

DEUTERONOMY

Lesson 17 - Chapters 13 and 14

Today we take up Deuteronomy chapter 13. Chapter 12 dealt with the Lord's command for Israel to uproot and destroy every vestige of the Canaanite mystery religions that were present in the Land of Promise. Israel was to make no compromises nor accept any treaties that permitted the resident Canaanites to continue with the worship of their false gods. Why? Because first, these practices (even though in a certain sense permitted for pagans) were abominable to Yehoveh; and second, because such perverted observances were dangerous for Israel because the Israelites could easily become ensnared in tempting and attractive pagan celebrations. The danger was so great that for Israel to do such a thing would involve severe retribution from God, even going so far at times as to end in permanent separation from Him for some individuals.

Therefore chapter 13 is the natural extension of chapter 12 because 13 declares what is to happen to anyone who tries to reestablish the multiple god worship that Yehoveh is in process of stamping out.

Let's read chapter 13 in its entirety.

READ DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 13 all

Verse 1 is a product warning label; a kind of a divine mattress tag that is never to be removed. And the warning is plain and simple: what I am telling you to do, do and don't ever abolish any of these principles and don't ever add any more principles. The Lord God has given the ways of worshipping Him that are acceptable. Should the Israelites choose to add some of the pagan Canaanite worship practices to their worship of Yehoveh, this amounts to disobedience and sin at the highest level; it amounts to idolatry and unfaithfulness.

This short terse verse seems so repetitive and simplistic, yet in reality it is at the heart of what

would plague Israel and eventually the church to this very day. As we carefully read the later books of the Old Testament and learn of the idolatrous practices of many Hebrews in mixing in the worship of other gods, it was rare that worship of Yehoveh was abandoned and replaced with these new gods. Rather it was more usual that Israel simply added some pagan traditions to their worship of the Lord and (just as usual) added the worship of some pagan gods alongside the worship of Yehoveh. They simply mixed and matched to please themselves, and to show tolerance to their pagan neighbors, and then declared that since it was in the name of God Almighty then it was OK.

There were a number of ways in which this abomination could come about and in chapter 13 we encounter a set of 3 of those ways, and it has to do with individual Israelites who entice their brethren away from pure worship and towards apostasy. We are given 3 examples of common ways a Hebrew might lead others astray; 1st is whereby a man claims allegiance to God, publicly says he has received a word or visions from the Lord, and is even able to give a visible sign (that comes true) to prove that what he prophesies is authentically from Yehoveh. 2nd is the case of a close relative or friend (in essence a family member) who, in private and in secret, tries to get other family members to accept forbidden gods. And 3rd is where a man has prophesied something as from the Lord and successfully gets the inhabitants of an entire village or city to adopt some form of pagan traditions and/or some pagan gods.

Now this is not meant to exhaust all the possible ways for people to be led astray by false prophets; it is but the more common everyday ways that are bound to occur with regular frequency in such a large population as Israel that will be living amongst several Canaanite nations who have no intention of giving up their gods for Israel's god. What is important to understand is that each of these cases applies to the modern body of Messiah as much as to ancient Israel.

The first case starts in verse 2 and ends in verse 6 or 7 depending on your Bible version. It tells of a person who is regarded as a prophet or one who has visions (dreams), and who is difficult to refute because he claims to be a prophet of Yehoveh AND what he offers as proof (a sign) of his ability to see the future, as revealed by the Lord, seems to come true. The problem is that this person who claims allegiance to God says that God Himself has told him that Israel should bow down to other gods as well. Now this may sound very odd to us, but to anyone living in that era this was the norm. Recall that one of the titles we'll find in the Old Testament for Yehoveh is "El" and El is a title that originated from the Canaanite mystery religions that denotes the chief god, the highest god, who rules over the pantheon of lesser gods and goddesses. It was common that a prophet of the El (in whatever culture we might be talking about) would announce that El has decided that his people are to add a god or goddess to their worship. Since all the lesser gods and goddesses were under the authority of the El, this was in no way abandoning worship of the El, the highest god; it was simply saying that one of the countless numbers of lesser gods who reported to El was now to play a role in their worship practices. So the idea is to follow other gods in addition to El; and the Hebrews were very comfortable with that idea.

