

DEUTERONOMY

Lesson 11 - Chapters 8 and 9

In the Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary, the eminent Bible scholar Jeffrey Tigay makes this outstanding observation regarding the opening words of Deuteronomy chapter 8. He says: ***“Since his message is that Israel should always remember its dependence on God, it is noteworthy that Moses begins with an appeal to observe the commandments. This reflects the Biblical view that awareness of God and obedience are not separate phenomena.....the commandments are the practical expression of awareness of God and serve to foster it....”***

In Deuteronomy 8 and then 9 Moses continues with his sermon to the people of Israel appealing, exhorting, fervently pleading with them to remember who they are, who God is, and that observance of His commands IS the proper expression of allegiance to and love of Yehoveh.

Today in addition to showing you some of the momentous theological principles contained within these chapters, I want to exhort you in a similar manner to love God by means of obedience to His commandments. As outstanding a job as the Christian church has done over the centuries in spreading the Good News of Jesus to every corner of the globe, this foundational God-principle of obedience to the Lord’s commands as ***the*** expected expression of love towards Him (the expression that He seeks from us) has curiously been set aside and made less important than it ought to be; it often has been labeled that obedience to His written commands is legalism, and therefore it is a “work”, and legalism and works are to be avoided. I realize that many who hear this teaching still have some reluctance to accept this foundational God-principle of active obedience to the Lord’s laws and commands as the expected and demanded practical expression of our love for God. Many Believers still cling (consciously or unconsciously) to the notion that accepting Yeshua as Lord and Savior is the last work or act of obedience ever expected of us. While that is indeed true for attainment of our Salvation, it is **not** true when it comes to how we’re to live our lives as saved people. Perhaps Deuteronomy 8 and 9 will give us food for thought; I pray that it does because people are watching how we act out our faith as never before. And because of the era in which we have arrived, Jews in particular are watching us (all be it usually from a distance); watching how gentile and Jewish Believers in Yeshua actually operate.

My wife and I had a Torah observant Jew as one of our guests for Thanksgiving one recent

year, and because we had developed a relationship he felt free enough to talk a bit about Christianity and ask us a couple of questions about the New Testament. In the end he stated that his primary problem with the New Testament and the church is that it is all about emotion; that there is no substance. I told him that while indeed what he has observed about some Christians may be accurate that the NT in no way contemplates or defines a new religion based on emotionalism. But, of course, for him all he has to go by is how he observes people behaving who claim to be living a New Testament life. And what he told me that he sees is that the New Testament life apparently represents a complete disconnect of faith in God from any desire to be actively obedient to God's commands. While this is in no way universal of course, I am forced to admit that it is a rather common attitude in the Western Church.

If you think that's not true, then note this: 25 years ago a study showed what church officials instinctively knew: 80% of all giving to the church was accomplished by only 20% of the people who attended. Did you catch that? In the early 1980's only 2 out of every 10 people who went to church wound up providing almost all of the support. Today the Christian Marketing and Information gathering company Barna reports that number is rapidly shrinking towards only about 1 in 10 who provides the bulk of support.

Well, you might say, sure but that's because some people have a lot more money than other people; that this is due to a wide disparity in incomes. There is some truth to that, of course, but let me give you another fact that ought to temper that notion; a few years ago I was the business administrator of a mega-church, so as part of my duties I gathered all the financial reports and had to make heads or tails out of them. One report in particular caught my attention. To my surprise only about 40% of the people who attended our church during a year's period of time give anything at all. That's right; out of every 10 people who regularly attended this church 6 contributed exactly nothing. And as it turns out, that is actually rather typical according to studies accomplished by Christianity Today in cooperation with the Barna group.

