

DEUTERONOMY

Lesson 9 - Chapter 6 Continued

I'd like to ask you for your attention and patience today because the first half of this lesson is significantly different than the last, and the last half deals with one of the more challenging messages I've had the privilege to present.

One of the most revered Jewish Sages, the Rambam, also known as Maimonides who lived during the 12th century said this:

“The ancient sages said, ‘whoever has Tefillin on his head and arm, tsitsit on his garment, and a mezuzah on his door may be presumed NOT to sin,’ for he has many reminders; and these are the “angels” that save him from sinning, as it is said, ‘The angel of the Lord camps around those who revere Him and rescues them’”.

The Rambam's point is that the wearing of Tefillin and Tsitsit, and the fastening of a Mezuzah to the doorpost of one's home brings the Lord and His commands into constant reminder to the Jew who does such a thing; and therefore the likelihood that such a person would knowingly sin against Yehoveh is remote. BTW: as I've taught you before, the Hebrew word that we usually (and sometimes in error) translate into English, as “angel” is malach. And in its plainest sense malach simply means messenger, and that is more the sense Maimonides means it here.

As we continue today in our study of Deuteronomy chapter 6 we're going to look carefully at the practice of Orthodox Judaism in the wearing of devices called Tefillin, and of placing a mezuzah at the entry to one's home (and often at every interior doorway throughout a house).

Let's re-read Deuteronomy 6 from verse 6 to the end of the chapter.

RE-READ DEUTERONOMY 6:6 – end

When verse 6 says, “these words, which I am ordering you, are to be on your heart”, it is immediately referring to the Shema, the Hear O Israel, the 2 verses that came immediately before what I read to you just now; and we thoroughly discussed those 2 verses last week. I’m not going to review all that but if you missed it either go to the torahclass.com website or pick up a CD and listen to it because this is the central tenet of the Judeo-Christian faith. Please note further that the phrase, “these words”, is also referring to all the laws and commands which have already been given, and are about to be given, because this section of Deuteronomy is in essence an interruption in the flow of the giving of the Law in order for Moses to make a crucial point that God’s commands are to be carried out within the context of loving the Lord. The idea is that to make following these commands out to be some kind of heartless or mechanical ritual misses the point. Further notice the instruction that the Law, the Torah, is to be “on your heart”. I emphasize this because it has been erroneously taught by many church leaders that the OT was a rigid EXTERNAL law code written on stone tablets, while the NT would have the new dynamic of being commands of Jesus written INTERNALLY on our hearts. Such is obviously not the case (as are many of the OT versus NT myths perpetuated by anti-Jewish and anti-Scriptural doctrines that ought to be purged from our thinking).

Verse 7 tells Israel to teach these laws and commands (especially the Shema) to their children; this is not an idle exhortation. I mentioned last week the Moses isn’t spending all this time and energy giving a thorough restatement of the Law, and then expounding upon it’s meaning, just as some kind of ceremony celebrating the beginning of Holy War to conquer the Promised Land. Rather this new generation didn’t KNOW much of the Law. Their parents, who were the original Exodus generation, now dead and gone, did NOT do their duty and teach their children (those now standing before Moses to hear his sermon) God’s laws; nor did they particularly follow the Law very seriously.

At this point we get a short series of instructions that has formed a great deal of Jewish Tradition. It says that the heads of the households are to speak about the Lord and His commands “when you are at home, when you are away, when you lie down, and when you get up”. This statement is a literary device that is not at all confined to Hebrew culture, but it is one that we find used a great deal in the Bible; it is called merism. That is, it is a poetic statement meant to convey an idea; it is an expression that the several parts of it are combined to present one an overarching concept. For instance, in an earlier example of merism in Genesis we are told that God “created the Heavens and the earth”. The idea is NOT that He created ONLY something defined as “the Heavens”, and then another thing that we call the earth....the planet itself.....and then we’re left to ponder whether God did NOT create things other than the heavens and the earth. Rather it simply means that God created **everything** because to the Hebrew the heavens represented the infinite while the earth represented the finite. So the statement about WHEN to speak about the Lord (when home or away, lying down or getting up, etc.) simply means “at all times” or “in every situation”.

In verse 8 we encounter an instruction that has created significant controversy inside the

Hebrew religion, and has generally been ignored in Christianity; that we are to bind these commands as a sign on our hand and as a symbol on our forehead. The controversy among the Jews is whether this is a LITERAL command in which some kind of ritual device is to actually be fitted to the hand and the forehead, or whether this is a metaphorical statement that simply means that just as the Lord's words are to be constantly thought of and spoken, they are also to become part of us in some kind of physical sense. And the purpose is for one to constantly be reminded of Yehoveh and His Law.

