way a person finds wisdom that allows him to accomplish his earthly mission in its fullness, and for this purpose one often needs a long life:

My child, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments;

For length of days and years of life and abundant welfare they will give you. (*Prov 3:1-2*)

On the other hand, the Scripture speaks of the premature death of the wicked that often die in the midst of their days:

But you, O God, will cast them down into the lowest pit; the bloodthirsty and treacherous shall not live out half their days. But I will trust in you. (*Ps 55:23*)

King David pleads with the Most High for the "fullness of days" and for being spared from the fate of the wicked:

"O my God," I say, "do not take me away at the mid-point of my life, you whose years endure throughout all generations." (*Ps 102:24*)

Thus, here the text (*Ex 23:25-26*) emphasizes the fact that the life of an individual and of the whole people depends solely on their attitude toward

God and his Law. All the victories of the people of God over their enemies are linked with this as well:

I will send my terror in front of you, and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you... (*Ex 23:27*)

Indeed, so often success in warfare is conditioned not by the strength of the army or its skill, but by some seemingly accidental reasons! Everyone who studies the history of war craft ponders this problem. However, in all such "accidents" the hidden will of Providence, that governs the destiny of the nations and the general course of history, manifests itself. "Terror" (Heb. *מַיָּמָה* *<ei ma>*), that is mentioned here, stands for a certain psychological state of enemy soldiers: depression and panic that seize everyone all of a sudden. Thus, the Lord himself deprives them of the ability to resist. Such cases were frequent in the history of Israel's wars when the nation was faithful to the Lord. For example, during the period of the judges, under Gideon's rule, the Lord inspired the Midianites and the Amalekites, Israel's enemies, with such fear that they suddenly began to fight with each other and shamefully fled the battle-field:

When they blew the three hundred trumpets, the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow and against all the army; and the army fled... (*Judg 7:22*)

In the time of King Saul the Lord granted his faithful servants, the king's son Jonathan and his armor-bearer, the victory over the big garrison of the Philistines:

In that first slaughter Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed about twenty men within an area about half a furrow long in an acre of land.

There was a panic in the camp, in the field, and among all the people; the garrison and even the raiders trembled; the earth quaked; and it became a very great panic. (*1 Sam 14:14-15*)

The Lord gives the following promise concerning the future victories of the Israelites over the enemy, provided that they keep righteousness:

...And I will send the pestilence in front of you, which shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you. (*Ex 23:28*)

The word "pestilence" used in the English text translates Hebrew *צִרְעָה* *<tsi'ra>*, a "hornet" — a poisonous flying insect whose sting is very painful. A swarm of hornets is indeed capable of scaring a whole body of troops. This promise has one more interesting aspect. Shortly before the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt the Canaanite city-states became the objects of Egyptians' conquests, and many of them, as we have already mentioned, passed under Egyptian control. At that time a hornet was a Pharaoh's symbol and its images were placed on standards and chariots. For that reason, the Lord's words concerning hornets "which shall drive out" the Canaanites "in front of you," may apply to the Egyptian armies that have

weakened the nations of Canaan, having made them more vulnerable for Israel's invasion.

Next comes the prophecy about the gradual conquest of the Promised Land. The slowness of this process is explained by significant historical and natural reasons:

I will not drive them out from before you in one year, or the land would become desolate and the wild animals would multiply against you.

Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land. (Ex 23:29-30)

The Israelites were told not to drive out the nations inhabiting the Canaan completely: a great part of them, as we have seen, attached themselves to the Israelites, having adopted faith in true God. As for the rest, they were not conquered at once, but up to the time of the judges and even the kings, vast areas of Palestine were still occupied by them (Judg 1:19-36, 2 Sam 5:6-7). There were several reasons for that. First, neither of the generations of the Israelites before David was obedient enough to God's will so as to gain a complete victory over all heathen nations of the Holy Land. The Most High intentionally left a certain number of the Canaanites in the land, so that the people of God might learn to lead both a spiritual fight — for the faith, and a physical one — for the sake of their survival. The heathen nations were the instrument of testing Israel's steadfastness in obeying the commandments:

Now these are the nations that the Lord left to test all those in Israel who had no experience of any war in Canaan (it was only that successive generations of Israelites might know war, to teach those who had no experience of it before)...

<...>

They were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the Lord, which he commanded their ancestors by Moses. (Judg 3:1-4)

Finally, there is one more important reason mentioned in the given excerpt of the Book of Exodus. If we understand the words concerning the multiplication of "the wild animals" literally, then the fact that the Canaanites inhabited Palestine prevented the land from becoming desolate and averted the multiplication of wild animals (lions, wolves, snow leopards, bears etc.), which did much harm to the cattle-breeders. If we understand these words figuratively, i.e. if we take into consideration the fact that these wild animals could often stand for the "wild" heathen kingdoms (cf. Ps 22:13, 16; 74:18-19; Ezek 29:3; Dan 7:3-7), then we can conclude that these Canaanite, Hittite and Syrian (Aramaean) petty states served as a buffer between Israel and the aggressive kingdoms of Mesopotamia. They did not let "the wild animals" attack the settlements of the Jews that were still vulnerable. The borders of the Jewish kingdom in the time of its future flowering are determined in the following verse:

I will set your borders from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates; for I will hand over to you the inhabitants of the land, and you shall drive them out before you. (Ex 23:31)

However, such borders are promised providing people stay faithful to their covenant with God (cf. Num 34:2-12). The Red Sea, or the "Sea of Reeds" (ים סוף *yam Soof*), which the Jews crossed dry-shod, is situated between the eastern parts of Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula. Therefore, even the territory of Sinai is promised here to the people of God. In fact, it never belonged to them even partially, and this is probably connected with their insufficient zeal in obeying God's commandments. Even in our days, having captured this territory as a result of the Six-Day War of 1967 and retaining it for a number of years, Israel, according to the peace treaty with Egypt, was forced to return it to its neighbor.

"The sea of the Philistines" stands for the Mediterranean Sea, for the major cities of the Philistines were situated not far from its coast. For a long time the Jews could not capture these cities. "From the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines" — such is the width of the Holy Land. As for its length, it should stretch "from the wilderness to the Euphrates": "the wilderness" is the Arabian desert (the very word ערבה *ara'va* means "desert," hence, ערבי *ara'vi* is "the inhabitant of the desert," "the Arabian," "the Arab"). As to the river, in the biblical usage הנהר *hana'har* (literally, "this stream," "this river" — with a definite article ה *ha*) indeed means the Euphrates, the largest and the most well-known river of the region. However, here the word נהר *na'har* can imply another large river (although inferior to the Euphrates) — the Jordan. Therefore, if the Israelites are wholly faithful to God's will, they will be rewarded with a territory of which the Euphrates is an eastern border. If they violate the commandments, then the river Jordan will be this border, and the territory of the country will be much less...

For that reason, after several grave cases when the people renounced the Lord in the wilderness, it is the Jordan and not the Euphrates that is definitely called the eastern boundary of the land:

...And the boundary shall go down to the Jordan, and its end shall be at the Dead Sea. This shall be your land with its boundaries all around. (Num 34:12)

Only in the time of David and Solomon the boundary of Israel came close to the river Euphrates (1 Kings 4:21): it was the age of the people's maximum faithfulness to their covenant with the Lord, but as soon as they began to swerve, the boundaries got narrow again.

This happens in the life of every one of us: the promises given to us by the Lord are linked with our faithfulness to the covenant. A different fate awaits us depending on what kind of life we lead — a righteous or a wicked one. The boundaries of spiritual and physical existence of those who turn aside from the Fountain of life get narrower all the time. In their lives, the words told by God through the prophet Jeremiah come true:

...For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water. (Jer 2:13)

In case the people of God lead a righteous life, when (and if) the borders of the kingdom are expanded to the limits set by the verse under consideration (Ex 23:31), they will be able to drive the Canaanites out completely, without detriment to themselves. Once again, the main prohibition concerning the Canaanites is repeated at the end of the chapter:

...You shall make no covenant with them and their gods.
They shall not live in your land, or they will make you sin against me;
for if your worship their gods, it will surely be a snare to you. (*Ex 23:32-33*)

This prohibition refers to those heathens who remained faithful to their evil cults, not to those who turned to God. This becomes still more obvious from the fact that the phrase “their gods” is used here twice.

Now let us turn to the contents of Chapter 24, in which the mysteries of God’s appearance are revealed. Not only Moses, but also the priests and the elders who accompanied him, become witnesses of a great event:

Then he said to Moses, “Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship at a distance.
Moses alone shall come near the Lord and all the ordinances; but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.” (*Ex 24:1-2*)

These verses describe the division of the people into various spiritual “categories.” Each of these categories is on a certain stage of development with regard to the supreme world and therefore adapts itself to the perception of truth in its own way. The common people who belonged neither to the Aaronic priests nor to the elders were prohibited earlier to go up the mountain of the Lord or even to touch it (Ex 19:12-13). The holy mountain symbolizes the spiritual world, which is invisible, like Jacob’s ladder (Gen 28:12-16). The Lord dwells on its top, and going up this mountain stands for the path of life of a righteous person, the ascension of his spirit in the course of his life:

For the wise the path of life leads upward, in order to avoid Sheol below.
(*Prov 15:24*)

However, in order to “dwell” or to “stay” on this mountain or even to move toward its top, one needs to have a heart in which the truth dwells:

O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?
Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart... (*Ps 15:1-2*)

It is clear that the overwhelming majority of the people who were led out from Egypt did not belong to the righteous persons of this kind and did not have the qualities listed in Psalm 15:

...Who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends,
nor take up a reproach against their neighbors;
In whose eyes the wicked are despised, but who honor those who fear the

Lord; who stand by their oath even to their hurt; who do not lend money at interest, and do not take a bribe against the innocent.
Those who do these things shall never be moved. (*Ps 15:3-5*)

Only those pure in heart (Mt 5:8) can hope for “seeing God.” The ascension of the holy mountain must be preceded by the purification of one’s heart: a person should first perceive himself as spiritually poor – “poor in spirit,” possessing nothing but expecting to get everything from the Lord. Then he must fully repent of his transgressions and bemoan them. After that, he is to gain a genuine meekness before God and men, to start being thirsty for the truth, i.e. for the justice, and for the vindication at God’s trial, like one thirsts for water in a hot wilderness. Finally, a person must be filled with mercy, i.e. with love for everyone, in order to receive mercy. Only after all that his heart will be purified, and he will be able to go up the holy mountain in order to “see God.” In such sequence, the stages of the spiritual purification are listed by Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:2-8).

The people which had been in slavery for several generations, first had to receive the rudimentary knowledge of God’s Law. As we have read, they needed to be warned against murder, stealing, adultery, fights, abusing widows and orphans (Ex 21-23). It is evident that the people were far from even the first step of purification that consists in realizing one’s spiritual poverty. In such a state any ascension of the Lord’s mountain was out of the question: anyone who dares to encroach upon the holy things being defiled is severely struck (Ex 19:13, Lev 10:1-3).