As unwelcome as that news is, volunteerism also continues to diminish; the general number today for those who volunteer their time in ANY way is 5% of the church population: 1 in 20. What is it that Yeshua said? "The Harvest is plentiful but the workers are few". Now there is far more to a Believer's demonstration of obedience to God's commands than merely giving money to your church or synagogue, or devoting your time to ministry. But this is a quantifiable measurement gathered over decades and it is certainly a valid and real reflection of just what our thoughts are about how seriously (or not) that we manifest our faith in God when it comes to being actively obedient (or not) to His laws and commands.

Here in Deuteronomy, as Moses stared into the faces of all those Israelites whom he had led, cared for, fought for, mediated for, and sacrificed everything for (over the past 40 years) it was little different than how it is today within Christianity. A few among his listeners would heed the message to love the Lord in the WAY the Lord demanded: obedience to His

commands. Unfortunately the vast bulk of the people would nod their head in silent agreement and then decide they had a better way, their way, to go about supposedly living the redeemed life; and it led to horrible consequences including the loss of their precious land inheritance for hundreds of years at a time.

As Disciples of Messiah our ultimate inheritance is the Lord. And we too are bound to DO the commands of God or we too are bound to lose our inheritance. Our Lord and Savior had this to say about it:

^{NAS} Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.²² "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'²³ "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

What lawlessness is Jesus speaking about? Breaking the Roman law? Breaking American civil law? Of course not. He's talking about the only law that concerned a Jew. He's talking about the Law that is Biblical, universal, and eternal; the laws of Yehoveh.

Let's read Deuteronomy chapter 8 together.

READ DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 8 all

If it sounds like Moses is more or less repeating himself, that's because he is. He is saying similar things in different ways to try and make some important points. We won't linger at every point but we will look at a few of them carefully.

Verse 1 makes a strong statement: there is a real and tangible reason for Israel to obey the instruction (in Hebrew, **Torah**) that they are hearing; it is so that they will thrive in the Land of Canaan that is about to become their possession. This is one of those statements that are said so often and so concisely, that it can blow right by us (as I'm sure it did those ancient Hebrews). There is a quid pro quo at work here: IF you do this, Israel, THEN I (the Lord) will do that for you. In other words Israel's ability to stay rooted in the Promised Land, as well as to thrive in the land, is entirely conditional on Israel's obedience to the Lord's commands.

Note something: when the Bible speaks of obedience to God more often than not what is actually said is, “obedience to God’s COMMANDS or laws”. When the Bible says “obedience to God” it MEANS “obedience to His written commands”. What else is there to be obedient to? We have developed this doctrine over the centuries that everything we (as Believers) are to obey is somehow directly transmitted from God to us (as individuals) in some supernatural way or it’s not for us. That is that God’s written Word is subservient to, or at variance with, some thought or instruction that the Lord puts in our minds by means of the Holy Spirit. Does the Lord put those mystical thoughts in our minds in this way? **Absolutely**. Is that the regular everyday means of our understanding God’s purpose and boundaries and rules of conduct for our lives? **Absolutely NOT!** The main way we discover the Lord’s characteristics and justice system (which is spelled out by His laws and commands) is by means of His **written** word. In fact when we DO get a thought of something to do or not to do that we believe is from the Lord, we are to check it alongside His written Word to see if it agrees. If it does NOT agree, or if it is against His written laws and commands, then we are to discard that thought as either a temptation from the Evil One, or perhaps something derived from our own evil inclinations, or even an over active imagination. The written Word is the standard by which all else must be compared. The written Word of God is the Believers’ spiritual constitution. Listen to this well-known and often quoted NT passage:

^{NAS} 2 Timothy 3:16 *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

A couple of things about this passage: remember, the ONLY Scripture Paul was referring to was the OT because there would be no other words of God written down and accepted as inspired biblical canon for around a century after his death. That is, when the word “Scripture” is used in the Bible (including in the New Testament) it is referring only to the Old Testament because that’s all that existed. Paul, Peter, even the latest New Testament writer John the Revelator had no idea that about 100 years after Paul’s martyrdom that some of their letters would be seen by a portion of the Church as additions to Holy Scripture.

