



Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him. But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries. For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off. (Ex 23:20-23)

The present chapter is a continuation of the definition and penalties (for disobedience) of the Law of God. In a modern world setting in which positive thinking is promoted in every venue of academia and management, to the absolute rejection any negative thought, we should look to the Author of our Laws. There are only two commandments that might be considered positive, or neutral. All of the others are negatives. If there were no negatives, we could not enjoy electrical devices, or even rivers. There must be a positive and a negative in order for the world to operate.

This chapter contains at least one profound and astonishing reference to the Pre-Incarnate Christ, in my opinion. The chapter is so clearly and plainly written that it needs very little explanation on my part. There are three salient divisions to the chapter:

1. False witness & slander
2. Expansive definition of the Sabbath
3. A guiding angel to guide and rebuke

False Witness & Slander

Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment. (Ex 23:1-2) False reports, gossip, and outright lies have greater potential for fatal injury than any Saracen sword ever crafted in the fires of hate. I believe the most accurate description of the power of the tongue for evil is given by James: *For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and*

setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be."

(James 3:2-10)

I am sorry to say that James' indictment against loose tongues probably (rather, certainly) stand in condemnation of every reader of this devotion as well as its author. God's sanctions against false speaking are not limited to oral and overt speech, but also to that which is unspoken. Silence in the face of lies is tantamount to complicity in the lies. Failure to act on behalf of someone facing immanent hurt and danger is a lie manifested in physical behavior. *"Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause."* (Ex 23:3) Our own lack of goodness or sufficiency is evidenced in the plight of others. The stranger is not one bit different from us except in detailed specifics. We have all been strangers in certain settings. *"Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt."* (Ex 23:9) I still remember my fearful reluctance to go into my elementary school class at the beginning of my first grade experience.

Expansive Definition of the Sabbath

The very definition of the Sabbath clarifies the fact that it is intended as a blessing to man and not a burden. Of course, it is true, that the religious leaders, as religious leaders are wont to do, make the Sabbath into a burdensome observation in the time of our Lord's ministry. The exorbitant restrictions on freedom, imposed by the Pharisees and religious rulers, created an atmosphere of oppression rather than of liberty. There was a time when there was no Sabbath – but that lack of the Lord's Sabbath only existed for the first six days of Creation. The seventh was the Sabbath of the Lord and existed long before the proclamation made from Sinai. In short, Sabbath means REST. The Sabbath is religiously observed by most college professors who deny the Author of the Sabbath but, every seventh year, they insist on taking their privilege 'sabbatical'. *"And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof: But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard. Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed."* (Ex 23:10-12) The land on the seventh year is given a rest to lie fallow. Inevitably, there will be small harvest of crops from the previous years that sprout up and will be free gleaning for the poor. But the land deserves a rest. The Sabbath rest is incorporated into the natural Law by her Author.

A Guiding Angel to Guide and Rebuke

There is some evidence in Scripture that nations have angels that guide and direct them - some for good, and others for evil. There is no possibility that the angels of God ever lead a nation in dark paths. Nations such as Communist China, Nazi Germany, or Islamic nations of cruel bent are led by God's angels, but perhaps by those fallen angels (demons) cast out of Heaven – along with their depraved leader, Satan. Your attention is invited to Daniel the prophet who had sought guidance from the Lord, but the guidance was slow in coming. This, as an aside, demonstrates that God has reasons for delaying answer to prayer. Please read: *And, behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands. And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man*

greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling. Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia. Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days. (Dan 10:10-14)

It seems to me a strong possibility that the Guiding Angel described in verses 20-23 is the Pre-Incarnate Lord. It is certainly the Angel of the Lord that has been used to identify that Angel of the Lord. Remember the Pillar of Fire by Night, and Cloud by day that both led (as guide), and followed (for defense), the Children as they began their departure from Egypt and throughout their Wilderness Journey? *“Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him. But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries. For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off.”* (Ex 23:20-23) There are two prominent reasons that I believe this is the Pre-Incarnate Christ:

1. The Angel God sends serves the same function as that Pillar and Rock that followed the Children of Israel, and that Rock was the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 10:4)
2. God says, *“My name is in him.”* No one has acted with God’s power and name save Jesus Christ! He is God with us, and He is the One who bears all of the marks of His Father.

The remainder of the chapter gives counsel, once more, against the terrors of idolatry. God will chase all others out of the land He has promised Israel. He counsels against any fellowship with those who do not believe, for their lack of faith may lead to the lack in the hearts of God’s own Chosen. *“And I will set thy bounds from the Red sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river: for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee. Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me: for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee.”* (Ex 23:31-33)

Food for thought: Do you believe that the same Angel who led our Founding Fathers is the same that leads America today?