

### DEUTERONOMY

#### Lesson 35 - Chapters 25 and 26

Last week we ended our discussion of Deuteronomy chapter 25 with some laws that revolve around God's principle of fundamental fairness among one another. Those laws were given in the context of a wife who intervened in a fight her husband was having with another man, and in order to help him win she grabbed the genitals of her husband's opponent. This rolled into a law about not having two different sets of weights and measures, used with the obvious intent to cheat people.

Immediately following those two are the law we will begin today discussing: the law of Deuteronomy 25:17. This law tells Israel to always remember that their archenemy is the Amalekites and that when the time is right Israel is to wipe out that wicked nation.

Let's re-read the small section of Deuteronomy 25 that talks about this admonition.

#### **RE-READ DEUTERONOMY 25:17 – end**

Who are the Amalekites that Yehoveh wants Israel to never forget and to eventually destroy? Well, if it weren't for the Lord choosing to put them front and center as the archetypical enemy of Israel, they were actually a rather unremarkable people about which little is known. Genesis tells us that the person of Amalek was a grandson of Esau (Esau was the patriarch Jacob's twin brother), who was sired by Esau's son Eliphaz. Therefore Amalek was related to Israel and was a Semite, but because he was not Hebrew that automatically means that Amalek (and the Amelikites) were gentiles. Nevertheless the people that Amalek spawned and grew into a nation that was especially wicked in God's eyes. In fact I contend that they are presented in the Bible as a type, a pattern, probably even as the epitome of an enemy of Israel.

Notice in these verses that God says Israel is never to forget what Amalek did to them; that Amalek attacked Israel as they were struggling to escape the grip of Pharaoh and journey to the Promised Land. Amalek didn't seem to have any rational reason to hate and attack Israel, as Israel had done nothing to them that is recorded in the Bible or any other known historical narrative. Amalek hated them (so far as we know) simply because they existed. They behaved

as a coward and without honor as their method was to attack at the rear of the miles-long column of Israelites, where the weak and the elderly struggled to keep up.

In other words, what they did was fundamentally unfair; and as you'll recall, fundamental fairness was the issue of the previous few verses of this chapter.

It would be a long time before God would finally direct Israel to bring about the annihilation of the nation of Amalek. It was King Saul, about 250 years or so after the time of Moses, who was given the direct order by God to attack Amalek and begin the process of ridding them from the world.

Let's take the time to read the story of King Sha'ul and his battle with Amalek because it ties together a couple of important principles that we have discussed in the past.

### **READ 1 SAM. 15 all**

In a nutshell God orders King Saul to kill everyone and everything associated with Amalek. Saul immediately summons several thousand troops; they set up an ambush and largely succeed in their efforts.

Before Israel attacks, however, they have a parlay with some people identified as the Kenites and warn them to leave the area otherwise they'll become collateral damage. As was customary in battles of this era the king of Amalek, Agag, was captured by Saul and his life was spared. The healthy animals that belonged to the Amalekites were taken as spoils of war by the Israelites. This act angered God to such a degree that He openly stated how much He regretted making Saul king over Israel.

The Prophet and former Judge Samuel (*Sh'mu'el* in Hebrew) intervened and told Saul that he had disobeyed God and would now pay the price of losing the legitimacy of his throne for it. Saul argued back that Samuel was mistaken; that he had done what Yehoveh asked of him (to annihilate the Amalekites) but in the end admits that he has sinned against God (even though in his mind it was more a technicality than anything significant).

Samuel orders that King Agag be brought to him, whereupon he executes Agag and cuts him up into pieces. This would be the last time that Samuel ever saw Sha'ul, the man he had

earlier personally anointed to be the first king of Israel.

In verse 23 of this chapter the Lord compares the sin of King Sha'ul with the sins of sorcery and idolatry and says that because Saul has done this evil that God now rejects Saul. It is important to remember that of the few sins and crimes that automatically call for the death sentence (meaning there is no means of atonement provided for in the Law of Moses) two of those are sorcery and idolatry. God is through with King Sha'ul and will now separate Himself from Him; this is the ultimate death sentence.