Also notice what Paul said is the **source** is of teaching, reproof, correction and learning, and what righteousness IS; it is the **written** word of God (Scriptures), the Old Testament. Then we’re told WHY we need this learning, and what is the reason? It is so that we are well equipped to do what? To do good **works**. Uh-oh. There’s the “w” word again. Paul says we’re to learn the Lord’s commands for the purpose of our **doing good works**. I guess Paul, by modern doctrine, is telling us to be legalistic and to put all our hope in works, huh? Obviously I’m saying that sarcastically because the Bible NEVER, NEVER makes good works out to be legalistic, nor does it tell Believers that we are to abandon obedience to God’s commands and to works.

My dearest brothers and sisters in the Lord please consider this: it is the most common saying among we modern day Believers to tell one another to “follow your heart”. That within our hearts lays the truth. Remembering that when the Bible says “heart”, in that era the thought was of the heart as the organ where conscious thought, the intellect, the mind resided. Therefore we’re cautioned this in the Word of God:

^{NAS} **Jeremiah 17:9** *"The heart (meaning the mind) is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"*

Is our heart (mind) no LONGER deceitful when we accept Yeshua as Savior? Listen to Paul again:

^{NAS} **Romans 7:15** *For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.*

This is the dilemma we all face as Christians. The evil inclination in our minds was NOT destroyed upon our Salvation; we will continue to struggle with it, give in to it at times, and even occasionally believe it and obey it over God’s Word and His direction to us through the ***Ruach HaKodesh***. So many great and worthwhile evangelists, preachers, and teachers have taken great falls because they listened to a supposed “word from the Lord” that ran completely counter to the written Word of God, (whether it was general wisdom or direct commandments). They believed that somehow what was “in their hearts” was greater and more important than what was in the Lord’s written commands. This is why we must always look into the word of God; that is we must always be obedient to His commands and be a bit suspicious of our own thoughts.

Next Moses tells the people to remember God’s acts of deliverance and of harsh judgment against them in their 40-year wilderness journey. These lessons are going to be all-important when they reach the Promised Land. They need to remember their dependence on God, and His mercy in supplying all their needs. They need to be very humble in remembering their rescue from Egypt by God when no other means was possible; and how they were ushered from slavery into a land of abundance by God when all roads seemed blocked. So everything was of divine providence given by the Great Provider; it was not a result of their merit or human ability.

It has always been recognized by the great Bible teachers that the recorded history of Israel’s time in the wilderness was both real and literal as well as a prophetic shadow and illustration, and completely analogous to the process of our moving from our personal slavery to sin into redemption (salvation) in Christ, and then eventually on into the Promised Land of eternity with God. I agree with that premise particularly in the ***pattern*** that is demonstrated. Note that part of

what is being communicated by Moses here is that the Laws the people are learning are really MORE for use INSIDE the Promised Land than outside of it. In fact there are many laws and commands of the Lord's Torah that don't have application without their possessing that Land and living in it (laws of bringing in the firstfruits of a harvest, making a pilgrimage at 3 of the Biblical Feasts, and the laws of Jubilee and family inheritance for examples). What I'm saying is that the Hebrews weren't redeemed, then given God's Commands, and then just as they were about to enter the Promised Land told to disregard all those Laws and Commands and follow their own minds and hearts. And so it is for us. We have not been redeemed by Yeshua, spent time being shown God's commands and learning to obey them, only to stand on the brink of eternity and be told, "once you get there, there will be no more laws and commands". We're to learn and live by those commands now, during our earthly physical lives, because we're going to be living BY those same laws and commands throughout all eternity. Might they have a somewhat different expression and application in eternity as opposed to now? Probably to some degree because the way the Law was practiced in times of old is expressed a little differently today. In fact part of Paul's mission was to explain some of the ways that the expression and application of the Law transformed at the advent of Yeshua HaMashiach.