Another spiritual “group” consisted of Aaron, the future high priest, his sons Nadab and Abihu, who also were to become priests in future (but later lost this right along with their earthly life for a certain sin — see Lev 10:1-2), and the elders who, already from the time of the patriarchs, passed the sacred knowledge about the Creator and his covenant from generation to generation. These people were internally prepared for going up the mountain, but still they were to “contemplate God” from a distance, not approaching him, unlike Moses (Ex 19:2, 14). In the New Testament age we can also find such spiritually prepared, chosen, people. They are awarded with the knowledge of God’s mysteries and, unlike “Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19), they are called “mature” (Col 1:28, Heb 5:14. A Greek word *τελειος* *teleios* means “perfect,” “superior,” “initiate,” “completed,” “whole”). Concerning such people the apostle Paul says:

Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish.
But we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. (*1 Cor 2:6-7*)

Finally, only Moses, who occupies the highest spiritual step (Num 12:6-8), has a right to draw near the Lord. Many works of world art are devoted to Moses’ communing with God on the mountain. One of them is the poem by Ivan Bunin:

The Torah
The poem follows...

Legendary details mentioned in this poem are taken from Haggadah...

Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do." (*Ex 24:3*)

The people repeat the words that they once already said in response to God's call (*Ex 19:8*; cf. *Deut 5:27*). On both occasions they pledge themselves to obey the Lord on behalf of those who live now and on behalf of all future generations (*Deut 29:14-15*).

And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and set up twelve pillars, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. (*Ex 24:4*)

The first part of this verse is important to us for it contains the evidence showing that it was Moses who gradually put into writing the whole text of the Torah.

Let us trace how the Torah was gradually written down by Moses. What evidence do we find in other Scriptures? For the first time the recording of the events "in a book" (i.e. in the Torah which was being created by the inspiration of the Spirit of God) is mentioned in the same Book of Exodus:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this as a reminder in a book and recite it in the hearing of Joshua: I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." (*Ex 17:14*)

It follows from the given text that all events preceding the Exodus had been already recorded, and the war with the Amalekites was to be written down in a scroll, in a certain place, following everything that preceded it. At the same time, it is clear that the events relating to the Exodus could be described only after the narration concerning the Egyptian bondage of the Israelites. As for the latter, it should have been preceded by the story of their settlement in the land, which, in its turn, should have gone after the whole history of the patriarchs, starting with Adam. As to the creation of Adam, it can be perceived only in the context of the story of the Six Days of Creation. Hence, the whole contents of the Book of Genesis and this part of the Book of Exodus that precedes the description of the victory over Amalek, had been earlier put into writing by Moses.

Another place that points to the record of the next portion of the Torah is the one that we have just read: "And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord..." It is clear from the context that the meaning here is, at least, the Ten Commandments and the contents of Chapters 21-23, which include direct commands, i.e. "the words of the Lord." Indeed, the Ten Commandments must have been set forth in connection with the description of those circumstances that accompanied their declaration by God himself. Therefore, this place (*Ex 24:4*) hints at Moses' recording of all events

starting with the victory over Amalek up to the first part of the Sinaitic revelation (*Ex 17:14 - 24:4*).

However, some Bible critics are confused by the fact that Moses everywhere except for several places of the Book of Deuteronomy (e.g. *Deut 1:9, 12; 14-16; 18* etc., where first person pronoun is used) speaks of himself in the third person. On these grounds they even object to Mosaic authorship. It should be pointed out that speaking of oneself in the third person is characteristic of many literary texts of the Ancient Near East. The kings of Sumer and Akkad, Babylon and Assyria, the Hittite empire and Phoenicia speak of themselves in this way. This form of narration is frequently found in various places of the Holy Scriptures. For example, answering Esau's question — "Who are these with you?" — Jacob says:

"The children whom God has graciously given your servant." (*Gen 33:5*)

Such usage of the third person while speaking of oneself, according to the ethical norms of that age, stressed the humbleness of the one who spoke and his respect for one's associates (cf. *Gen 44:7, 1 Kings 1:17* etc.) Concerning Moses the Scripture says:

Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth. (*Num 12:3*)

This is why Moses continually uses third person pronouns while speaking of himself. There is one more reason for that — incomparably greater significance of that אֲנֹכִי *ʾAno`chi*, I, that stands for the Lord himself, beside which there is no place left for the human "I," even if belongs to the greatest mediator between God and the people — Moses...

Where does the text describe further record of the Torah after inscription of the Ten Commandments on the tablets (*Ex 34:28*)? The story of the people's wandering in the wilderness forms the larger part of the contents of the Torah. The writing down of these events is mentioned in the Book of Numbers:

Moses wrote down their starting points, stage by stage, by command of the Lord; and these are their stages... (*Num 33:2*)

Notice that any recording was done only by God's command, being inspired by the Holy Spirit:

...Because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (*2 Pet 1:21*)

Hence, in the Book of Numbers we find evidence of the recording of all the events following Moses' ascension of Mount Sinai up to the dividing of the lands east of the Jordan between the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh (*Ex 24:4 - Num 33:2*). The rest of the text was being put down stage by stage until Moses' death. For example, there is evidence of the Lord's direct command concerning the recording of the "song of Moses," which contains a prophecy relating to the Israel's future history:

Now therefore write this song, and teach it to the Israelites; put it in their mouths, in order that this song may be a witness for me against the Israelites. (*Deut 31:19*)

Still earlier the major part of the Torah (“this law”) was written down and given to the levitical priests and the elders who were supposed to preserve it:

Then Moses wrote down this law, and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. (*Deut 31:9*)

The only thing that Moses had to do now was to put down the above-mentioned “song,” which can be found in Chapter 32 of Deuteronomy:

That very day Moses wrote this song and taught it to the Israelites. (*Deut 31:22*)

Finally, Moses finished writing down the whole Torah “to the very end”:

When Moses had finished writing down in a book the words of this law to the very end,
Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying,
“Take this book of the law and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God; let it remain there as a witness against you. (*Deut 31:24-26*)

As to the last part of the Torah, which contains the description of Moses’ death, there are two points of view. According to one legend, it was put down by Joshua, who thus finished the text of the whole Pentateuch, according to another one, it was Moses himself. The latter does not seem impossible considering the fact that Moses described in detail the future events, which happened several millennia later...

Torah is mentioned in the book of Deuteronomy as one complete Book that was to be given to the future king, who was to read it and to correlate his actions with it:

When he [the king] has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him in the presence of the levitical priests.
It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes... (*Deut 17:18-19*)

As such, the Torah is referred to in the Book of Joshua:

This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. (*Josh 1:8*)

cf. Josh 22:5.

It is a copy of the Torah that was written on the stones by Joshua (probably, he wrote a copy of the most important commandments), according to the Lord’s instruction given through Moses (*Deut 27:2-8*):

And there, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. (*Josh 8:32*)

Moses’ successor read the Torah before all the people:

And afterward he read all the words of the law, blessings and curses, according to all that is written in the book of the law.
There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the aliens who resided among them. (*Josh 8:34-35*)

The Book of Joshua, which describes the conquest of Canaan and which was compiled by Joshua himself, was included “in the book of the Torah of God,” i.e. it was written down in a scroll after the already existing Torah:

Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak in the sanctuary of the Lord. (*Josh 24:26*)

The Law of God given through Moses, which was written in full and had the highest, the holiest authority, from this time onwards was known in all the periods of Israel’s history. For example, King David just before his death gives to his successor Solomon the following admonition:

“I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, be courageous, and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as is written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn. (*1 Kings 2:2-3*)

Under David’s descendants who ruled over Judah the Torah was well-known. For example, regulations relating to sacrifices and duties of the priests in the Jerusalem Temple were in keeping with the prescriptions of the Torah:

Jehoiada assigned the care of the house of the Lord to the levitical priests whom David had organized to be in charge of the house of the Lord, to offer burnt offerings to the Lord, as is written in the law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, according to the order of David. (*2 Chr 23:18*)

Literal quotations from the Law of God can be found in the historic books of the Scripture. For instance, King Amaziah, having taken vengeance on those who had murdered his father Joash,

...Did not put their children to death, according to what is written in the law, in the book of Moses, where the Lord commanded, “The parents shall not be put to death for the children, of the children be put to death for the parents; but all shall be put to death for their own sins.” (*2 Chr 25:4*)

Under the rule of the righteous King Hezekiah temple worship was restored according to the ordinances of God's Torah:

The contribution of the king from his own possessions was for the burnt offerings: the burnt offerings of morning and evening, and the burnt offerings for the Sabbaths, the new moons, and the appointed festivals, as it is written in the law of the Lord.

He commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion due to the priests and the Levites, so that they might devote themselves to the law of the Lord. (*2 Chr 31:3*)

The righteous King Josiah also celebrated the Passover in accordance with the law written in the Torah:

They set aside the burnt offerings so that they might distribute them according to the groupings of the ancestral houses of the people, to offer to the Lord, as is written in the book of Moses. And they did the same with the bulls. (*2 Chr 35:12*)

All the prophets who lived before the Babylonian Captivity preach, taking it for granted that the people and the rulers know God's will expressed in the Torah. Isaiah rebukes wicked judges and threatens them with severe punishment from above because they have rejected the Torah:

Therefore, as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will become rotten, and their blossom go up like dust; for they have rejected the instruction of the Lord of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. (*Isa 5:24*)

Hosea speaks on behalf of the Lord, mentioning the written Torah as something that everybody knows well:

Though I write for him the multitude of my instructions, they are regarded as a strange thing. (*Hos 8:12*)

Amos speaks of the rejection of the Torah by Jews as a transgression:

Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have rejected the law of the Lord... (*Am 2:4*)

In the 6th century BC, not long before the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians, the prophet Jeremiah proclaims that a great disaster will befall the people due to their opposition to the teaching of the Torah, well known to all the inhabitants of Judah:

Who is wise enough to understand this? To whom has the mouth of the Lord spoken, so that they may declare it? Why is the land ruined and laid waste like a wilderness, so that no one passes through?