Here's the thing: what exactly did Saul do that was so egregious so as he deserved such a harsh judgment? Essentially the reason for Yehoveh's severity is all wrapped up in the answer to this question: who was it that ordered the war against Amalek? Answer: Yehoveh. Therefore this constitutes formal God-ordained Holy War. Only the divine can order Holy War. Men who engage in battle in the name of God (like in the Crusades) are NOT engaged in Holy War despite their claims. When we fight a war that God has not directly and unequivocally ordered, it may well be the necessary and right thing to do and God may even be on our side (so-to-speak); but that is NOT the definition of Holy War.

There have been NO Holy Wars since the close of the Scriptures (at least so far as we know). There will be NO Holy Wars until Messiah returns to lead the next Holy War that we typically dub as the Battle of Armageddon. That the Lord has aided Israel at times in their several wars since returning to the Holy Land doesn't necessarily mean that Israel was fighting Holy War. Our current fight to defend ourselves against Islam, just as Israel's fight to defend their nation, while completely justified is NOT true Holy War. I hope you can see this and accept it.

In Holy War the Law of **Herem** comes into play whereby the spoils of war belong exclusively to the Lord, not to the men who participated in the battle. Since God is Spirit He has neither need of neither the captured cattle or human slaves nor gold and silver nor the cities of the enemy. Therefore according to the rules of Holy War (that we studied in depth some time back) all the spoils of Holy War are to be handed over to God unless He specifies otherwise some exceptions on a case by case basis. These spoils are by their very nature God's holy property.

Under normal circumstances (such as the offering of regular Levitical sacrifices) the items designated as God's holy property are turned over to the Priesthood for disposition and most of the stuff (grains, fruit, wine, meat) is divided up among the priests and Levite laborers as their God-authorized means of support (a substantially smaller portion of the plants and animals are burned up on the Brazen Altar). But in Holy War the items are generally not turned over to the priests for their distribution and use. Rather the spoils of Holy War are to be destroyed and/or burned up; they are returned to their elements as a symbolic way of giving them to Yehoveh. This also (as difficult as it is to take) goes for the captured people. God ordains what is to be done with them. In some cases the men are to be executed and the

women and children spared and added to Israel as servants (and invariably after a few generations eventually assimilated as citizens). At other times (as with Amalek) ALL the people are to be executed: men, women, children, infants.

King Saul being the weak and selfish king that he was, paid no attention to the Holy War laws. He decided he'd do things a little bit God's way and a little bit his way. So while he did follow God's command to attack Amalek (and it appears that as of this time Amalek was not a particularly threatening problem for Israel and Saul), and Sha'ul did execute all the people, he did NOT kill the King of Amalek. In addition he also took for himself (and allowed some of the Israelites to take for themselves) some of the spoils of war. This was a direct affront upon God's holiness as King Saul and those Israelites had helped themselves to God's Holy Property.

The affront was so serious that God's prophet, Samuel, completely and permanently separated himself from King Saul. This was completely appropriate for what use was there for a Prophet of God to give God's Word to a man whom is now separated (*karet*, cut-off) from God?

Before we get back to Deuteronomy I would like to mention a couple more things. Often in the Bible we'll see statements that use the word "all". Or we'll see statements that seem to indicate finality or full inclusion (or full exclusion for that matter). Almost always those are general statements. It would be like our getting bilked in some financial scheme and lamenting that we have lost "all of our money". While we may be terribly damaged and indeed our wealth greatly diminished, we have not lost 100% of our money never to again have any money. So in our story of the Amalekites where it says that Saul "completely destroyed the people (the Amalekites)", that doesn't in any way mean that every last Amalekite was killed.

In fact it next fell to King David to again deal with the Amalekites and he destroyed them until there was almost nothing left. Centuries later King Hezekiah would order 500 men from the tribe of Simeon to go to Mt. Seir (in the territory of Edom) to finally and permanently eradicate the remnant of Amalek.