Great concern is placed on Israel that they avoid becoming haughty and proud as they conquer Canaan. Starting in verse 11 Moses goes on at length repeating a warning about how all that they experienced in the wilderness was for a divine purpose; it was to teach them to trust God, and to have fear and awe of Him at the same time. The climax is verse 17 where it says, ".....**and you say to yourselves 'My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me'**". To this rhetorical miscalculation, Moses counters that the wealth they will have is from the Lord, and it is because of a promise that Yehoveh made to the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and no other reason that Israel has won such favor with God. But if Israel does forget, and it does get proud, destruction will come in similar form as is about to happen to the pagan nations and tribes of Canaanites who will be dispossessed of their homes and land.

I think that for a person to be a success in this world, but then turn around and give God the praise and glory for that success, is only possible if God intervenes in your life to show you the truth. The act of being saved is not, of itself, sufficient to automatically make us grateful or full of humility. I have experienced this and know firsthand. Even as a Christian I was confident and bloated with self-assurance in my corporate life, and thought of myself as invincible and fully deserving of my success. Well it took a severe intervention by God to show me otherwise. The lesson was among the most valuable in my life, but the pain of that time is also unforgettable. It really isn't our natural knee-jerk reaction to give God the credit for the good things in our life; rather it's to see ourselves as full of merit.

Let's move on to chapter 9.

READ DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 9: 1 - 17

I told you when we started Deuteronomy that it was primarily a sermon of Moses, and as such he would repeat many of Yehoveh's laws and commands but equally he would expound on their meaning and intent and how they were to be applied in the Promised Land. Therefore the form of what I'm teaching you in our Deuteronomy study is sermon-like; and it is really unavoidable. I've mentioned before that the NT is composed more than 50% of OT quotations; Deuteronomy is by far the most quoted book by Jesus and the Apostles. And I think that is due to its sermon nature and the focus on explaining the laws rather than simply listing them. It is the same reason that The Sermon on the Mount is perhaps the most studied part of the New Testament by Christians; because it is exactly that, a sermon; a sermon that expounds on the Law.

It's interesting that the FIRST WORD of chapter 9 is one we looked at carefully a few chapters ago: **Shema**. The first two words of chapter 9 are **shema Israel**...Hear O Israel. Recall that shema doesn't mean to listen passively. It is a term that means to pay attention AND to do what is said. I've often defined **shema** as meaning "hear and obey". It is a very forceful statement.....a demand really.

The entire point of chapter 9 is this: the Lord God, Yehoveh, will be the victor in the Holy War against the Canaanites; Israel is only God's agent (His human proxy) in this victory. The Lord says that Israel is going to battle and dispossess nations who are stronger than they are and who are well entrenched; nations that have had much time to prepare their defenses against attack from Israel. Remember Israel's destination was no secret to the people of the Middle East. Their route was a bit up in the air, but Israel's stated destination (Canaan) was always known. So you can be sure that the great kings of the various Canaanite peoples prepared in earnest for the coming invasion. Among those who Israel will take on are the Anakites; these are a legendarily big, tall, and ferocious nation of warriors. Verse 2 says that it was a common saying among Middle Easterners, "who can stand up to the children of Anak?" But Israel is not to be concerned because the Lord God is a consuming fire and no one (not even the fearsome descendents of Anak) can stand against Yehoveh.

We come now to a vital part of today's lesson, Chapter 9 verse 4. Because the Lord says that when Israel has subdued the Canaanites (actually when God has subdued them) the Hebrews are **not** to think, "the Lord has enabled us to possess this land because of our virtues". That is they're not to think that because they are an especially meritorious people their God has enabled them to win. As the last part of verse 4 says, "it is rather because of the wickedness of those nations that the Lord is dispossessing them", and then goes on to repeat what has now been said a number of times, "**...and in order to fulfill the oath that the Lord made to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**".