And the Lord says: Because they have forsaken my law that I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, or walked in accordance with it... (*Jer 9:12-13*)

The prophet intentionally stresses that the authorities are familiar with God's Law:

"...Let me go to the rich and speak to them; surely they know the way of the Lord, the law of their God." But they all alike had broken the yoke, they had burst the bonds. (*Jer 5:5*)

Ezekiel, the younger contemporary of Jeremiah, also prophesies that Israel's land will be punished exactly for the following fact:

Its priests have done violence to my teaching and have profaned my holy things; they have made no distinctions between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. (*Ezek 22:26*)

Many places in the Psalter show that the Torah, the Book of the Law, in the time of David was generally held in great respect and the whole nation was familiar with it. For example, Psalm 78 says about the Lord that

He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children... (*Ps 78:5*)

Psalm 19 compares God's Law to the life-giving sun:

Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple;

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes... (*Ps 19:6-8*)

Psalm 119 is entirely composed of the verses that sing of the greatness, the perfection and the miracles of God's Torah:

Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. (*Ps 119:18*)

Solomon in his Book of Proverbs speaks of the happiness that results from keeping God's Law:

Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint, but happy are those who keep the law. (*Prov 29:18*)

There is no need to emphasize that in the post-exilic period of Jewish history the Torah was regarded as of paramount importance in the life of the people. Numerous places of the Holy Scriptures testify to this fact (*Ezra 3:2, 6:18, 7:26; Neh 8:2-8; Dan 9:12-13* etc.). Malachi — the last of the great prophets whose books were included in the Canon — exclaims on behalf of the Lord in the end of his preaching:

Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. (*Mal 4:4*)

In the same way, none of the New Testament writers, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit, ever had any doubt as to the Mosaic authorship of the Torah. Jesus Christ repeatedly testifies to it. For example, answering the question of the Pharisees Jesus alludes to the Law of Moses:

He answered them, "What did Moses command you?"

They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.

But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you..." (*Mk 10:3-5*)

Thus, Jesus and the Synoptic Evangelists unequivocally attested the Mosaic authorship (cf. Mt 19:7-8; Lk 20:37, 24:27). The Evangelist John, Jesus' beloved disciple, also states that

The law indeed was given through Moses... (*Jn 1:17*)

A brief survey of those places of the Scriptures that attest the record of the Torah by Moses, the ancient tradition which has been reverentially kept throughout the centuries and which confirms his authorship, as well as the methods of handing down the text of the Torah by the scribes—sofrim (mentioned in lectures on the Book of Genesis) — all these facts again and again convince us of the invariability, authenticity, completeness and perfection of that the text of the Pentateuch that by God's mercy is until now at our disposal. No disasters, wars, fires, destructions, captivities or expulsions could destroy the main treasure of world culture, the most precious property of the people of Israel, the Church and the whole humanity — the great Book of the Lord!

Lecture 4

LOVE FOR THE STRANGER. BIBLICAL FESTIVALS AS A PROJECTION OF ETERNITY

The instructions of Chapter 19 of the Book of Leviticus relate to interpersonal relations. It is here that the well-known "Golden rule" of biblical ethics is stated for the first time: "Love your neighbor, as yourself" (Lev 19:18). Whom should I consider my "neighbor"? Is he my relative, a person belonging to my people, a man living next door or a friend? Everyone answers this question according to the level of his spiritual comprehension. Human soul should pass an immense way starting from seeing its neighbor only in a kinsman, colleague or coreligionist, up to perceiving the whole humanity as an integral unity...

Let us look how this subject is presented in the Bible.

The definition of a neighbor given in the chapter under consideration goes far beyond the notions of tribe and people:

...The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. (*Lev 19:34*)

The concept of "neighbor," according to the Bible, is deprived not only of national, but also of social coloring, it encloses all members of the given society without exception:

The rich and the poor have this in common the Lord is the maker of them all. (*Prov 22:2*)

Answering the question of a certain lawyer (that is, an expert and interpreter of the Torah) — "But who is my neighbor?" — Jesus tells the parable of the Merciful Samaritan, who saved a man belonging to a different tribe and a different religion (Lk 10:30-37). Concluding his parable, Jesus calls the lawyer (and any other man through him) "to become a neighbor," actively, to anyone who requires help:

...Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (*Lk 10:37*)

Thus, Jesus teaches: your neighbor is not the one who owes you his assistance, but the one whom you yourself are able to help.

However, the commandment "love your neighbor, as yourself" (Lev 19:18) remains only an attractive option until one obeys it in practice. To

follow it human soul should be prepared not only doctrinally, but also by experience: we are supposed not only to comprehend mentally the essence of this commandment, but also to continue purifying our hearts in order to be able to obey the commandment joyfully. All the previous instructions of Chapter 19 also serve such preparation. They create a context of “The Golden Rule” of ethics:

The Lord spoke to Moses saying: speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. (*Lev 19:1–2*)

The Hebrew word קדוש *ka`dosh*, “holy,” means “separated [for the service to the higher realm].” By immersing himself in the elementary physical existence, man likens himself to an animal, and even a spark of love to his fellowman is not able to arise in such a state. Separation from the elementary physical existence (that is, identifying oneself as a spiritual being) means involvement in higher aspects of existence, reminds us of the Lord, likens us to him. These are the initial terms of genuine love: “...You shall be holy, for I am holy...”

The reminder of the Fifth and Fourth Commandments follows:

You shall each revere your mother and father, and you shall keep my sabbaths: I am the Lord your God. (*Lev 19:3*)

It is in the family that each of us receives his primary emotional and intellectual education. This education is based on “reverence” (Heb. יראָה *yi`rah*), which can be rendered as “awe,” “deep respect”) of one’s father and mother, whose authority, indisputable in early childhood, subsequently transforms into intelligent love and respect. Parents are the first objects of child’s gratitude, tenderness and therefore love. Without the religious and moral tradition transmitted from generation to generation by means of family education each person individually and the whole society in general quickly enough (sometimes within few years) fall into brutal, animal like behavior. No need to say that in such context love for one’s fellowman becomes impossible. Therefore, the reminder of the Fifth Commandment precedes the words about love.

Unlike in Ex 20:12 and Deut 5:16, here the mother is mentioned before the father: it is she who supervises over the very first “moral experiments” of the child. Besides, one should revere both his parents equally; therefore, the mother is mentioned sometimes after the father, sometimes before him.

However, why does the Fourth Commandment — the precept of Sabbath — follow here the Fifth one? The reason is that the child’s participation in his family’s life precedes his inclusion into social and religious life. In his family he receives the first instructions in piety, including observance of the Sabbath day. Without revering the aged, it is impossible to start awing the Most High, and, therefore, “to enter his rest” (Heb 4:3).

How does the observance of the Sabbath correspond to loving one’s neighbor? The ability to identify oneself with other people’s troubles is the ultimate condition of love and it can be achieved only at a certain spiritual level. This level is obtained through prayer and direct fellowship with the

Most High and through studying his word. This is also the purpose of the Sabbath rest.

Further, we find a following caution:

Do not turn to idols or make cast images for yourselves: I am the Lord your God. (*Lev 19:4*)

Having chosen the way of love, one should not escape into the deceitfulness of idols. Such escaping is a betrayal of love relationship. The way of love is a way of sacrifice — those who love would give up even their lives for their beloved.

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. (*Jn 15:13*)

The next verse of the Book of Leviticus deals exactly with the same issue, telling us about the sacrifice, which is offered to receive Lord’s blessing and to make one’s spiritual way successful:

When you offer a sacrifice of well-being to the Lord, offer it in such a way that it is acceptable on your behalf. (*Lev 19:5*)

The instruction to eat the meat of the offering in the shortest time (vv. 6–8) teaches us to be fast in doing God’s will. If we are not zealous in doing his will, we cannot truly love our fellowmen.

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest.

You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God. (*Lev 19:9–10*)

Helping the poor is an effective means of developing love for one’s fellowman. Without support rendered to the poor, a call for love remains only a bare declaration.

You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another.

And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the Lord.

You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. (*Lev 19:11–13*)

Love is the supreme state of the spirit. However, you cannot reach the pinnacle without starting from the bottom. Love is impossible without respect; the latter is impossible without honesty in interpersonal relations, without full recognition of others’ rights and caring for their interests. All this is incompatible with deceit and gaining benefit to the detriment of others.

Immanuel Kant paraphrased “The Golden rule” this way: “Each man should be a purpose for another and never a tool.” (The phrase is translated

from Russian). Without following this rule, one cannot even speak about love for the neighbor.

You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. (*Lev 19:14*)

Our tolerance towards others' needs, demerits and imperfections is an indispensable condition of love. Dealing with someone we must take into account his background and inner state. This is also a figurative meaning of this verse, for deafness and blindness are not always literal and physical...

You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. (*Lev 19:15*)

Just as the welfare of any society depends on justice of its courts, so spiritual prosperity of an individual is connected with the kind of judgment he passes on his fellowmen and the kind of measure he uses towards them:

...For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. (*Mt 7:2*)

Loving one's neighbor is impossible without respect for his life and dignity, without considering them to be of supreme value:

You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the Lord. (*Lev 19:16*)

A "slanderer" (Heb. רכיל *ra'chil*) — "the one who goes from one place to another [with unpleasant news about somebody]," "spreader of malicious gossip," "informer") not only mistreats his fellowman's dignity, but also finds particular pleasure in spreading abusive things about him. It is not by chance that the second part of this verse speaks of "profiting by the blood of your neighbor," because spreading around malicious things about a person can cause him fatal harm: the discredited person can fall gravely ill or commit suicide; such denunciation can provoke his haters to attack him, etc. The literal rendering of this part of the verse — לא תעמד על-דם רעך — would be: "...do not stand at the blood [or: on the blood] of your neighbor," that is, do not be careless, do not stay idle if he is facing a fatal danger; and all the more, do not build your prosperity on his sufferings! Sharing someone's sufferings, treating them as your own is the next step towards genuine love...

You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. (*Lev 19:17*)

Love is the opposite of hostility; hence, anyone who rids his heart of any kind of hatred, unfriendliness and even disappointment towards his fellowman frees room for love. Sincere talk can also be helpful, for it assumes confidential relations between people when any admonition is perceived as an expression of friendship and care, not arrogance or

malevolence. Besides, here one can see a prohibition to harbor an unuttered discontent towards your neighbor: the complaints should be spoken out, but the one who is being admonished should remain your "brother."

And finally, "the Golden Rule" itself:

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. (*Lev 19:18*)

The "focal" words of the verse are anticipated by the warning: do not take vengeance or bear a grudge. Love does not take vengeance, but forgives: it is incompatible with rancor (1 Cor 13:4-7).

As for the phrase "any of your people," it should be understood, as it was mentioned before, according to the level of one's spiritual development. For those who have reached the state in which they are able to perceive the integrity of mankind, the whole humanity is one family of Adam's descendants, bearing God's image:

From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth... (*Acts 17:26*)

Verse 18 includes an admonition not to take vengeance or bear a grudge, which has a ring of the words of Jesus:

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... (*Mt 5:44*)

This is a good example showing that the major New Testament doctrines are entirely based on the Old Testament and that the very preaching of Jesus is a spiritual interpretation of the Torah and other scriptural books...