Let's be clear: God DID communicate to His people in ancient times by means of His prophets and through those who had visions. In general these were two different categories; prophets were the professionals. Prophets were often ordained as prophets and even if they were not, they were recognized de facto as God's prophets. They were even supported by the community. So it's not as though a person would just pop up and declare he was a prophet; rather it was a recognized position. A person who had visions generally was NOT a professional, but rather a layperson; it could be a person who found favor with the Lord and so had these divine dreams, or it could be a religious authority who received a revelation from time to time in a dream. At times a prophet might receive his word from the Lord via a dream or vision. So these words are simply lumping both possibilities together and saying do not listen to anyone, no matter how accurate their prophesies might be IF they also advocate worshipping other gods.

And, in verse 4 the Lord says the reason that He allows one of these false prophets to know the future all the while that prophet is trying to lead the people astray, is to test the Hebrews to see who will obey God and who won't. The key here is that any prophet or dream interpreter who suggests following other gods, or adopting some element of pagan worship, is NOT to be listened to because the very suggestions that prophet is making are indications that he is evil. Instead the people are to reject that prophet or dream diviner and put him to death.

Notice something important; the test of whether a prophet is false is NOT whether or not he is correct. It isn't even whether or not he claims that he is a follower of God Almighty. Rather it is that WHAT he prophesies is in tune with God's written laws and commands. Think back to when we studied Moses confronting Pharaoh; God gave Moses a series of signs and wonders to prove that he was the Lord's spokesperson. However in many of those cases Pharaoh's sorcerers were equally able to perform similar signs. So who was to be believed? Certainly in a head-to-head battle the Lord's sign overcame the Egyptian magicians' sign (such as when Moses' staff turned into a serpent, the Magicians countered by turning their staffs into serpents, but the serpent of Moses devoured the other snakes) but the magicians signs were real nonetheless. A false prophet CAN display supernatural ability, so we must be very discerning. How do we discern? Without knowing God's written word it is impossible. That Word gives us the truth so that we can compare what we experience against it in order to know what is and what is not of the Holy Spirit.

In some ways this problem sounds ancient and primitive but in fact it has corrupted Judeo-Christianity to our core. And it began with the false doctrine that the Old Testament was dead and gone and that we should not look to it for God's principles, patterns, and truth. What better way for the enemy to deceive the church than to convince us to discard the very document given to us from our Creator as our roadmap for harmonious and victorious living, and instead have us turn to pious sounding but error-filled doctrines contrived by the minds of denominational leadership, theologians and religious philosophers? The church has done the very thing we were warned NOT to do! Do NOT subtract from nor add to the Word of God. My

goodness the church has officially abolished 2/3rds of Gods Word! Our Savior Yeshua warned us again during His Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew 5:17 -19. But by means of allegory and anti-Semitism that is what we have done and it caused us the greatest of confusion and done the worst harm exactly as it did to the ancient Hebrews.

The consequence for being a false prophet is pronounced in verse 6; he is to be executed. Is this execution punishment, per se? Actually it is less a matter of punishment and more a matter of what is said at the end of that same verse: "this is how you are to rid your community of wickedness". Boy has the world's supposedly developed and civilized and intellectualized societies managed to turn this principle on its head. Getting rid of a person who commits heinously evil acts once and for all (evil as defined by God) is a benefit and protection for the community at large because it rids that community of evil. Now the whole thing has been turned upside down and the so-called "law of love" doctrine is wrongly applied and the murderers and violent offenders are to be shown mercy and tolerance with the result that evil is allowed to remain and infect others.

Next up is the case of a family member privately trying to entice another family member to serve other gods "which you have not known". This is referring to a VERY close family member who is doing the enticing because we are given specific relations in descending order of importance (for that era, at least). First is the brother; but because it was very usual for a man to have more than one wife (and a concubine or two as well), and therefore for a son to have several half-brothers, this makes clear that this is referring to a FULL brother (having the same mother and father), the closest sibling relationship possible. Second in importance is one's son, and after that one's daughter, and after that one's wife, and then a VERY close and trusted friend. So the idea is that when a close family member approaches another family member with the suggestion to include the worship of other gods, the family member that was approached with this illegal suggestion might just be tempted to ignore it or cover it up and not do what God has ordained be done: execute the instigator.