Sometime well after the Law was given a few groups of Jews agreed that this was indeed meant to be taken literally and so the use of Tefillin came into being. In Greek, and therefore in the NT, we'll find direct mention of these ritual objects using the word "phylacteries".

Tefillin, or phylacteries, consisted of two small, black leather boxes that contain four passages of Scripture, and these are attached to black leather straps. One box is placed on the left arm by the biceps and the other is placed on the forehead by or on the hair. They are donned before and during morning prayers by Orthodox Jews; however they are NOT used on Sabbath and certain other holy days because it is considered that the observance of the holy day itself is a sign and no other is needed.

Before the tefillah (singular for tefillin) for the arm is put on a prayer is offered. This prayer tells us that for the Orthodox Jew the wearing of tefillin is seen as a Commandment from God. They say in Hebrew,

'Behold, in putting on tefillin I intend to fulfill the Commandment of my Creator, Who has commanded us to put on tefillin, as is written in His Torah. And, then Deut 6:8 is quoted: "Bind them as a sign upon your arm and let them be tefillin between your eyes."

The reality, however, is that although this last sentence comes from Deut. 6:8 the Hebrew word tefillin is NOT there; rather the word is totefet, which more correctly means 'bands'. Thus, what we have here in the wearing of Tefillin is Tradition. However not all Hebrews observed this tradition, and there is no evidence that this tradition existed before about 250 B.C. We do know from records that the Pharisees made the wearing of Tefillin a strict part of their doctrines, and at some point took to wearing them not only at morning prayer but at all times except when sleeping. We also know that the Hebrews who lived in Samaria did NOT observe this tradition (which of course was a great and intended insult to the Jews of Judea). It appears that this was primarily a custom of those Jews who lived in Judea around the center of Jewish orthodoxy, Jerusalem. There is no record of any widespread use of Tefillin in the Galilee where Yeshua lived.

So, was it ONLY Pharisees that wore Tefillin? Apparently not because ancient Tefillin were found among the artifacts of the Essenes at Qumran, and they are mentioned within the Community Documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Josephus also discusses Tefillin and goes on to explain that at times even the 10 Commandments were included among the writings that

were stored inside those miniature leather boxes. So we know that how they were worn and what was contained in the changed over time, and that different groups of Jews developed different Tefillin traditions.

The head tefillah is placed in the center of the forehead with yet another prayer recited. The straps in the back are knotted so as to form the Hebrew letter **dalet**, and the arm strap by the hand is to be in the form of a **yod**. These three Hebrew letters form the name Shaddai (Almighty). Alfred Edersheim, a tremendous Hebrew/Christian scholar writes of the Tefillin's mystical significance:

'for their value and importance in the eyes of the Rabbis, it were impossible to exaggerate it. They were revered as highly as the Scriptures'. 'It was said that Moses had received the law of their observance from God on Mount Sinai; that the 'tephillin' were more sacred than the golden plate on the forehead of the high-priest, since its inscription embodied only once the sacred name of 'Yahveh, while the tefillin 'contained it not less than twenty-three times'.

Alfred Edersheim also affirms that although the Pharisees were scrupulous about wearing them:

'The admission that neither the officiating priests, nor the representatives of the people wore them in the Temple (Zebach. 19a,b), seems to imply that this practice was not quite universal"

The Pharisees wanted to be noticed for their outward piousness, and as we'll all recall Jesus criticized them for this and other actions such as having a trumpet blown whenever they contributed money to the Temple coffers. But what is key is to notice that (in his typical British manner of understatement) Edersheim says that this practice of wearing Tefillin "was not quite universal". Translation: it was but a minority of Jews who did this.

Now, I have heard several Hebrew Roots teachers say that Jesus wore Tefillin. That is anywhere from highly unlikely to approaching not-a-chance. Yeshua was a common peasant Jew from the Galilee; he often displayed the typical Galilean attitude of disdain towards the inflated religious egos of the Jewish religious authorities of Jerusalem and this included the Pharisees who were a vital part of that religious authority.