The mystery of love for one's neighbor is rooted in the original integrity of all human souls, which once abode together, constituting one organically congruent unity:

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. (*Jn 1:3-4*)

This is said about the Word of God, by means of which the world came into existence. In this Word all immortal radiant souls (Greek φως των ανθρωπων *fos ton an thropon*) — "the light of men") constituted one "life" (Greek ζωη; *zo eh*). This integrity of souls was destroyed by the Fall and now is gradually being restored in Christ, "the last Adam" (1 Cor 15:45-49): every soul that returns to God in repentance takes its place in the "body of Christ," becoming its integral part and joining other saved souls by means of love (1 Cor 12:12-14).

Thus, love for one's neighbor, which is potentially inherent in every person, is not only rooted in the integrity of the souls that existed before the Fall, but also anticipates the future oneness of the saved in the "body of Christ."

The spiritual image of an individual is reflected in his fellowman's heart. The purer, the less obscured this heart, this "inner mirror" of one's soul is, the clearer is the reflection.

Just as water reflects the face, so one human heart reflects another.
(*Prov 27:19*)

However, if the heart of the loving person is not properly purified, would he not thrust on his neighbor, whom he loves "as himself," things that he unreasonably considers to be good? For example, a drunkard can accustom his neighbor to drinking, a drug addict — to drugs, etc. In order to avoid such interpretation of the mentioned commandment, the following warning is given:

You shall keep my statutes... (*Lev 19:19*)

The examples of such statutes follow these words:

...You shall not let your animals breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall you put on a garment made of two different materials. (*Lev 19:19*)

In the original the word כִּלְאִים *kil'layim* — "restraining," "hampering" [each other], is used here three times. It is translated by three different phrases — "with a different kind," "with two kinds of seed," "of two different materials."

According to the laws created by God two different breeds of cattle cannot have posterity or their posterity is born defective (for example, mules, the offspring of a female horse and a male donkey, are born sterile); diverse kinds of seeds sown together can hamper each other's growth; according to the ancient commentators, garments made of mixed woolen and linen threads are injurious to health, etc. However, biblical precepts of "killayim" have a general meaning as well: it is forbidden to do anything that contradicts God given laws. It is no accident that in the given verse the word חֻקַּת *chuk'kot* — "statutes" — is used again: here it applies to the laws of nature, which are established by God, as well as the laws given to men.

Thus, being considered along with the previous commandment concerning love for one's neighbor, the precept relating to forbidden combinations "killayim" teaches us that love for another person must be expressed in such forms and within such bounds that assist his good and are congruent with physical and moral laws established by the Most High.

Further precepts of this chapter demonstrate that there is a close affinity between physical and moral laws. Thus, for instance, the law concerning a seducer of a slave woman designated for another man is placed next to the instruction relating to eating the fruit of the trees (vv. 20–25). Having both spiritual and physical nature one should get to know the correlation between ethical precepts and physical laws.

The same chapter also contains the following instruction:

You shall not eat anything with its blood. You shall not practice augury or witchcraft. (*Lev 19:26*)

Breaking the commandment to abstain from eating blood one makes his inner world accessible for unclean spirits where they gradually can gain dominion. Eating blood disposes one to turn to "other gods" (that is, evil spirits) by means of augury and witchcraft. The phrase "to practice augury" translates the Hebrew verb נָחַשׁ *na'chash* — literally, "to whisper," "to hiss." Besides, "Nachash" is a biblical name of the serpent that tempted Eve, i.e. the name of the supreme evil spirit that tries to indulge humans into witchcraft. The kind of sorcery that is called "nechushim" (from the root word "nachash") consists in chanting incantations, which can evoke demonic presence. The phrase "to practice witchcraft" translates Hebrew עָנָן *a'nan* — literally, "to envelop," "to cover with clouds," "to dim." It implies the kind of sorcery that darkens one's mind, obstructs one's emotions and subjugates one's will to the sorcerer's control (see Deut 18:10–12 and a corresponding note in Lecture 13). All kinds of witchcraft are forbidden by the Most High once and for all; breaking this prohibition is a grave sin which deserves death penalty:

Do not turn to mediums or wizards; do not seek them out, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God. (*Lev 19:31*)

Pagan rites in which people express excessive grief over the dead and which are meant to establish contact with dark spirits are forbidden as well:

You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard.

You shall not make any gashes in your flesh for the dead or tattoo any marks upon you: I am the Lord. (*Lev 19:27–28*)

Let us emphasize that these prohibitions refer to the rituals of sorcery and have nothing to do with regular hair cutting, shaving, surgery etc. Rituals of this kind were practiced by the priests of Baal. The biblical illustration can be found in the episode when the prophet Elijah challenges the Canaanite priests:

Then they cried aloud and, as was their custom, they cut themselves with swords and lances until the blood gushed out over them. (*1 Kings 18:28*)

This example teaches us once again that causing harm to one's health (lacerating one's own body) can be connected with worshipping unclean spirits. Moreover, if someone is determined to mistreat his own body, he (or she) will not see anything wrong in maiming another person.

...The Lord's commands are the same for the whole creation; they embrace both the outer material world and the inner world of any individual:

I made the earth, and created humankind upon it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host. (*Isa 45:12*)

The Canaanite worship of idols was accompanied not only with sorcery and lacerating the body, but also with cult prostitution. Therefore the next prohibition reads:

Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute, that the land not become prostituted and full of depravity. (*Lev 19:29*)

Instead of idolatry the Bible offers a true reverence of God, which is expressed in sanctifying Sabbaths and worshipping the Creator in his Temple:

You shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord. (*Lev 19:30*)

The well-being of God's people consists in respecting the rights of each individual, both the noble and socially deprived. The aged are held in great honor; their life experience and their role in passing tradition from one generation to another grant them a right to be most revered:

You shall rise before the aged, and defer to the old; and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. (*Lev 19:32*)

An alien is considered the most socially deprived member of Israel's society, for he has got no kinsmen, no roots among the native residents. He needs to be treated with special care, so that he may feel himself a full member of God's people:

When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien.

The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. (*Lev 19:33-34*)

Let us emphasize that formal equating of aliens' rights with the rights of native-born Israelites is not sufficient: only genuine love expressed by people around them is able to make these aliens turn to God with their whole heart...

Finally, of great importance are those statutes that are called to regulate public relations in general:

You shall not cheat in measuring length, weight, or quantity.

You shall have honest balances, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. (*Lev 19:35-36*)

This should be understood not only as honesty while literal weighing and measuring (ephah and hin are a dry and a liquid measures of capacity accordingly), but in a more general sense as irreproachable mutual honesty in every sphere of life. In conclusion it is added: "I am the Lord your God..." — as if a seal of the Legislator has been put, a seal that certifies the great value of the given precept. Those who deal dishonestly with their fellowmen thus encroach on the rights of God himself.

We have already discussed the contents of Chapter 20: it is closely connected with the precepts of Chapter 18.

Chapter 21 is devoted to the matters of ritual cleanness of Aaronic priests (cohanim) and to the acceptability of their service in various cases. The observance of holiness, i.e. separation from any kind of impurity, is shown as a matter of paramount importance for a priest:

And you shall treat them as holy, since they offer the food of your God; they shall be holy to you, for I am the Lord your God, I who sanctify you, am holy. (*Lev 21:8*)

The observance of ritual cleanness implies abstaining from any contact with a dead body. A priest should constantly try to keep himself undefiled. Therefore, he can participate in a funeral ceremony only in the case of his nearest kin (vv. 1-4). As for the high priest (כהן גדול *co`hen ga`dol* — literally, "the great priest"), he is forbidden to go to the cemetery, even if his parents are to be buried (vv. 10-11). He is obliged to stay at the sanctuary all the time:

He shall not go outside the sanctuary and thus profane the sanctuary of his God; for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is upon him: I am the Lord. (*Lev 21:12*)

The high priest symbolizes the higher aspect of our essence — our spirit, which has a calling to serve the Lord incessantly:

You make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers. (*Ps 104:4*)

In the given verse the English word "winds" translates Hebrew רוחות *ru`chot*, which can also designate "spirits."

Having a ministry similar to that of the angels, human spirit should not leave its inner sanctuary and be exposed to anything "dead," i.e. something that does not accept life from God. It should constantly burn with love, with zeal for the divine commandments (Rom 12:11).

The priests should not imitate idol-worshippers in any way. Unlike the latter they have a prescription to keep both internal and external grandeur:

They shall not make bald spots upon their heads, or shave off the edges of their beards, or make any gashes in their flesh. (*Lev 21:5*)

Notice that it is not forbidden to "shave one's head," but to make קרחה *qar`chah* — "bald spot," i. e. to disfigure one's appearance intentionally (practice that is required by some pagan cults and that is reviving today in some trends of fashion which are directly or indirectly connected with Satanism).

The requirement of cleanness applies also to the marriages of the priests:

They shall not marry a prostitute or a woman who has been defiled; neither shall they marry a woman divorced from her husband. For they are holy to their God. (*Lev 21:7*)

As to the high priest, the demands made of him are even higher:

He shall marry only a woman who is a virgin.

A widow, or a divorced woman, or a woman who has been defiled, a prostitute, these he shall not marry. He shall marry a virgin of his own kin... (Lev 21:13-14)

Therefore in the New Testament the church, which is “holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27), is called the “bride” of the Lamb, who is “the high priest of our confession” (Heb 3:1). The true Church has been preparing itself for this condition of being without blemish during the centuries of history — right up to the day when “the voice of a great multitude” will be heard (Rev 19:6):

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready;

To her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. (Rev 19:7-8)

This chapter contains other important statutes concerning priests:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Speak to Aaron and say: No one of your offspring throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the food of his God... (Lev 21:16-17)

Blindness, lameness, ugliness, etc. (vv. 18-20) are mentioned among these “blemishes” (Heb. מום *moom* — “physical defect”). A priest, who is always in the public eye while ministering, should have a pleasant appearance; besides, he has to cope with many duties and his physical defects can make it difficult.

However, these words have another meaning as well: only that spirit which has reached certain perfection can be allowed to serve the Creator; and may not the person with spiritual defects appear in front of the altar until he or she is healed:

...But he shall not come near the curtain or approach the altar, because he has a blemish, that he may not profane my sanctuaries; for I am the Lord; I sanctify them. (Lev 21:23)

At the same time, a priest with a “blemish” is permitted to partake of the sacrifices brought by the people:

He may eat the food of his God, of the most holy as well as of the holy... (Lev 21:22)

The same is with the spirit of believer, which has not been yet purified of its sinful defects, but receives its share of divine mercies, because other people intercede on his behalf in their prayers.

The discussion of ritual cleanness of the priests goes on in Chapter 22:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Direct Aaron and his sons to deal carefully with the sacred donations of

the people of Israel, which they dedicate to me, so that they may not profane my holy name; I am the Lord. (Lev 22:1-2)

A priest, who is about to perform his duties in a state of ceremonial defilement, insults the name of the Most High. In this case “that person shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord,” i.e. he will be discharged — exterminated by the divine power. A priest who is affected with leprosy or has an emission of semen as well as the one who has touched anything dead or tasted unclean food — “that which died or was torn by wild animals” (vv. 3-8) — is considered defiled.