Therefore we're told in verse 9 that in addition to not consenting to such a thing (not even if that family member is your own mother or someone in authority over you) you are NOT to pity them, not to obey them, not to follow them, nor are you to conceal them (that is protect them from what must rightfully be the consequence). Instead the FAMILY must kill that family member who is trying to entice the others into idolatry. The reason for this drastic action is stated in verse 12: "then all Israel will hear about it and be afraid, so that they will stop doing such wickedness as this among themselves".

The means of executing that person is also prescribed: stoning. Here's the thing; the idea of stoning a person to death is that everyone in the community is to participate. By everyone in the community participating, it indicates the community's consensual agreement to reject the evil and sin that person committed. Therefore what is being stated in these verses is not that (without trial) a father is to take his son or his wife outside the camp and then stone them to

death if that son or wife suggests the family worship other gods; rather it is that they are to turn them in to the proper authorities, bring them up for trial and act AS A WITNESS, and then if that person is convicted they are to follow God's law that the witness is to be the first to throw a stone of execution and then the rest of the community joins in to finish the job. Pretty severe.

The God-principle is clear: our obligation of obedience to God and His commands is above any allegiance to our closest family member (even our parents, children, or spouse). When faced with the terrible choice of committing blatant evil in God's eyes or maintaining a relationship with that fallen family member, one is to turn their back (if necessary) on the family member in order to remain faithful to the Lord. This, as all other Torah principles, was not abolished by Yeshua. Jesus says this in ^{NAS} **Luke 14:26** *"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple."*

Now hopefully you can detect that just as in our day teachers and preachers of God will use some degree of hyperbole to bring home a point, that is what Christ was doing here. He was not suggesting that upon accepting Him that we are to develop an active hatred for our families. He is of course not stating that loving Him means automatic rejection of our family. Rather it is that IF He calls upon us and our family says we must choose between following Jesus and remaining in good stead with the family, we are to choose to follow Jesus and let the chips fall where they may. I, fortunately, did not have to make such a heartbreaking choice; but many have had to make this heartbreaking, life changing decision, including MOST Jews who have accepted their own Jewish Messiah, Yeshua.

The final example given is when a person attempts to subvert an entire population center by encouraging them (as a community or congregation) to fall away from the Lord by worshipping false gods or adding paganism to our observances. In fact the case here in Deuteronomy 13 is of an Israelite town where it has already happened. It is interesting that the point I just made about there necessarily being a trial to determine the guilt or innocence of the accused idolater is here raised. The consequence is that the entire community who has succumbed to this apostasy (not just the instigators) must be executed.

The fellows who started the trouble (here in the CJB called scoundrels, and in other versions called base fellows) are literally in Hebrew described as "**bene Belial**", which means children, or sons, of Belial. Belial means worthless or useless folks like murderers and rapists that do nothing but do harm and incite trouble; so most literally this calls the instigators of this mass idolatry sons of worthlessness (so scoundrel is a good translation). There are a couple of places in the Bible where we'll again run across this word, Belial, and sometimes it is used as a proper noun (a formal name). Satan, for instance, is often used as a formal name even though it also simply means "adversary". When Belial is used as a proper name, it is much in the same way we might call the devil the "Evil One". The Evil One isn't really another formal name for the devil; it's just a literary device whereby we take a general title and assign it to a

certain person who is said to bear that attribute, and it becomes (in a kind of poetic fashion) an alternative proper name.

We find the term Belial in the NT as well as the old. ^{NAS} **2 Corinthians 6:15** *or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?* So from the OT we now learn what this NT passage means: it means “or what harmony has Christ with sons of worthlessness (scoundrels or antisocial criminals)....”