Wow. If that doesn't put the Hebrews in their place before the Lord, what will? God says Israel has never held any special or inherent virtue that caused Him to want to do all these wonderful things for them. Israel has not been born with, nor have their deeds earned them, righteousness before the Lord; that in fact they are inherently no better or worse than any body else living on planet earth. Rather just as in later times when the Lord will use the Assyrians, later still the Babylonians, and finally the Romans as His instruments to wreak holy judgment upon His own people Israel on account of their rebellion, so is God about to use Israel as simply a tool to wreak His holy judgment upon the Canaanite tribes for their wickedness.

In reality only God possesses true righteousness. Probably one of the most difficult and contentious words in the entire Bible is the word "righteousness" (in Hebrew, **tzedek** or in this form **tzedekah**). Like the word **Shalom** in the OT or Salvation in the NT, righteousness is not a word that can be explained in dictionary fashion; several of these Biblical words carry deep and often inscrutable elements to them.

For the sake of time let me offer one particular aspect of this term that perhaps you might not have heard; it is that in addition to the more familiar aspects of righteousness meaning good, or standard, or normal, it also indicates a judicial legal standing. Legal standing is everything in the Bible, because God's righteousness is based on His system of justice and vice versa. So from a legal/judicial standpoint God's righteousness means that He is always "in the right". In a court of law the basic understanding is that when two people contend against one another like in a Civil case, or it is the government going against an individual for breaking a law, one side is essentially judged as "in the right" and the other side as "in the wrong". A Biblical principle is that a person who has been tried in a court of law and found innocent is seen as "in the right" or as righteous. The Holy War that the Lord was ordering upon Canaan was to establish **what was right** in order to replace **what was wrong**. That is that Israel (who God says is being used as His earthly representative of what is right) is His proxy to overthrow those who are wrong (the Canaanites and their wicked ways).

Now this may bother some of you a little (particularly in a world of relative right and wrong) to call one entire people group "right" and to lump a whole other group of people into the category of "wrong". But in a certain sense that is what is happening here. This particular usage of the word "righteous" (meaning **what is right**) also extends to the concept that the Promised Land is currently inhabited with Canaanites who in God's plan do not belong there; rather, Israel belongs there. So it is with no apologies that the Lord makes right what is currently wrong by ejecting the Canaanites and installing His people.

Now I don't want to belabor this (but I will) to make a point that certainly applies to the situation in the Middle East today: what God was doing in the takeover of Canaan by Israel was not establishing Israel as a people who were somehow inherently **in the right** by dispossessing another people who were unlucky enough to be born as a people **inherently in**

the wrong. Are you with me? Israel was not a “right people” and the Canaanites a “wrong people” by their own nature or merit. Israel was not “right” in and of itself, and therefore fully deserving of having that land that was currently in the hands of a people who were “wrong” in and of themselves. This was not even an issue of whether Israel was righteous or not; this was the Lord working out His own righteousness for His own purposes. In essence Israel was but the agent of God’s divine righteousness to be used against a bunch of people who chose to behave wickedly.....the people of Canaan. Israel was imputed with God’s righteousness; none of it was of their own.

Let me take that one step further; there is no human being born inherently righteous. There is not a nation or a tribe or a family anyone can be born into that is inherently “in the right”, versus another person or family that was born inherently “in the wrong”. Accidents of birth are of no interest to the Lord; one doesn’t win the Heavenly Lotto by being born a Jew or by being born an American; but lose by being born an Iraqi or an Arab. You see, Israel did not have inherent righteousness and neither do born again Christians. As part of redeemed Israel a Hebrew was simply elected as God’s agent in the working out of His **tzedek**, His righteousness; it wasn’t because that particular Hebrew had some special kind of righteousness that others didn’t. As part of the body of disciples of Yeshua, you and I were simply mysteriously elected as God’s agents in the working out of His **tzedek**, His righteousness on earth.