In a spiritual sense, leprosy stands for sin. Any discharge from the flesh is a waste of spiritual strength, squandering it “in vain.” Touching a corpse is a symbol of a close contact with something spiritually dead. Finally, eating carrion symbolizes “taking in” mortal ideas of denial of God, revolt against him, misanthropy, etc. Any such state defiles the spirit and prevents it from performing religious rites until it is fully purified:

...He shall be clean; and afterward he may eat of the sacred donations, for they are his food. (Lev 22:7)

Eating of the sacred donations means joining in the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. Such joining in, according to the Gospel, is available only to the true disciples of Jesus. It is unattainable for “those outside,” which perceive only physical, “outside” aspect of their life and do not care about internal matters:

And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables;

In order that ‘they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand...’ (Mk 4:11-12)

The “lay person” (Heb. זר *zar* — “strange, alien”) is forbidden to taste of sacred donations (sacrificial offerings) even if this “lay person” closely communicates with the priest:

No lay person shall eat of the sacred donations. No bound or hired servant of the priests shall eat of the sacred donations... (Lev 22:10)

A person who has joined in the mysteries of the Kingdom of God should not make them known to those people with whom he is connected only externally, not spiritually:

The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes his covenant known to them. (Ps 25:14)

In the given text the English word “friendship” translates Hebrew סוד *sod* — “mystery.”

The case is not the same with the household of the priest, including a person acquired “by purchase”: having become a slave for a while, he is brought up by the priest as a full member of the family:

If a priest acquires anyone by purchase, the person may eat of them; and those that are born in his house may eat of his food. (*Lev 22:11*)

A member of household is the one whose spirit is kindred to a believer's spirit. That is why he can perceive the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. However, having ceased to be a member of household, he (or she) loses the right to eat of the sacred donations:

If a priest's daughter marries a layman, she shall not eat of the offering of the sacred donations;

But if a priest's daughter is widowed or divorced, without offspring, and returns to her father's house, as in her youth, she may eat of her father's food. No lay person shall eat of it. (*Lev 22:12-13*)

Marriage with a "layman" (i.e. the person who does not belong to the priestly family) symbolizes the fact that the soul falls away from the communion with saints and immerses into "the vanity of this world." Only having returned to a former state, i.e. after full repentance, the soul can again partake of the sacred things.

Not only priests should keep purity. The same demand of purity is made of sacrificial animals:

...Anything blind, or injured, or maimed, or having a discharge or an itch or scabs — these you shall not offer to the Lord or put any of them on the altar as offerings by fire to the Lord... (*Lev 22:22*)

Only best things are to be offered to God. Remember that Abel brought an offering "of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions" and the Lord had regard for him, not for Cain (*Gen 4:3-4*).

In a spiritual sense, a sacrifice without blemish signifies a prayer:

Take words with you and return to the Lord; say to him, "Take away all guilt; accept that which is good, and we will offer the fruit of our lips..." (*Hos 14:2*)

The Hebrew original of the fragment translated as "the fruit of our lips" is פִּרְיֵם שִׁפְתֵינוּ *pha'rim sepha'teynu*, which literally means "the calves of our lips," i.e. the sacrifice, offered by means of speaking.

A prayer can be "blind," "injured," "ugly" etc., if it is said with a vicious, purely selfish motive, if our intentions are malicious, if we pray without humility, forgetting about our fellowmen. It is forbidden to offer "sacrifices" of that sort.

However, not only prayers, but also good deeds can be our sacrifices:

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. (*Heb 13:16*)

What "defect" can be seen in good deeds? If the latter are performed with a selfish motive, not in the name of the Creator, such "sacrifices" are not pleasing to God:

You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable in your behalf. (*Lev 22:20*)

"Sacrifices" that are offered without a volitional effort and are deprived of an internal "charge," which is capable to produce further kindness, are not pleasing to God. Such powerless "sacrifices" are symbolized by castrated animals:

Any animal that has its testicles bruised or crushed or torn or cut, you shall not offer to the Lord; such you shall not do within your land, nor shall you accept any such animals from a foreigner to offer as food to your God; since they are mutilated, with a blemish in them, they shall not be accepted in your behalf. (*Lev 22:24-25*)

The Most High prohibits to deprive living creatures in general (and humans especially!) of their productive force — in both direct and figurative senses. An attempt to suppress a talent in a person, to extinguish some ability granted from above, to prevent it from being developed or becoming known, is also a violation of this instruction. The main reason of such attitude is envy, which is described this way:

...But through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it. (*Wis. of Solomon 2:24*)

This verse states quite clearly that those who belong to the devil's party are afflicted with envy, and that envy brings death...

The instructions concerning sacrifices are concluded by the following generalizing verse:

You shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel: I am the Lord; I sanctify you, I who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the Lord. (*Lev 22:32-33*)

A person sanctified by the Lord in his or her turn should sanctify God's name. Mutual sanctification (of the people by the Lord and of the Lord by the people) is indeed the purpose of the exodus from the land of Egypt — the land of sin and darkness. In other words, man's abiding in the Lord and the Lord's abiding in man is the purpose of the exodus.

...Chapter 23 is devoted to the festivals of the Lord — "the holy seasons": the instructions concerning the holiness of one's life in general are followed by the regulations connected with special sanctification of major "times and seasons." One can regard the contents of this chapter as an extensive commentary on the Fourth Commandment — of the Sabbath as a sanctified day, separated from routine, devoted to the worship of the Most High.

Annual festivals are also called "sabbaths," irrespective of the day of the week on which they fall, for on these days it is also prescribed to "rest" and to have a special solemn divine service (for example, the Day of Atonement is called "sabbath," although it can fall on a weekday — *Lev 23:32*). Therefore, in the list of biblical holidays weekly Sabbath is mentioned in the

first place, as a “starting-point,” “a spiritual center” of holy celebration in general:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: These are the appointed festivals of the Lord that you shall proclaim as holy convocations, my appointed festivals.

Six days shall work be done; but the seventh day is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work: it is a sabbath to the Lord throughout your settlements. (*Lev 23:1-3*)

The word “festival” translates Hebrew מועד *mo`ed* — “appointed time,” “certain season.” In the Book of Genesis, where we read about the creation of luminaries, it is emphasized that they are intended for marking “the seasons” (מועדים *moa`dim*) — “certain times,” “festivals”):

And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and for years... (*Gen 1:14*)

It means that the dates of biblical festivals should be determined both by the moon and by the sun, for we are told about the creation of “two great lights” to rule the day and the night (*Gen 1:16*). The following psalm mentions a special connection of the festivals with lunar cycles:

You have made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting. (*Ps 104:19*)

The word “seasons” used here translates the same Hebrew word מועדים *moa`dim* — “holidays.” However, the fact that the sun is mentioned here along with the moon shows that the biblical calendar is based on both lunar and solar cycles. Wherever it is said about celebrations on such-and-such day of such-and-such month, the word חדש *chodesh* — “month” is used, which means literally “new moon,” i.e. the appearance of a thin crescent. At the same time, festivals should not fall on different seasons as it occurs, for example, in the Moslem calendar, which is based solely on lunar months.

The lunar year (i.e. a year of 12 lunar or synodic months, each of which corresponds to the period of revolution of the moon round the earth) consists of approximately 354,37 days, while the solar year (a period of the earth’s revolution round the sun) consists of approximately 365,24 days.

If the lunar cycle is not brought in line with the solar one, there will be the shortage of eleven days between the time of festivals and the seasons every subsequent year. Every three years this shortage will be more than a month. Thus, several years later a spring festival will fall on winter etc. This contradicts biblical instructions. For example, we have a following regulation concerning celebration of the Passover:

Observe the month of Abib by keeping the Passover for the Lord your God, for in the month of Abib the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night. (*Deut 16:1*)

“The month of Abib” is a translation of Hebrew חדש האביב *chodesh haa`viv* — “the month of the ripening ears” or “a spring month,” that is,

the first spring month, when the barley is in the ear (cf. *Ex 9:31*, where we read that just before the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt “the barley was in the ear”). Hence, the Passover should always fall on the first spring month. There are similar instructions concerning other biblical feasts: for example, Pentecost is celebrated seven weeks after the beginning of the wheat season (*Lev 23:10-21*, *Deut 16:9-12*), and the Festival of Booths — after the autumn harvest (*Lev 23:39-43*, *Deut 16:13-15*).

Since the mentioned kinds of agricultural work are connected with certain seasons, in order to tie biblical festivals to these seasons the years are counted by the sun. A special cycle of 19 years is used (the so called Metonic cycle), in which the 3rd, the 6th, the 8th, the 11th, the 14th, the 17th and the 19th years are leap years, that is, they have an interposed (thirteenth) lunar month. The rest of the years in the cycle consist of 12 lunar months. An interposed month, according to a tradition (borrowed in Babylon) that developed later, is called אדר שני *A`dar shay`nee* — “a second Adar.”

The names of lunar months acquired by the Jews during the Babylonian Exile (6th century BC), are mentioned in the latter scriptural books (*Neh 1:1*, *2:1*; *Esth 3:7*, *8:9*, *9:1*, *15*, *19* etc.). In the Torah months are named according to their ordinal numbers, thus the annual festivals fall on the first (Passover), the third (Pentecost) and the seventh (the Festival of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Festival of Booths) months. The latest names for these months (that go back to the Akkadian language) are Nisan, Sivan and Tishri. The Scripture mentions also some pre-exilic names: thus, Nisan corresponds to the month of Abib (“head of grain”: *Ex 13:4*, *23:15*, *34:18*; *Deut 16:1*); the second spring month was called Ziv (“shine,” “flowering;” *1 Kings 6:1*, *37*); Tishri — the seventh month counting from spring or the first autumn month — was called Ethanim (“strongholds” or “floods;” *1 Kings 8:2*); the eighth month counting from spring or the second autumn month was Bul (“ripening,” “fertility”: *1 Kings 6:38*).

The Sabbath is mentioned before the rest of the festivals (*Lev 23:3*); hence, the instructions concerning the observance of the Sabbath rest apply to other festivals as well. Indeed, we read about each of them: “...you shall not work at your occupations...” (*Lev 23:7-36*). The instructions concerning holy convocations, prayer, sacrifices and studying the Law (*Lev 23:3*) should be observed during all holy times (v. 4). Other instructions vary depending on the meaning and importance of each festival.

Talking about holy times, we will discuss their connection with historical events, and will examine their prototypical meaning, which serves as the indication of the future, of which the festivals are a “shadow” or a “projection” (cf. *Col 2:16-17*).