The reason I went to this length to talk about Amalek is because of what I told you at the outset: Amalek was certainly real, and the stories of them true, but they also represent a type. And the type Amalek represents doesn't only pertain to Biblical times.

When we dust off the history books and look closer we see that Amalek is also symbolic of the spirit of the Anti-Christ and of Satan. Satan, the great Evil One, the ultimate enemy of Israel and of mankind and of God. If you want to understand what God's attitude is towards Satan, and what our attitude is to be toward Satan and his followers, then study the stories of Amalek.

God is in the process of total eradication of Satan, his followers, and everything Satan possesses. And He will do it in the pattern of His genocide upon Amalek.

Let's recall something we discussed a few weeks ago. There is this notion (a false notion) among the modern Church that Jesus has revised the face and character of God, away from this OT God who will judge and destroy His enemies to the NT God who winks at sin and wouldn't harm a fly (so great is His mercy and so much does He love everyone and everything). The concept is that Yehoveh has forsaken His attributes of wrath and justice, and now is 100% all-forging and forgetting love. He is the ultimate pacifist deity who exists only for our benefit. His new motto is: no harm, no foul.

And one of the primary sayings of Yeshua that is used to defend this modern position is that we are to love our enemies and not hate them. I accept this instruction completely. but understand: there is a night-and-day difference between our loving OUR enemies, and our loving GOD's enemies. Just as there exists justifiable and rational human war versus God-ordained Holy War, so there is not necessarily a connection between our personal enemies (people who have harmed us or offended us as our neighbors) versus those who God has declared as His eternal enemies (enemies of the Kingdom of God).

We indeed are to love and not hate that person who has perhaps defrauded us, or slandered us, or perhaps even tried to kill us; Christian or not. But we are not to love and accept those whom God has explicitly identified as marked for destruction because they are His eternal enemies who oppose His Kingdom. Amalek was one of God's enemies; Satan and his followers are another. Notice how the instruction of Deuteronomy 25:17 is to at all times "remember" what Amalek did to Israel, and how God hates them (meaning God rejects them), and how His plan is to use Israel as His divine instrument of final destruction upon Amalek. The modern day Believers of the God of Israel as equally to "remember Amalek".....the nation and people of Satan.....and to be prepared for Holy War against them. That Holy War is not far off and we better be well into our preparation for it; it will begin when God sends Messiah Yeshua back to be the divine warrior leader against Satan and his followers. But while long ago the preparation for Israel was spears and bows and swords, for us it is trust in Yeshua as our Savior and in the Word of God as God's will for men.

Notice also that while Israel was to be as separate as possible from Amalek, and was to have nothing to do with Amalek, and was to defend themselves at all times from Amalek, that a Holy War AGAINST Amalek was not to be attempted anytime Israel was feeling its oats. If Israel suddenly had some religious fervor grip them, the leaders got together and they decided that NOW they were strong enough to attack Amalek, that was not Holy War.

Let's move on Deuteronomy chapter 26.

Before we read chapter 26 I'd like to introduce it by saying that it begins a 4-chapter section that revolves around the blessings and curses contained in the Law of Moses. We ended chapter 25 where the subject was essentially fundamental fairness, and in this 4-chapter section of Deuteronomy that begins with chapter 26, the subject of "true religion" will be briefly summarized and examples will be given. At the end of the section the often forgotten admonition of God that, "this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you" is spoken. And we should all etch this divine statement in our memories because too often the incorrect reason given for the giving of the New Covenant is that the Law was too hard to be followed.

There is also a warning of future disasters for Israel if they fail to follow the terms of the covenant of Moses, and we'll see some covenant renewal ceremonies to ensure that people understand that the Mosaic Covenant stands forever; it didn't end with their entry into the Promised Land.

But there is one more aspect of this section that is also truly fascinating, and it is stated in the words of chapter we'll get to in a few weeks: chapter 29 verse 28. That aspect is in the form of a riddle, a mystery, about Israel's duty to observe the Torah: "The **secret** things belong to YHWH our God and the **revealed** things to us and to all our children forever; we are to DO all the words of this Torah."