Now as a final judgment for the crime of idolatry that the entire community participated in, the town itself (the buildings) is to be destroyed. And the ruins of the town are never to be built on again. The Hebrew word used here for the heap, or ruins, of the town is “**tel**”. Those who have been to Israel have been to many a **tel**, because a **tel** is just where a series of cities have been rebuilt each upon the ruins of the previous city....often as many as 15 or 20 times. In fact the word heap or mound well describes it; because although the original city was generally built on the same level as its surroundings, over the centuries the cycle of destruction and rebuilding literally creates a hill which grows with each successive round of construction to the point that some of these **tel** mounds are 100 feet high and more and to the uninitiated seem as though they must have been a small hill jutting out of nowhere.

In addition to burning the buildings the spoils of the city (the personal items that are usually confiscated and given to the military commander or king) are to be piled high and burnt with fire. This is called **herem**; and the idea is that because the Lord ordered the destruction of the town due to His divine wrath being poured out upon it, this was a sacred and holy act. Therefore just as a sacrificial animal is to be completely burnt up on the Altar and all of it given to God, so are the town’s spoils to be burnt up symbolically thereby giving it all to God.

The last 2 verses explain that the reason for destroying the town is that God’s anger is against ALL Israel for the act of this one rebellious town turning to apostasy; and His anger will not be satisfied until His instruction to destroy the town, the townspeople and everything in it is accomplished. Only then will He bring His favor back upon the nation of Israel.

Such is the seriousness of committing adultery against the Lord. There exists no higher crime against His Holiness than for one who purports to be in union with Him, to willingly come into union with evil.....in this case, false gods.

Let’s move on to chapter 14.

READ DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 14: 1 - 8

This chapter begins with a most personal comment from the Lord. I have mentioned on a couple of occasions that the Bible makes it clear that in the eyes of God you are whoever you identify yourself with. This was expressed in the previous chapter using the term “**bene Belial**” (sons of worthlessness), scoundrels who the Lord identifies as evil people opposed to Him. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the words that begin Deuteronomy 14; there God says that Israel is “**bene Yehoveh**”, sons of Yehoveh. The Lord identifies the Hebrews as a holy people attached to Him and says the Lord, as such you are not to have mourning rituals like the Canaanite pagans (the **bene Belial**) have.

We’re going to find that several specific rituals and practices of the Canaanites are prohibited for Israel simply because the Canaanites do them; generally speaking that is why this command against Israelites shaving their heads (males, of course) and slashing themselves so that they bleed as a custom for mourning the dead is not allowed. These types of acts were known throughout the Middle East and most of the known world, but the Lord says His people are not to do such things because they are a holy people set apart for Him. One of the principles behind God’s holiness is that holy things must be without defect. Therefore animals that are to be sacrificed to Him on the Brazen Altar must not have blemishes or scars or be sickly or weak; rather they must be the best, perfect, no defects. This also carries over to the priests who serve the Lord; priests cannot serve if they have a physical deformity like a missing finger or a large scar or burn mark or are born with some kind of birth defect. Thus it follows that the common population of Israel is also under this ideal holiness pattern of having no deformities or defects; and therefore while a Hebrew who DOES have a scar or burn or birth defect is NOT penalized by the Lord and is no less holy than any other common Israelite for it, they certainly are not to intentionally create a defect by scarring or disfiguring themselves in any way.

With this short paragraph concerning holiness in mourning completed, verse 3 begins a longer section dealing with diet (or better the required holiness of the Israelite diet). And central to this is the definition of acceptable versus prohibited foods, clean versus unclean. In fact from the Hebrew viewpoint, that which is prohibited is not even considered food. In other words there is food on the one hand and then there are edible things on the other that for Israel is not food. This is a type of thinking that is important for us to grasp when reading the Bible (OT or NT) as it concerns what a Hebrew can eat and what he can’t.