In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, there shall be a passover offering to the Lord,

And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the festival of unleavened bread to the Lord; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread... (*Lev 23:5-6*)

A Passover sacrifice (פסח *pe`sach*) — “passing by,” “passing over” or “mercy”) was offered during the first of the annual festivals celebrated in

memory of the exodus from Egypt. The Festival of Passover (see vol. II, Lect. 4) is also called “the Festival of Unleavened Bread.” It always falls on the full moon on the eve of the 15th of Abib or Nisan, i.e. on the beginning of spring when the trees are in blossom. In the Book of Genesis (18:14) this day is named מוֹעֵד *mo'ed* — “holiday” and עַתְּ הַיְּהִי *et hay-ah* — “time alive,” “time of revival.” It was during the Passover days that Abraham and Lot baked unleavened bread (compare Gen 18:6 and 19:3 with Ex 12:18–19 and Lev 23:6). The blossoming, “revival” of nature coincides with the “revival” of the people of Israel — their escape from Egyptian bondage. The annual Festival of Passover reminds us of the opportunity of the “exodus” from a state of sin and death to “the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). Each believer on the individual level should “come out of Egypt” and be restored spiritually, perceiving himself as a participant of the great exodus from the darkness to the light:

You shall tell your child on that day, ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt. (Ex 13:8)

Passover, “the time of revival,” is also the day that commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was executed on the eve of the first day of the Passover — the 14th of Nisan, and rose from the dead on the 17th of Nisan — on “the day of Preparation” (Jn 19:14, 20:1. See also vol. II, Lect. 5). At the same time, it is the festival of the resurrection of the souls of those who follow his teaching and are united with him in “one body” (Rom 6:4–5).

In this festival all the archetypes of deliverance, revival and salvation, shown in the Scripture, meet in a focus like rays. The future gathering of the people of God and their “coming out of the land of the north” are also prophetically presented in the Passover celebration:

Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, “As the Lord lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt,” but “As the Lord lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them.” For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their ancestors. (Jer 16:14–15)

Finally, the Passover is a prototype of the final victory over death, the resurrection of the dead “at the end of days.” The sacred Passover meal symbolizes the participation of the resurrected righteous men and women in a messianic feast of the last days:

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations;

He will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. (Isa 25:6–8)

The lamb that was eaten during a Passover meal symbolizes a sacrifice offered by Christ as the atonement for sin:

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (Jn 1:29)

Unleavened bread eaten during this meal and for the next seven days stands for the purity of life, from which “the yeast of malice and evil” has been removed (1 Cor 5:8; cf. Mt 16:11–12):

...And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the festival of unleavened bread to the Lord; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.

On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. For seven days you shall present the Lord’s offerings by fire; on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation: you shall not work at your occupations. (Lev 23:6–8)

The first day is celebrated in memory of the exodus from Egypt (Ex 12:51), and the seventh — in memory of crossing the Red Sea on dry ground (Ex 14:19–31).

Next festival is the summer Festival of Pentecost, which is linked with the Passover both by the time of its celebration and by its meaning.

The Lord spoke to Moses: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. (Lev 23:9–10)

The first fruits of a harvest, as well as the firstborn of people and livestock, are set apart to the Lord (Ex 13:12–13, 34:26). In this case, the sheaf of the first fruits of the barley harvest is meant, because in the Holy Land barley ripens earlier than wheat (compare Ex 9:31–32 with Ex 34:22).

He shall raise the sheaf before the Lord, that you may find acceptance; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall raise it. (Lev 23:11)

The word “sabbath,” according to the Orthodox Jewish tradition, denotes here the first day of the Passover, which is a day of rest, devoted to the divine service. The Karaites, adherents of the alternative tradition of interpreting the Torah, understand this verse as a prescription to keep count of days leading to Pentecost starting with the first day of the week, which follows the Passover Sabbath.

On the “day after the sabbath,” i.e. on the 16th of Nisan, the first sheaf “was raised” in the Temple. The ears fell on the ground, symbolizing the grace that would be poured out in future, on the day of Pentecost.

It is forbidden to eat the bread of the new harvest until the first sheaf is raised:

You shall eat no bread or parched grain or fresh ears until that very day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your settlements. (Lev 23:14)

Similar to the first sheaf, all our efforts should be devoted to the Most High (Col 3:17).

From the day on which the first sheaf is raised one should count off 49 days that remind of the events between the exodus from Egypt and Sinaitic revelation (Ex 19:1 – 20:18):

And from the day after the sabbath, from the day on which you bring the sheaf of the elevation offering, you shall count off seven weeks; they shall be complete. You shall count until the day after the seventh sabbath, fifty days; then you shall present an offering of new grain to the Lord. (*Lev 23:15–16*)

This festival is called שבועות *Shavu'ot* — “weeks” (Ex 34:22, Deut 16:10), because seven weeks separate it from the first day of the Passover. Another name for it is Pentecost (from a Greek word meaning “fiftieth”), for it is celebrated on the fiftieth day, counting from the second day of the Passover (Acts 2:1, 20:16). However, the word שבועות *shavu'ot* can be understood and as “oaths”: on this day the Ten Commandments were given, which constitute a basis of the covenant ratified by a mutual oath of God and the people of Israel. The Lord took an oath to observe his promises and the people pledged themselves to keep his commandments:

...To enter into the covenant of the Lord your God, sworn by an oath, which the Lord your God is making with you today... (*Deut 29:12*)

The Festival of Pentecost combines our gratitude for the harvest (in this case the wheat harvest) with the renewal of the covenant and the joy upon receiving the Law and the commandments.

The first, the earliest, “harvest” in human history “ripened,” when the people of Israel was formed that was called to become a community of the righteous. Indeed, the purpose of the creation of man is “gathering the righteous,” spiritual harvest (Mt 13:37–39).

1345 years later, during the same festival the Holy Spirit came on the disciples of Jesus, marking the creation of the New Testament community, which is called to embrace a great multitude of people “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev 7:9):

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (*Acts 2:1–4*)

This event — the beginning of gathering the righteous from all nations of the world — can also be likened to “the first fruits of the harvest.”

As it has been explained in Lecture 1, both Jews while receiving Torah and Gentiles while the outpouring of the Spirit on them were not yet purified of “the yeast of malice” (1 Cor 5:8). Therefore, on the day of Pentecost two loaves of leavened bread are brought into the Holy Place; they symbolize “unpurified” Jews and Gentiles:

You shall bring from your settlements two loaves of bread as an elevation offering, each made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of choice flour, baked with leaven, as first fruits to the Lord. (*Lev 23:17*)

The purpose of the exodus was to introduce the people of Israel into the covenant with God by means of the Law; the purpose of Christ’s ministry was to introduce a person into the New Covenant with the Most High by means of the Holy Spirit:

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. (*Jn 14:15–17*)

Pentecost should be celebrated as “a statute forever,” that is, in every generation and in every settlement of the people of God:

On that same day you shall make proclamation; you shall hold a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. This is a statute forever in all your settlements throughout your generations. (*Lev 23:21*)

Pentecost is one of the three annual festivals (the others are Passover and the Festival of Booths), called חג *chag* — “going round [the sacred place],” “celebration,” “pilgrimage [to the Holy Place]” (cf. Arab. “hadj”):

Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose: at the festival of unleavened bread, at the festival of weeks, and at the festival of booths. They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed; all shall give as they are able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God that he has given you. (*Deut 16:16–17*)

Early Christians zealously observed the instruction concerning pilgrimage to Jerusalem, as well as other precepts. For example, we learn about apostle Paul:

For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia; he was eager to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. (*Acts 20:16*)

Since the wheat harvest is mentioned among the statutes concerning this festival, in conclusion the following instruction is given:

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien: I am the Lord your God. (*Lev 23:22*)

The celebration is not pleasing to the Lord if it is not linked with mercy and care for the poor. Indeed, he reproaches his people for such formal, purely ritual and insensitive “celebrating” through the prophet:

Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them.

When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil,

Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. (*Isa 1:14-17*)

The Festival of Pentecost not only reminds us of the great events of the past, not only marks the fruitful changes in the hearts of those who live nowadays (immersion into the Holy Spirit of certain individuals — Mt 3:11), but also points to the future, when the Holy Spirit will come down on the whole people of God:

Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. (*Joel 2:28-29*)

The Book of the prophet Ezekiel also contains a prediction that after the world-wide calamities caused by the final return of the Israelites to the Holy Land and by the invasion of Gog's hordes into the land, the Spirit will come down on the whole people of God:

...I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them from their enemies' lands, and through them have displayed my holiness in the sight of many nations.

Then they shall know that I am the Lord their God their God because I sent them into exile among the nations, and then gathered them into their own land. I will leave none of them behind;

And I will never again hide my face from them, when I pour out my spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord God. (*Ezek 39:28-29*)

This outpouring of the Spirit will be accompanied by a plaintive repentance of all Israel. The prophet Zechariah testifies to it, mentioning that prior to this event all the nations that come against Jerusalem, that is, Gog's armies (cf. Ezek 38-39), will have been defeated:

And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. (*Zech 12:9-10*)

It is the Holy Spirit who will dispose all the Israelites to recognize that Jesus from Nazareth is the true Messiah and to take close to heart his sufferings for the mankind:

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf... (*Jn 15:26*)

Thus, Pentecost commemorates not only giving of the Law but at the same time the establishment of this Law in the hearts of the believers by the Holy Spirit:

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah...

«...»

...This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they will be my people. (*Jer 31:31-33*)

The Book of Joel (2:28-31) tells that the Holy Spirit will come down with great power on God's people just before the Day of Judgment — “the great and terrible day of the Lord.” The next festival which is not directly connected (unlike the Passover and Pentecost) with any event of the exodus from Egypt can be viewed as a prototype of this terrible day. There is a legend that this festival is the day of creation of Adam. Therefore, it was appointed for judging the mankind.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Speak to the people of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of complete rest, a holy convocation commemorated with trumpet blasts... (*Lev 23:23-24*)

In the Jewish tradition this festival is called ראש השנה *«Rosh haSha`nah»* — “the head [in the sense of the beginning] of the year,” i.e. the New Year's Day. The fact that the Festival of Booths, which is celebrated 14 days later, comes at the “turn of the year” proves that the biblical year starts in autumn. It also means that all autumn feasts are celebrated during the period when one year replaces another:

You shall observe the festival of weeks, the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the festival of ingathering at the turn of the year... (*Ex 34:22*)

Nine days after the New Year, on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), every 49 years the coming of the Jubilee Year is proclaimed. It follows then that the year begins in the seventh, not the first month:

...Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month — on the day of atonement — you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land.

And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you... (*Lev 25:9-10*)

This leads us once again to the fundamentals of a lunar-solar biblical calendar: months are counted from spring (Ex 12:1-2), and years are counted from autumn (so that the solar and the lunar cycles may be equalized). The tradition of counting years from the first autumn month was kept for a long time in some Christian countries, for instance in Russia, up to the epoch of Peter the Great.