Let me be clear: the wearing of Tefillin is at the least a dubious interpretation of the Torah. So, is the wearing of Tefillin necessarily wrong? No. But it is in no way a Biblical command. The great Rambam and many other elite Jewish sages say unequivocally that the statement to "bind them as a sign on your arm and on your forehead" is a metaphor and not meant to be taken literally. But like every manmade tradition or invention of a new symbol, there is danger. And we find that danger evident simply in the Greek word used for Tefillin, which is phylactery. Phylactery is NOT a special Greek word invented to describe this unique Hebrew habit of some Jews wearing leather boxes and straps with small scripture scrolls inside them. Rather phylactery is a rather general Greek term that means "amulet". An amulet is a magic charm. It is a small object said to possess healing powers or protection qualities. And as one might expect, among the many Jews who DID decide to wear Tefillin some thought of them as

objects that possessed godly power. In fact we have it expressly stated in an ancient Jewish Targum (in Cant. 8:3), that the 'tefillin' prevented all hostile demons from doing injury to any Israelite.' That said, I don't think we ought to be judgmental about the Jews' use of this ancient cultural tradition; however emulating it as gentile Believers is a stretch.

Before we begin discussing Mezuzahs and their use let me make something quite clear: the Bible does NOT prohibit every possible manufacture or use of symbols. We were created as visual creatures and thus symbols are an important element in helping to remind us of our position and allegiance to God Almighty. However there are strict rules and principles governing making or using symbols in the Torah. And Deuteronomy throughout helps us to be very cautious not to develop symbols that can be used (or taken by others) in a wrong way. The Torah tends towards firmly prohibiting symbols that tend to anthropomorphize Yehoveh; that is, it speaks against something that would have God taking on HUMAN-like qualities expressed in human-like forms. Therefore there are to be no statues, no paintings, no carved images of any kind said to depict Him. Truthfully, the wonderful works of Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel probably ought never to have been done, because many of them have God depicted as but a bearded old man floating around on the clouds. And this kind of image that became so very popular in the Renaissance period has unconsciously (and in some cases consciously) pervaded the Church and greatly distorted the image of just who God is. It has caused us to think of Him more as a superhuman, than as an infinitely superior non-human.

We are also specifically prohibited from using ANY created thing (that is, created by God) as a model for a symbol that identifies with the Lord; things like stars, or the moon, or animals, or fish, or any kind of sea creature. Conversely the Bible DOES give us certain God-ordained symbols we are divinely authorized to use, although within limits. And among these are Tzitzit (fringe) and perhaps the object that we are about to study next, the Mezuzah. And notice that NONE of these things that are God-ordained violate the rules that the Lord sets down about symbols and images.

The Mezuzah is a continuation of the Lord's extreme importance that He places on worshipper's act of remembering who He is and that He is our God. Now this instruction in verse 9 to "write His Laws on the door-frames of your house and on your gates" is universally agreed within Judaism to be a literal command to place Scripture on the entry to your home and on the gate into a village or city. However, it could also reasonably be construed to be a metaphor about honoring the Lord especially in your own home.

It was common in Moses' era, as well as before and after, to write some sort of message or epithet honoring one's god above your doorway; most societies did this in one form or another. It was also the norm to have some type of message at the main entries into cities that pronounced the greatness of the king or the god honored in that city; and it was no less so in Egypt from which the Israelites had come. So it is no wonder that the order to remember the Lord, and to sort of dedicate the premises to the Lord, by means of writing some of His Scripture on entryways was completely understood to be a carrying on of that common Middle Eastern custom.

In Jesus' era this was therefore something that all Jews.....Judean, Galilean, even Samaritan

and Diaspora Jews.....could agree on. Now, HOW this was to be done was not elaborated upon in Holy Scripture so of course traditions developed to handle it. It appears that the practice we see today with this small oblong device that can be affixed to a doorway began in the 2nd Temple period, slightly before and during Yeshua's time. And inside this device called a Mezuzah typically went some Torah portions written using miniature letters on a tiny piece of parchment. Usually Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21 are what is written. Like with Tefillin, Mezuzahs were also found at Qumran and in addition to having those particular verses within them several of those ancient mezuzahs also included the 10 Commandments.

Sadly, just as with Tefillin, even this God-ordained symbol at times took on the characteristics of an amulet. We find that even the great Jewish religious leader Rabbi Judah the Prince sent a Mezuzah to the Parthian King Ardavan with a message that if he would attach it to his home's doorposts that it would protect him.

In the end most of the details involving the use of Mezuzahs are traditions, yet the principle of their use (as with Tefillin) is definitely Biblical. My advice is that if you want to employ a Mezuzah to indicate your family's allegiance to the God of Israel or to simply remind you of the Lord's commands as you come and go, that you at least follow standard Jewish traditions about placement PRIMARLY so as not to ruin the witness if a Jewish person comes to your home. And the main thing to know is that it is to be placed in the upper 1/3 rd of the right door jam (right side from the outside looking inward), with the top angled toward the home's interior.