The Hebrew Sages point out that the concept of the Lord putting boundaries around what a Hebrew can eat as food begins in Genesis 2 when Adam and Eve are told that they can eat the fruit of everything in the Garden of Eden without restriction EXCEPT fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. I would like to point out a principle revealed here that we haven’t talked about in quite some time but its worth reviewing; and it is that up until Yehoveh instructed Adam and Eve not to eat of that certain tree, there WERE NO rules laid down by

God. Let me say that again: when Adam and Eve were first created no moral laws or civil laws or rules of any kind existed for them. It is instructive for us that the very first law that God ordained for them, and for the world, concerned food. What this means in our modern vocabulary is that up until the moment that Yehoveh said not to eat that one fruit from that one tree, sinning was utterly impossible for the first couple. Without a law from God to break....and breaking a law of God is the definition of sinning.....how could they commit a sin? Answer: they couldn't. But once the Lord gave the command to Adam and Eve restricting the eating of fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil sin NOW could occur. Why? Because there was finally a rule to break. Adam and Eve essentially had a Torah that contained but one single law. And, guess what, they couldn't wait to violate it.

I am convinced that until that law was set in place Adam and Eve had no idea that there was such a thing as right and wrong, good and evil, obedience to God and sin. The concepts of evil, wrong, and sin had no meaning and have no meaning unless a line is drawn between something that is acceptable to Yehoveh and something that is not.

Although this is a slight detour I would like to make a couple of observations that will be helpful in understanding why things are the way they are concerning mankind and sin. I need you to put down your Bibles, please, look up at me and follow me because this is not an easy thing to comprehend.

We are all born with two inclinations in our souls: the good inclination and the evil inclination; the propensity to do good, and the propensity to do evil. These two inclinations are what form our will. Adam and Eve were created with the good inclination and evil inclination just as we are. If they weren't formed with those two inclinations then they would not have had wills. They would have been as robots. What is the purpose of the will? The will is that component of a human that makes moral choices. What is a moral choice? Moral is defined in the Bible as meaning something that is in line with God's character and will; so a moral choice is whereby we choose to align our decisions for or against God's will. When we make a moral choice that is **in line** with God's will that is called obedience. When we make a moral choice **to go against** God's will that is called sin.

Therefore, even though Adam and Eve were created without sin, they **were** created with the **ability** to make a moral choice. But until God announced that they were not to eat of that one tree, they had no moral choices to make. Therefore sinning was a practical impossibility for them. Can you see that? A will is completely inoperable without any moral choices to make. God's laws provide for those moral choices.

But in addition to moral choices mankind has a second and entirely different category of choices available to us: preferences. Preferences are things like preferring red to yellow; apples over bananas; chocolate over vanilla. Or choosing to drive a Buick instead of Honda, or

wearing a long sleeved shirt instead of a short-sleeved shirt. Preferences are things that allow us freedoms whereby good and evil are not involved and therefore obedience versus sin are not involved. The function of the human will is NOT to make preferences; the human will is that part of us that makes moral choices.

Here's the thing I'd like you to try and envision: there are two realms (two categories) of choice for mankind: moral choice and preference. God has divided and separated these two realms from each other as far as east is from the west. In the realm of moral choice (the realm that deals with our wills) the Lord has laid down detailed parameters and boundaries in the Torah. Within the Torah are laws and commands (the things that detail those parameters and boundaries). Usually they're in the form of God's do's and don'ts; it is where good and evil, right and wrong are defined and set down for us so that we don't have to guess. This is where God's sovereignty reigns and it is untouchable and inalterable.

The Bible does not generally deal with preferences other than to make it clear those choices OUTSIDE of moral choices falls into the realm of preferences. The liberties and freedoms talked about so much in the NT are in this realm (or category) of preferences, NOT in the realm of moral choices. We must never think that a) there are no rules and laws for the Believer, and b) that therefore everything for us is simply preference. Because if we believe that, we're saying that morality no longer exists for the Disciple of Christ. That Christians and Messianics currently live in the same state that Adam and Eve lived BEFORE God have them the command NOT to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. That is just plain Scriptural error to think that.

Here's the rub: what mankind has done forever, and is doing so at an unprecedented rate today, is attempting to remove items from the realm of moral choice and place them instead into the realm of preference. Remember, the realm of moral choice is governed by God's will, His laws and commands; the realm of preference has been given for man to choose among; things for which no divine law has been created and therefore right and wrong do not come into play.