Here’s the dilemma: WHY Israel, and WHY me? WHY didn’t God choose the Egyptians, or Osama Bin Laden? WHY did God choose Israel to be His redeemed people, and WHY did God choose you to be part of His redeemed according to faith in Yeshua and not some others? I don’t know. The Bible uses the term “election” (and often “called”) on both counts and that in itself is a long subject. If election or called is the correct term (and it probably is), it indicates choice or selection as opposed to chance. It’s not by cosmic chance, or by Israel’s self-appointment, that Israel became God’s people; that’s why they’re called “God’s **Chosen**” in Holy Scripture. It’s not by cosmic chance, nor self-appointment, that any human, since about 30 A.D., who put their faith in Yeshua was redeemed; it was by God’s choice. How does He make these choices; what are His criteria? We don’t know, but here is what we DO know: the selection has NOTHING to do with who we are, where we were born, whether we’re male or female, what our skin color is, what our social status is, nor does it have to do with some type of “rightness” that we possess naturally (sort of genetically in-born) that others didn’t get.

Therefore as Paul states it, here is how we should look at the mystery of our election to salvation: **Corinthians 1:26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, and the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are,²⁹ that no man should boast before God.**

He chooses weak people, and people who are not. He chooses despised people and people who are not. He chooses wise people, and people who are not. Election is a mystery, an unsolvable Rubrics Cube. There is no merit involved, apparently no prerequisite that we're aware of, and as a result we ought to accept our Salvation in the deepest humility and perhaps with a good helping of fear. Paul had no idea why Israel was chosen (other than for the sake of the Patriarchs, which is hazy even to the Rabbis), or why Paul himself was chosen, or who **will** be chosen. But chosen we are and chosen we will remain. God chose Israel AND it remains chosen, and so it will be forever. We can agree or disagree with God's choices, but it changes nothing.

Now as for the Middle East today: just as it was for Moses, Joshua and the Israelites 3300 years ago there is nothing inherently "in the right" about today's Jews and inherently "in the wrong" about today's Arabs. They're all just people. However a long time ago the Lord made a choice; Israel was chosen to be set apart as God's servants, and Israel was to possess a special tract of land in the Middle East to fulfill God's purposes, and no one else is authorized to hold that land. Israel (as foolish and stiff-necked as they are) remains a tool to punish the wicked nations who surround Israel. And at the same time those nations are God's tool to bludgeon His people Israel to repentance. Three times the Hebrews were exiled by wicked empires that the Lord authorized to be His agents to discipline His People. But that time has passed and it is abundantly clear in the Scriptures that the LAST time that exile will be used as punishment upon Israel happened 2000 years ago, at the hands of the Romans.

Instead, in our era, the Israelis will return to their own land (which they have) and THERE they will be attacked, bloodied, hated, and murdered not just by their immediate neighbors but also by every nation on earth. They will not be driven out but they will be decimated. However before they are wiped out completely Israel's Messiah will return, the surviving remnant of Israel will be saved, and Messiah Yeshua will lead a war of complete annihilation against all the wicked nations of the earth and this time God's elect will be God's agents to wreak havoc upon the wicked. Yeshua our Messiah will lead this Holy War to end all wars at Armageddon.

Therefore there is one thing and one thing alone that Israel can stand upon as their claim to being God's especially chosen people and to the land; it was God's sovereign decision. They never earned it, but also they were never required to earn it. They certainly don't deserve it any more now than they did 3000 years ago; but they weren't required to deserve it. All they're required to do is to be obedient. No matter, God is "in the right" to make the divine choice that He wants Israel there and that for the Arabs (or anyone else for that matter) to occupy even one square foot of land designated for Israel is "wrong". God is in the same process today as Moses was so long ago as Moses was telling Israel that the Lord was the about to replace the wrong people with the right people.

We'll stop here and return to our study of Deuteronomy chapter 9 next week.