One more thing: while the doorposts are referring to your personal home, the gates are referring to the city or village point of entry. The city gates functioned as the town square in the Bible eras and even as the area where court was held. It's not unlike the practice that USED to exist in America of posting the 10 Commandments in our courts of law to remind all in attendance that it was these principles that form the foundation for all of our laws. And that the Lord is looking down upon the proceedings and wants His definition of justice and mercy administered as much as is humanly possible.

Now in verse 10 the act of remembering takes on a different kind of importance from Tefillin and Mezuzot. It is that whether in poverty or prosperity one is exhorted to look back in history (Biblical history, salvation history, and even our own personal history) at the wondrous things that Yehoveh has done for our sake. However make no mistake; the main thrust of these next passages is about our remembering His sovereignty ESPECIALLY in the time of PROSPERITY because it is man's tendency to look more to ourselves and our manmade societies, and away from the Lord, when things are going really well for us. This is the part of today's lesson where the rubber hits the road so please stay with me.

The Lord says here in Deuteronomy 6, "don't allow abundance to make you forget your God and turn to other gods...." Oh what unheeded wisdom that warning has been throughout mankind's history, Israel's history, the church's history, and perhaps never before to such great extent as today in Europe and America. It is so ironic that the one thing that causes most people to go astray is the seeking and attainment of wealth. That is because, in my opinion, we feel much less dependent on the Lord when we seem to have all that we need and more. Believe me, I'm in no way glorifying poverty or criticizing abundance; I am simply saying that

prosperity can be a dangerous thing. I have firsthand experience with that. Many years ago in the middle portion of my corporate career, success brought a great fall for me. It's not that I ever doubted that Yeshua was my Savior, or that the Lord God was and is; it's that I forgot about my relationship with Yehoveh, and I saw no need to consult Him on my daily life because I had more than I had ever hoped for. Everything I touched seemed to turn to gold. I felt completely self-sufficient, prideful (arrogant would probably be a fair word to use). I gave no thought to His ways and His laws, or even to the reality of, and my need for, His presence. I certainly gave no thought to His holiness nor did I give thanks for the blessings that He provided because I was much too business congratulating myself for it all. Then came the fall. It was a hard and painful lesson to learn that what the Lord says, He means, and it applies to everyone without exception.

And so the Lord says, beginning in verse 10, that once Israel finally possess the land that had been promised to Abraham 600 years earlier, and once the Israelites begin to benefit from all the preparations the Lord had made for them, that there were a few things that they needed to keep in mind or they (like I did) would find themselves in a place they didn't want to be with regard to their relationship with the Lord and there would be severe and inescapable consequences.

So my dear brothers and sisters in Messiah, hear this warning. In a nutshell the Hebrews are told that ALL that they are about to receive they did not build. ALL they are about to inherit, they have not earned with merit. The cities and houses they'll live in are being forcibly taken from the various tribes and nations of Canaan who built them (by the Lord they are being taken) and all of it simply turned over to Israel for Israel's benefit. The vineyards with the luscious and enormous grapes they will enjoy, Israel neither planted nor tended. The Olive groves that will produce the all important oil needed for everything from cooking, to powering their oil lamps, to being necessary ingredients for several of the ritual ceremonies the Lord has ordained, are a ready-to-go gift that others worked for (for generations) and Israel is receiving it all merely for showing up. Israel is reminded that they didn't elect themselves or separate themselves to be God's special people; the Lord selected them and blessed them as His own. And, by the way, they didn't rescue themselves from Pharaoh, either; God did it all.

Bottom line: everything that Israel needs the Lord is prepared to give it to them. What He wants in return is their love and trust of Him. The fundamental truth about the Kingdom of Heaven is that whatever we build with our own hands that come from our own minds will burn up when the end of history arrives; that which the Lord builds through us, however, will survive. The lesson is that that which is worth anything of real value is willed and accomplished by the Lord. And, He deserves all the credit and we don't.

That in no way indicates that we are to just sit back passively and wait for good things to come our way. No; our lives are to be a co-operative effort with the Lord. Yehoveh tells the Israelites that He has prepared the battlefield ahead of them and assured the victory but they must still go through with fighting the battle. They are to fight when He says to fight, where He says to fight, and not how it seems good or foolish to them. They must put their very lives on the line and be willing to give up everything dear to them. The lesson shown to us here is that action on our part is invariably required and demanded by God. But what are the characteristics of the

actions we are to take, and how do we know that it is the Lord that is leading and not the misguided mindset of an agenda-driven man?