The two different modes of biblical calendaric reckoning used in counting years and months, as well as the rituals of the autumn festivals, contain a special indication of the two aspects of life. Life in the “present age,” which is measured by a period from birth to death, is symbolized by the spring and the summer festivals (the Passover and Pentecost). On the contrary, life in the “coming age” — the resurrection of the dead, the Judgment Day and the eternal bliss of the righteous — is symbolized by the autumn festivals (New Year, the Day of Atonement, the Festival of Booths).

In Lev 23:24 the biblical New Year is called “the festival of trumpets” (in the original תְּרוּעָה *teru'ah* — “the blowing [of trumpets]”), that is blowing the ram’s horn — the “shofar.” The name of this musical instrument is mentioned in the description of theophany on Mount Sinai (“the blast of the trumpet”):

...As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder. (*Ex 19:19*)

The instruction to blow the shofar (“trumpet,” as in our version) is repeated in one of the psalms:

...Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our festal day.

For it is a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob. (*Ps 81:3-4*)

The only biblical festival that falls on the same day as “the new moon” (celebrated on the first day of the seventh month of Tishri) is the biblical New Year’s Day. Hence, it is this festival that is meant here. The word “ordinance” translates Hebrew מִשְׁפָּט *mish'pat* — “judgment.”

This is the day of the annual judgment of the God of Jacob over all sons of man. On the New Year’s Day, according to a legend, heavenly books are opened, and the Most High inscribes the destiny of each person for the coming year — who will live and who will die, who will prosper and who will suffer... In the Book of Daniel we find the awesome description of such judgment:

As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire.

A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him.

The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. (*Dan 7:9-10*)

During this festival the alarming sounds of the shofar are called to awaken repentance in the souls of believers: even those who are deeply stuck in sin have an opportunity to lessen their punishment by good deeds and prayers. According to the Jewish tradition, this is the purpose of the Ten Awesome Days, the Festival of Trumpets through the Day of Atonement, when the verdict is fixed (“sealed”) by the right hand of the Lord.

Moreover, in the metaphoric language of the Bible the blasts of the trumpet stand for the resurrection of the dead:

...And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (*Mt 24:31*)

At Messiah’s second coming the dead will be gathered for judgment by the sound of trumpet (1 Thess 4:16). In the same way, the annual sounding of trumpets on the New Year’s Day calls everyone to revive spiritually — to start a new life in the presence of the judging Creator.

Thus blowing ram’s horns on the New Year’s Day is a prototype of both the resurrection of the dead and their summoning for the judgment (a sharp, alarming, shrill blast of the shofar serves as a reminder of this — cf. 1 Cor 15:52).

The resurrection of the dead and the subsequent celebration of the righteous are predicted by the following words of Daniel:

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (*Dan 12:2-3*)

The Festival of Trumpets is followed by the Day of Atonement, which foreshadows the Last Judgment:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Now, the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you: you shall deny yourselves and present the Lord’s offering by fire;

And you shall do no work during that entire day; for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the Lord your God... (*Lev 23:26-28*)

The whole day — “from evening to evening” — is devoted to penitence, prayers, reading the Scripture. It is called יוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים *Yom haKippu'rim* — literally, “the day of the coverings [of sins]” (see Lect. 3). On this day humility is prescribed as well as abstaining from any occupations except for the divine service and a complete fast — as a sign of one’s repentance before the High Judge:

For anyone who does not practice self-denial during that entire day shall be cut off from the people. And anyone who does any work during that entire day, such a one I will destroy from the midst of the people. You shall do no work: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your settlements. It shall be to you a Sabbath of complete rest, and you shall deny yourselves; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening you shall keep your sabbath. (*Lev 23:29-32*)

How is the Last Judgment described in the Bible? It is presented differently in various places of the Scripture, from various angles so to say.

First of all, it is said that the decisive argument while defending or prosecuting a person will be his or her deeds:

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them." (*Rev 14:13*)

Those risen from the dead and standing before the throne of the High Judge will be judged according to their works:

Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them.

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. (*Rev 20:11-12*)

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the nations are gathered before him,

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me... (*Mt 25:34-35*)

As an answer to a bewildered question asked by the righteous, when it was that they had the honor of serving the Messiah himself, the explanation will follow:

And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' (*Mt 25:40*)

The sentence passed upon the wicked will be also based on their deeds — on the fact that they showed no mercy to their suffering brethren, to "the least" of those who are members of Christ's family:

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels;

For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink... (*Mt 25:41-42*)

Everyone will agree that these words are of particular importance, for they are connected with the final destiny of each soul. It is according to one's deeds that this destiny will be determined. Indeed, here Jesus does not ask people about their beliefs: whether they went to such-and-such church, and if yes, how regular it was; in which manner they crossed himself; whether they worshipped icons or rejected them; what "creed" they adhered to and in general to what degree they honored "human precepts and doctrines" (*Mt 15:9*).

Similarly, according to the testimony of the apostle James, "faith apart from works is barren" — such kind of faith is characteristic of demons:

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe — and shudder.

Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren? (*Jas 2:19-20*)

What kind of works does the apostle James mean? Certainly, those that will be a decisive factor in bringing in a verdict on the Day of Judgment:

For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?

So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. (*Jas 2:13-17*)

These exhortations of the apostle have a ring of the words of Jesus:

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. (*Mt 5:7*)

In his epistles Paul says quite clearly that on the Day of Judgment each person will be repaid according to his or her deeds. Some will receive eternal life, others — God's wrath (see, for example, *Rom 2:5-8*).

If this is true, why so many preachers right up to the present time have been teaching that salvation comes by faith alone, irrespective of one's deeds? It is because they base their teaching on the words of the same Paul concerning justification "by faith apart from works prescribed by the law" (*Rom 3:28*). Is it to be admitted that the apostolic doctrine contains a discrepancy, as some liberal researchers love to say? We shall discuss this question at greater length.

"The justification by faith" mentioned by Paul is not identical with salvation "by faith alone," apart from works. Indeed, a wicked person, who has broken God's will, must justify himself before him. Through his faith in the sacrificial death of the Messiah a penitent sinner reconciles with God; he is "justified by faith." However, afterwards he is obliged to undertake observing the commandments that express God's will:

For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. (*1 Jn 5:3*)

However, it is only the First Commandment of "the quintessence of the Law," the Decalogue, that relates to faith (it commands to believe that God, who has brought his people out of Egypt, is One). Thus, faith is observing the First Commandment. Nevertheless, in order to be saved it is necessary to observe all the commandments; therefore faith, although it is the first and important condition of attaining the everlasting life, it is not sufficient:

And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (*Heb 11:6*)

“Seeking God,” described in the given verse, consists in knowing and doing God’s will, expressed in the commandments.

That is why the psalmist states that during the Last Judgment when everyone will be repaid according to his or her deeds, those who “seek God” will be justified:

But the Lord sits enthroned forever, he has established his throne for judgment.

He judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with equity.

The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you. (*Ps 9:7-10*)

Every search usually ends when the person finds what he has sought. Seeking God ends with “knowing” him (not in the absolute sense, of course, for the Most High is unfathomable in his essence). Here “knowledge” implies uniting with him “in Spirit and truth” by means of the Holy Spirit and obeying his commandments.

Faith in Jesus as the Messiah and following his teaching are interconnected in the same way:

Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. Whoever says, “I have come to know him,” but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says, “I abide in him,” ought to walk just as he walked. (*1 Jn 2:3-6*)

After the Day of Atonement, which signifies the present judgment and foreshadows the future Judgment Day, the last of annual festivals comes – the Festival of Booths (Tabernacles):

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Speak to the people of Israel, saying: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month, and lasting seven days, there shall be the festival of booths to the Lord.

The first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. Seven days you shall present the Lord’s offerings by fire; on the eighth day you shall observe a holy convocation and present the Lord’s offerings by fire; it is a solemn assembly; you shall not work at your occupations. (*Lev 23:33-36*)

The Hebrew word סוכה *suk`kot* means “tents,” “tabernacles” (or “booths”). Directly after the exodus, before the tents for dwelling in the desert were built, the Israelites lived in hastily erected booths made of branches. That is why the first settlement after the exodus from the land of Rameses (or Goshen; see Gen 47:5-6, Ex 12:37) was called Succoth (Ex 12:37, Num 33:5). It is this event that the annual Festival of Booths is called to commemorate:

You shall live in booths for seven days; all that are citizens in Israel shall live in booths, so that your generations may know that I made the people of

Israel live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. (*Lev 23:42-43*)

Living in a fertile land, the people of God were constantly exposed to a great spiritual danger — forgetting the Lord’s blessings. They could fall victim to ingratitude and disbelief in attributing all their victories and successes to themselves:

Do not say to yourself, “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today. (*Deut 8:17-18*)

For this reason the Festival of Booths is celebrated at the end of the year, when the harvest have been gathered in, when each family and the whole people are provided with food for a long period:

...Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and diligently observe these statutes.

You shall keep the festival of booths for seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your wine press.

Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns.

Seven days you shall keep the festival for the Lord your God at the place that the Lord will choose; for the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all your undertakings, and you shall surely celebrate. (*Deut 16:12-15*)

The festival of ingathering is linked with our gratitude to the Creator for granting fertility to the land. During this celebration each Israelite identifies himself as the one who left Egypt, depending on God’s mercy alone. He is prescribed to leave his house, his barns and storehouses full of earthly gifts, and to spend seven days of the festival in a tent made of branches partly open to the sky. In the biblical times booths were built of the plants used in the ritual of this festival:

On the first day you shall take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. (*Lev 23:40*)

Having returned from the Babylonian Captivity the people renewed the custom of building booths of these plants:

...And that they should publish and proclaim in all their towns and in Jerusalem as follows, “Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths, as it is written.

So the people went out and brought them, and made booths for themselves, each on the roofs of their houses, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. (*Neh 8:15-16*)

According to the Midrash, there is a symbolic meaning in the images of four plants. The first of them is פרי עץ הדר *pe`ri etz ha`dar*, “the fruit of majestic trees” — etrog, a citrus fruit having fragrance. This fruit has both taste and fragrance and symbolizes a righteous person studying Torah (taste is our inner perception of the word of God) and doing good to others (fragrance is an outer manifestation of inner properties). The second plant is כפת תמרִים *kap`pot tema`rim* — “palm branches.” A date palm bears fruit that have taste but are not fragrant. It signifies people studying the Torah but not doing good. The third plant — ענף עץ־עבת *a`nath etz-a`vot* — “a branch of a leafy tree.” This is myrtle, the evergreen bush that has fragrance but cannot bear edible fruit. It symbolizes a person who does not study the Torah, but does good. Finally, the fourth plant — ערבי־נחל *ar`vay-na`chal*, “willows of the river,” — can produce neither fruit nor fragrance. It stands for those who have neither knowledge of the Torah, nor good deeds. If the righteous person, “etrog,” can attain salvation of the soul independently, the other three kinds of believers need each other for mutual addition and reaching perfection.