I can do no better than to quote the eminent scholar C.J. Labuschagne in this regard: ***"The plain meaning of the text of Deuteronomy refers to its immediate context, which speaks of a national disaster for Israel as a consequence of disobedience to YHWH's commands. But, at the same time, those words have another message. The concealed things, the esoteric knowledge with regard to the written text of the Law, the sacred numerical structures, all these are for the sacred benefit of God, to His glory. But...the text of the Law in its straight, plain language is for the benefit of the people. What we have is a coded message to the ordinary people, the uninitiated, who do not know the hidden intricacies of the text, so that they would obey the law in its plain meaning."***

You see, the content of the revealed truth (that part of the Torah that all men can understand without being scholars) is what is written as part of Moses' Sermon and contained within that central core of the Law; it is those laws and commands presented to us in plain language in Deuteronomy chapters 12-26. But what we find in chapters 26 –30 begins to delve into the realm of the deeper mysteries that only those who know and love and diligently seek the God of Israel can even begin to comprehend.

Let's read Deuteronomy chapter 26.

### READ DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 26

One of the more interesting revelations of this chapter is that here and here alone in the entire Torah, we find some precisely prescribed declarations that each lay worshipper is to recite while doing the rituals of bringing their firstfruits to the Tabernacle. In essence these declarations are God-designed “form prayer” for the ordinary Israelites. In that sense this prayer is very similar in nature to the New Testament Lord’s Prayer. While the priests often have “form prayers” as part of their ritual liturgy, we really don’t find much in the way of “form prayers” in the Bible that are designed for the average person to speak.

This law about bringing the firstfruits to the Tabernacle (and later to the Temple) could not be performed out in the wilderness. It was a practical matter; only after the Israelites had conquered and settled the Land of Canaan could this be observed when the tribes had fields and orchards to harvest.

It is interesting to me that one of the instructions for the Hebrew farmer is that he is to place the portion of his harvest that he will bring to present to God into a basket. That seems like an awfully trivial detail until we realize that up to the point in Israel’s history where we are now in Deuteronomy, Israel knows little of farming. They were historically a shepherding people; they raised animals. In Egypt some were likely engaged in agriculture, but the larger portion were shepherds and construction workers. Therefore while firstfruits ceremonies were known to some Middle Eastern cultures, they probably were not known to the Israelites. Details had to be given to these future farmers.

By now our studies have introduced us to 2 so-called Firstfruits ceremonies; that one which in Hebrew is called Bikkurim (in association with the spring festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread), and then another summer festival of Firstfruits that is called Shavuot (Christians call it Pentecost). There is actually a 3<sup>rd</sup> “firstfruits” celebration that is held in conjunction with the Fall season festival called Sukkot, or the Feast of Tabernacles. This last one is more technically known as the “final ingathering”, meaning it is the end of the harvesting season as winter nears.

Each of these 3 festivals that dealt with firstfruits was connected to the pilgrimage festivals. Of the 7 total Biblical Feasts, 3 of them required that each worshipper (generally meaning the males) journey to the location of the Tabernacle with his offering of firstfruits. That is the meaning of the statement in verse 3 that ends with the words, “.....and go to the place where the Lord your God will choose to establish His name.” That place would move a few times after Israel first conquered Canaan (with Shiloh being the most permanent location for the tent), and in time Israel would establish several competing sites, and eventually by the time of David (and



then Solomon) it would become Jerusalem where the Temple was finally constructed.

At each of these 3 times per year journeys to the Tabernacle the worshipper is to hand his basket of produce to the priest who will officiate and perform the ceremony. Upon turning his sacrifice of firstfruits over to the priest the layperson is then to declare the following: "I acknowledge that this day, before the Lord your God, that I have entered the land that the Lord swore to our fathers to assign us."