By way of example: God's explicit command against homosexuality is being moved in Western society from the realm of a moral choice into to the realm of preference. We're moving it from the realm of morality, of right and wrong, of good and evil, into the realm of human preference where right and wrong is of no issue. This slight of hand is not only dangerous it is rebellion against the Lord on the highest level. What authority has man to tell God that we hereby decide to make that which He declares is a moral choice, and instead to downgrade it to a human preference? How dare we say that His definition of good and evil no longer applies to so many things in our lives that He says it does? This movement of choices out of God's realm of morality into man's permitted realm of preference is at the heart of man's rebellion against Him.

Church, I'm afraid that we are responsible for bringing this apostasy about and we must turn back. The day the church declared that there is NO LAW is the day we prematurely abolished the realm of moral choice and transferred all choice into the realm of preference (OUR preference). The day that Christianity believed the lie of all ages and said that Jesus came to abolish the Law (essentially abolishing the basis for moral choice) is the day the church declared total freedom from moral choice. And it has led us down the garden path to a place of moral relativity, decadence, tolerance of sin, and confusion. Too often modern denominational doctrines have declared that what salvation actually saves us from is the divine Law itself. This is a terrible error; rather, salvation saves us from the **consequences** of violating the divine Law. And what other definition of sin is there other than sin is the violation of the God's laws and commands? Further if Jesus came to abolish the Law, then why would we be need to be saved from our sins since ONLY WITH LAW can there even be sin? With Law there is sin, without Law there can be no sin since there is nothing to violate, right? If Yeshua's presence abolished the Law then there was absolutely no need for Him to go to the cross because there wouldn't be any sins necessary for Him to atone for.

This principle that I am stating to you is fully validated by none other than St. Paul, and it has been (for most people) one of the most cryptic and difficult statements of his many difficult statements. ^{NAS} **Romans 4:13** *For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.* ¹⁴ *For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified;* ¹⁵ *for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation.*

The first half of this statement is well understood and I agree with the consensus meaning of it: it is that no one is saved by means of the Law; rather salvation comes by means of faith in Messiah. The Law was never a document meant to save anyone. That was not its purpose.

I have, over the years, heard some of the most imaginative (to put it politely) sermons on the second half of Paul's statement that says, "For the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation". Coupled with some other verses in other of Paul's letters this is one of the key passages many Christian Pastors have used to argue that a) the Law is inherently bad, and b) therefore with the advent of Jesus Christ the Law is abolished and there are no laws for the Christian to follow. That is in no way what Paul is telling us; rather it is that the principle that I just covered with you whereby the ONLY way that sin (violation of the Law) ever ceases to exist is when God's laws cease to exist. Even if there is but one law remaining, there will be violation (just as Adam and Eve demonstrated by violating their one law.....don't eat that fruit!). Goodness, the brand new Believer instinctively understands that regardless of one's stance on the Mosaic Law we Christians DO have rules and boundaries set down by God. Are we now free to murder? Are we now free to lie, and steal, and cheat, and commit adultery? Even the most immature Believers know that when we cross those boundaries and violate those rules of God that we have sinned against the Lord. So maybe the better question for us is: when will that ever stop?

Well, I have good news for you, the Bible answers that question of when sin ceases to be an issue. The answer to that question is also contained in that definitive statement of Jesus Christ in Matthew 5:17-19 when He says, ".....^{NAS} **Matthew 5:18** ***"For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.***

This statement about heaven and earth passing away is literal and it is the key. When the existing heaven and earth pass away (as we are told it will), and when the world is made completely anew at the end of the 1000 year reign of Messiah, then conditions will be similar to the state of Creation AFTER Adam and Eve were created, but BEFORE Adam and Eve were given their very first rule.....don't eat fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. So now we know; only when the NEW Heaven and NEW Earth are created will the Torah and its laws cease to exist.....just as Jesus said. Only then will there be no laws, and therefore no moral choices, and therefore no possibility of sin.

Let's stop here for today and we'll look more closely at the kosher food list of Deuteronomy 14 next week.