Moses, the leader of Israel, personally sacrificed everything for the Hebrew nation and was constantly accountable to the Lord AND to the people. Moses didn't live under one set of rules and demand that everyone else live under another. The elders were accountable at every step to Moses. Moses was no less apt to be punished by the Lord for a sin or an act of rebellion than any one of the 3 million anonymous citizens of Israel. The plans and goals though difficult were for the good of the group and the Kingdom of Heaven (it was not to allow Moses to win a popularity poll) and each step along the way was a fulfillment of a God ordained covenant or promise. The leader, Moses, never even got to economically or personally BENEFIT from his 40-year effort. Some or all of these characteristics play a role in our determining whether it is men's plans or God's plans that we are being asked to buy into.

Notice what happens as a result of following a plan or an agenda that is not truly of the Lord even though it may sure SOUND holy. Verse 14 says, "do not follow other gods.....any gods of the peoples about you." OK, I'm going to meddle a bit; we have seen a number of times that the Biblical term for following other gods is idolatry. But we have also seen that God clearly labels as idolatry the placing of anything ahead of Him. This definition of idolatry is not allegory; this is the Lord's actual biblical definition of idolatry. Do we place our comfortable doctrines and personal habits and practices that please us, but that often have no Scriptural validity, ahead of His truth because His truth and His way is not so easy? Are we bound and determined to fight to the death to hold on to these dubious things because we like them and so we rationalize them? That is idolatry in its purest sense. Israel denied their idolatry at every step and only upon God's wrath did they ever seem to recognize it (and admit it) for what it was.

What is it that the world seeks and who is it that the world follows? By definition the world seeks and follows things that either are not God or are more important than God; the world seeks other gods. The world seeks the god of prosperity. The god of inalienable rights. The god of sexual freedom. The god of happiness and pleasure. The god of geopolitical harmony. When we Believers of the God of Israel seek to use the same sorts of things that the world prefers in order to attract new folks to us, only we add a religious element, then WE are on a dangerous path. But since we usually do them in a Christian environment we often deceive ourselves into believing that we can avoid the dangers of slipping into idolatry.

And what are the results of our cavalier attitudes in this regard? Verse 15 says the anger of the Lord will blaze up against us. If I hear one more time that our Father doesn't get angry at His people or would NEVER punish us, I believe I'll have a heart attack. That is apostasy and denial from the plain Scriptural truth. We are not PERFECT in His eyes; we are JUSTIFIED in His eyes. We have seen the example of how the Lord deals His justice among HIS own set apart people. Israel (REDEEMED Israel) was punished and disciplined time and again often with significant loss of life. We have reviewed in Torah Class the records of the tribes that were said to regularly go astray, and we find that in the case of Simeon and Dan they were decimated and their populations reduced by half and more.

Since 1965 church attendance in America began to dwindle. Why did our beloved church start to decline? I'd peg it to when the church goal became growth and prosperity above almost anything else. I'd peg it to when we started to move towards the world rather than keeping our standards high and intact. It's interesting that the era of the Mega Church, with it's ability to provide awesome surroundings and a wide array of activities and services for its congregation began at this same time. We are essentially following the identical trend of Europe. Two hundred years ago Europe was 90% Christian; today it is less than 3%. Churches are now becoming Mosques or changed into storefronts or museums. In America the most recent studies show without doubt that the number of people who attend church is dropping at the rate of about 1% per year since about 1990. Americans who claim to be Christians is dropping at a faster rate.

Folks, we need to face it: the Lord is not pleased with us. We have fiddled while Rome burned. We Christians have abandoned the simple loveliness of the Gospel for slick marketing. We have replaced teaching God's Word with rousing sermons about everything from the need to give more money to why we should vote. We have come to believe that if we present ourselves to the non-believing world by packaging ourselves attractively more will join us. Of course, the packaging that appeals to the world doesn't look much like the Laws and commands of God, does it? And, of course, the opposite of the intended effect has occurred.

The books of Joshua and Judges chronicle the fall of Israel into apostasy and disarray because they decided that rather than follow the Lord's demand that they possess the land He prepared for them, and to fight for what is right in God's eyes, they sought to appease their pagan neighbors through diplomacy, compromise and treaty. Their hope was to obtain their inheritance by peaceful means in a rational and logical way similar to how the world had always operated. Israel is STILL trying to do that, and now so is the church. Believe me, I'm not pointing fingers; rather I'm accepting blame. But now that we have discovered our folly and know where we have stumbled, let us determine together, now, tonight, to rekindle our love for God, to recover His Word and cling steadfast to its principles, and to increase the outward ministry that has always been expected of us. Let's not scramble after comfort and prosperity, rather let's open ourselves to Him and see what service to Him He wants of us; and what glorious blessings He may have waiting for us if only we will be obedient and not chase after other gods.

We'll finish chapter 6 next week.