The meaning of that declaration is straightforward, but also monumental: it is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. The land that was promised by God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob so long ago has been given; it is finished. It was not another land, it was THIS land. It would not happen in another time, it was NOW. The connection with the giving of the firstfruits of the field is that without the land they now possess there would be no firstfruits to give. Church, hear me: it grieves my heart to hear so many denominational leaders actually question why it is that the Jews necessarily have to be back in Israel; and this is an issue because the Jewish presence there supposedly has displaced the Palestinians. While this is not the only place in the Bible that unequivocally states that God INTENDED to give Canaan exclusively to Israel, this event actually did occur and God even required the Israelites to acknowledge that fact in this prayerful declaration.

It is noteworthy that the declaration is that **"I"** have entered the land of Canaan. That might have seemed more appropriate of a declaration for the very first generation of Israelites, those who fought beside Joshua. But the Lord intends that EVERY generation of Hebrew identify himself with the land as though he was the first one there. The Mishnah states regarding the Passover observances that, "in every generation one must view oneself as if he personally came out of Egypt". This is the source of that principle.

This concludes the first part of the Firstfruits ceremony. Next, after the priest has taken the basket and sets it before the Altar, the Hebrew farmer is to make another declaration to the Lord. And what makes it interesting is that it essentially is a brief review of the history of Israel. The worshipper acknowledges a number of things in this 2<sup>nd</sup> prayerful declaration:

1. Israel began as nothing special ("my father was a nomad from Aram"). The precise meaning of this has been haggled over a bit, but the underlying concept is rather simple. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all identified more with the homeland of their ancestor Terach (Abraham's father) than the place where they wandered (Canaan) before relocating to Egypt. One of the names for the region where Abraham came from is "Aram alongside the River". So this is quite correct to identify the Patriarchs are Aram-eans. Some bible versions will translate this as, "a fugitive from Syria" because Damascus, Syria eventually became the stronghold for the Arameans.....but not until



- long after the time of the Patriarchs. All that said, the thing is that each Israelite declares their association to the Patriarchs who were originally from Aram.
2. Next it is acknowledged that being very small in number, Jacob's clan (in no way big enough to be seen as a "people" or as a "nation") went down into Egypt where they became a large nation.
  3. The condition of their stay in Egypt is now stated; it was under harsh oppression that they existed.
  4. It was from this condition of hard labor and slavery that the Lord rescued Israel and did so in a miraculous and supernatural way.
  5. God moved Israel from a place where they were landless and without hope to the land He had set aside for His people, as promised to the Patriarchs, where they would own land, and the land would produce abundantly for them
  6. And since it is God who owns all things, since He created all things, it is logical that things that grow from the soil of the Promised Land should be seen as God's property. So a portion of what grows.....the first and the best.....is offered to Yehoveh in thanksgiving.

Hidden in all this is that Israel denies the Canaanites' claim that Ba'al is the ruling god over the land. It is Yehoveh that is supreme; he is behind all the wonders that have happened to Israel.

Another interesting note is that Biblically and historically (right up to this day), Jews see things within the context of the nation and people of the Jews, collectively, rather than as individuals. The Scriptures bear out this view of collective identification as more important than individuality. Therefore priests perform the rituals on behalf of Israel, and the Feasts are for Israel corporately. There are only a few places in the Torah where the individual is highlighted, and it is this particular one that draws my attention, because it is all about redemption. Each Israelite must acknowledge his own identification with the God of Israel, and the redemption that Yehoveh has given to him as an individual. The firstfruits ceremonies are quite personal in tone and purpose.

The ceremony concludes with a joyous feast. A festive meal eaten near the entry to the sanctuary is required of the worshipper. And since the Levites were busy tending to matters of the Tabernacle, they generally were not able to farm; so, the Levites were to be invited to share in the festive meal provided by the hundreds of thousands of worshippers who came to celebrate. Even the ger, foreigners, are to be invited to participate because it helps Israel to remember the uncomfortable circumstance of being a foreigner in a land not their own. Therefore they are to have mercy and compassion on foreigners, because the Lord does.

We'll end here today and start again at verse 12 next week.