For this reason during the divine service of the Festival of Booths believers hold etrog in their left hand like an orb, and bind together the other three plants and hold them in the right hand like a scepter. Thus, the right hand symbolizes God’s mercy and the left hand — his justice. For example, in the Songs of Songs God’s justice is presented by his left hand which is “under the head” of a bride, that is our soul (as though testing its thoughts and intentions), and his mercy is represented by his right hand by which he “embraces” the soul:

O that his left hand were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me. (*Song 2:6*)

Only the righteous person can pass the test of God’s justice, therefore etrog is hold in the left hand. Other “plants” have no choice but to hope for mercy and forgiveness that are symbolized by the right hand...

There are also other interpretations of the symbolic meaning of the mentioned plants: four letters of Tetragrammaton — the holiest of God’s names; four names of biblical foremothers — Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel; four ways of perceiving the truth (revelation, intuition, empathy, studying) etc. Such manifold symbolism reflects the correlation of concepts and phenomena, as though “stitching through” the whole creation.

The festivals are also connected with the periods of human life. Thus, Passover corresponds to youth as the prophet Hosea says:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. (*Hos 11:1*)

Through Jeremiah the Lord also reminded his people of the exodus as the time of its “early youth”:

...Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the Lord: I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as s bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. (*Jer 2:2*)

Pentecost corresponds to maturity, when the person already sees the first fruits of his earthly works:

...You shall observe the festival of harvest, of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field... (*Ex 23:16*)

The Festival of Booths corresponds to the old age: works have been completed, the crop has been gathered in, and the person returns to his initial state of being “an alien and a stranger” in the land, getting ready for moving to another world. Having received the fruits of our earthly works, we should give thanks to the Giver; renouncing worldly matters we should seek to become close to him...

The Song of Songs, the eminent poem about love and youth, is read in the synagogues during the Passover, while Ecclesiastes is read during the Festival of Booths, reminding us that everything in this world is vanity except for knowledge of God and observing his commandments:

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone.

For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil. (*Ecc1 12:13-14*)

Finally, the Festival of Booths is a prototype of the resettlement of the righteous after the Judgment to the Kingdom of God, the sign of the end of history, its transition into a new, higher spiritual dimension.

Apostle John saw the righteous from all nations standing before the throne of the Most High “with palm branches in their hands,” that is, celebrating the feast of booths in the supreme world:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.

They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (*Rev 7:9-10*)

After the destruction of the last impious power, the armies of the chief prince Gog (*Ezek 38-39*), the whole mankind will celebrate the Festival of Booths. At the end of times even the Lord’s former enemies will submit to his will and start coming to Jerusalem during the festival days for worship:

Then all who survive of the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the festival of booths.

If any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain upon them. (*Zech 14:16-17*)

This will be the age of universal reconciliation of nations, the age of deep knowledge of God, which is impossible to imagine nowadays:

...They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (*Isa 11:9*)

During this age even material things will be spiritualized to such an extent that, according to the prediction of the prophet Zechariah,

On that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "Holy to the Lord." And the cooking pots in the house of the Lord shall be as holy as the bowls in front of the altar. (*Zech 14:20*)

An inscription "Holy to the Lord" was engraved on a golden plate that was fastened over the forehead of a high priest (Ex 28:36-38). This plate was the holiest element of a priestly vestment. It bore the unpronounceable name of the Creator and symbolized the thought that was constantly directed unto him. In the age of the Millennial Kingdom of Messiah (Rev 20:4) such sacred inscription will adorn even ... the bells of the horses!

Thus, the Festival of Booths points to the overcoming the physical conditions inherent in the existence of the present-day mankind and to its exaltation, that is hard to fathom today:

On that day the Lord will shield the inhabitants of Jerusalem so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the Lord, at their head. (*Zech 12:8*)

The feeblest of the righteous persons will be like David, and Jesus — the Messiah from the house of David — will appear before the people in the image of the angel of the Lord. In this image his beloved disciple saw him in his vision:

In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force. (*Rev 1:16*)

Thus, the annual circle of festivals can be regarded as the presage of the whole history in its "sacred" cut, i.e. in the culmination moments of its spiritual development. At the same time, the circle of festivals can be viewed as the way of each soul.

With regard to the people of God it can be described this way: having received freedom from the Lord (Passover) and later the Law along with the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost), at the end of days, being close to the completion of their way, the people rise from the dead (New Year's Day) and are summoned for the Final Judgment (Day of Atonement). After that, the righteous will inherit the Kingdom of God (Festival of Booths).

The same way is foreordained for each soul that receives great mercies from the Most High, and then gives an account of its earthly life at the court of judgment:

The slave who knew what his master wanted, but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted, will receive a severe beating.

But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much

will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded. (*Lk 12:47-48*)

Such "inquiry" awaits every one of us at the end of our earthly life, immediately after the separation of the soul from the body (cf. Lk 16:19-31, 2 Cor 5:10).

However, every person can choose another sequence of events: it is not without reason that the biblical year can start in autumn or in spring. Every soul can experience awakening — "resurrection" — even during its earthly life (Festival of Trumpets); then it will examine itself and repent before the Lord (Day of Atonement); and after that a complete transformation of life will take place, the "resettlement" from a state of sin and death to the everlasting life (Festival of Booths):

And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (*Jn 17:3*)

As a result of this one experiences freedom — he or she is completely delivered from spiritual death (Passover) and is united with the Creator by means of the Holy Spirit, who engraves the commandments in his or her heart (Pentecost).

This festival celebrating the complete return to God was highly esteemed by the Therapeutae — the Egyptian version of the Essenes — at the beginning of our era. Philo of Alexandria, philosopher living in the 1st century AD, writes, that the Therapeutae had "...the greatest holiday which fell on the fiftieth day — the holiest of numbers and most conformable to nature. It is equal to [the sum] of the squares [of the sides] of a right-angled triangle [with the sides 3, 4 and 5], which is the beginning of the birth of existence" (*Concerning the Contemplative Life*, 65) (The excerpt is translated from Russian. It would be better to find the English translation from Greek).

It would be reasonable to ask why the majority of Christian confessions reject the festivals that have such profound meaning and are prescribed by the Creator himself (the biblical New Year's Day, the Day of Atonement, the Festival of Booths) or celebrate them on the days different from those appointed in the Bible (the Passover, Pentecost).

First, we shall discuss the attitude of early Christians towards these holidays. We know that they kept Sabbath (Acts 13:14, 13:42-44, 15:21, 16:13, 17:2, 18:4; Heb 4:9). It is obvious that they also celebrated Passover — on the day prescribed by the Torah (Acts 20:6; 1 Cor 5:7-8). Certainly, they celebrated Pentecost as well (Acts 2:1, 20:16; 1 Cor 16:8). They strictly observed other sacred days, for early Christians were genuine adherents of the Law (the Torah):

...You see, brother, how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews, and they are all zealous for the law... (*Acts 21:20*)

If this is so, when did a change of "the sacred seasons," the digression already predicted in the 6th century BC by the prophet Daniel, take place?

This is what he said: "As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth that shall be different from all the other kingdoms; it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces.

As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them. This one shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings.

He shall speak words against the Most High, shall wear out the holy ones of the Most High, and shall attempt to change the sacred seasons and the law; and they shall be given into his power for a time, two times, and half a time. (*Dan 7:23-25*)

This prophecy was fulfilled in the 4th century AD when Constantine, the emperor of the fourth, Roman, world empire (which in the given prophecy acts under the name "the fourth beast") declared himself a Christian and turned Christianity into the dominant religion of the empire (that made him "different" from the former emperors). Formal acceptance of Christianity (without observing the spirit and the letter of the teaching of Jesus) transformed it from the persecuted religion into the religion of persecutors. It also entailed the rejection of the biblical calendar. Instead, the church authorities accepted the Roman pagan calendar as it is clear from the names of the months given in honor of Roman gods (January — in honor of Janus, February — Phoebus, March — Mars etc.).

As far back as the first Church Council (325 AD) the decision was made to transfer weekly celebrating from Saturday to the first day of the week and to prohibit celebrating Passover "together with Jews."

In introducing such radical changes Constantine (at that time he was not baptized even formally, but nevertheless, thrust his will on the council) likened himself to Jeroboam, the ancient king of Israel who had shifted the celebrating of the Festival of Booths to the month ahead, and replaced levitical priests with his officials:

He also made houses on high places, and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not Levites.

Jeroboam appointed a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the festival that was in Judah...

He went up to the altar that he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, in the month that he alone had devised... (*1 Kings 12:31-33*)

The Scripture clearly teaches us to distinguish between God's Law and human precepts and to reject the latter altogether if they contradict the will of the Most High:

The Lord said: Because these people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote;

So I will again do amazing things with this people, shocking and amazing. The wisdom of their wise shall perish, and the discernment of the discerning shall be hidden. (*Isa 29:13-14*)

Jesus himself cited these words from the Scripture to prove that observing human precepts is "worshipping in vain":

You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said: "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me;

In vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' (*Mt 15:7-9*)

Following the spirit of Jesus' teaching the apostles retorted their persecutors in this way:

"Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge;

For we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard. (*Acts 4:19-20*)

Did anyone ever have a right to cancel Lord's festivals or to alter their dates? The Scripture itself gives us the answer. It says about all these festivals that they are eternal and should be celebrated "throughout your generations" (Ex 12:42; Lev 23:14, 21, 31, 41). The Lord himself exults together with his people on the days of holy convocations:

...He will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it.

I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. (*Zeph 3:18-19*)

There is a prophecy about "a time, two times, and half a time" (in other words, "a year, two years and half a year") that determines the term during which the king who attempted to cancel God's statutes (*Dan 7:25*) will still have influence. The same term is specified in the Revelation of John, where it refers to the persecution of "those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus," as consisting of 1260 "days," each of them being equal to one year (*Rev 12:6, 14, 17; cf. Num 14:34*).

Thus, 1260 years should have passed from the epoch of emperor Constantine to the time when the large number of believers could get direct access to the primary source of their belief, the Holy Scripture.

Indeed, it was not until the end of the 16th century (325 + 1260) that the attitude towards the freedom of religion became tolerable in Europe as a result of numerous debates and fights between Protestants and Catholics. This led to a new scrupulous studying of the Bible, and millions of people in different countries, due to the activity of translators and educators, at last could read it in their own languages. The huge number of believers started examining the word of God, about which the One who uttered it said:

...So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but I shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (*Isa 55:11*)

Thus, we see that the prophecies are fulfilled and in the end God's truth triumphs.