

DEUTERONOMY

Lesson 42 - Chapter 31

Before we get into Deuteronomy chapter 31 I would like to take a few minutes to discuss something interesting about the chapter that we just completed, Deuteronomy 30. Turn your Bibles to the opening verses of Deuteronomy chapter 30.

^{CJB} Deuteronomy 30:1 *"When the time arrives that all these things have come upon you, both the blessing and the curse which I have presented to you; and you are there among the nations to which ADONAI your God has driven you; then, at last, you will start thinking about what has happened to you;² and you will return to ADONAI your God and pay attention to what he has said, which will be exactly what I am ordering you to do today- you and your children, with all your heart and all your being.³ At that point, ADONAI your God will reverse your exile and show you mercy; he will return and gather you from all the peoples to which ADONAI your God scattered you.*

This is the classic "if, then" approach to the Law that is so characteristic of the Torah. God says when Israel has been exiled to pagan nations due to their disobedience and rebellion, IF they will return to YHWH their God and pay attention to what He has said, THEN God will reverse their exile and show them mercy and return them to the Promised Land, their inheritance.

So the deal is that FIRST Israel must recognize WHY they are in exile, second they must sincerely repent (meaning to turn from the ways they have been following and thus to re-turn to Yehoveh), third they must begin to obey YHWH again (NOT just know His Word), and fourth in response to these 3 things the Lord will bring them back to the land. This is the formula that His people must follow after they have fallen away if they have any hope of being taken back by God.

And of course that is how it went when Judah was taken to Babylon in 586 BC. While exiled in Babylon they admitted that they were wrong; the Jews heeded their prophets like Ezekiel and Daniel and they repented from their ways and so Yehoveh delivered them, took them back, reversed their exile, in a mere 70 years.

However this happened because Judah (also known in the Hebrew Bible as the Southern

Kingdom) reacted altogether differently than their brother kingdom of Ephraim-Israel to the North did when they suffered their own exile. Some 135 years earlier the 10 tribes of Israel that formed the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim-Israel were exiled from their land at the hand of the Assyrians; but they never returned. That is because they never admitted their wrong, repented from the apostasy that caused their destruction, and then determined to become obedient. In fact they received exactly what they overtly wanted; to be just like their gentile neighbors. So God gave them their free-will choice; the tribes of the Northern Kingdom all but disappeared because they didn't follow the formula of Deuteronomy 30. On the other hand the Kingdom of Judah almost one and a half centuries later DID follow the formula of repentance and renewed obedience and the God of Israel returned them to the land.

Several centuries later in the Roman exile (after Jesus' death), God said that He would do a new thing with His set-apart people. The provision of Deuteronomy 30 was that while in exile the people would have to repent and return to God while they were still in a foreign place; only then He would return them to the land. That's **not** what was to happen, though, with the Jews of the Roman exile (and it is from the Roman exile that Judah has returned to form modern Israel in 1948).

Isaac Newton is one of many wonderful theologians who have done their best to pull us back from our often misguided religious zeal in trying to use the Biblical prophecies as a diving rod to see the future, by reminding us that that was not the purpose of those unerring words of the Prophets. Rather the holy prophecies are so that when these prophetic things come about THEN His people will know that it was God who has changed the course of history, intervened on their behalf, and that His prophetic Word is nothing less than an order to the Universe to make it so; a divine order that cannot be resisted, cannot be undone, and any who would fight against it would be put to shame or be destroyed.

Turn your Bibles to Ezekiel chapter 36. This is an exciting chapter of prophecy that in our era is more present than future. Actually it is something that we are eyewitnesses to though few Christians see it; it is something that the saints of old would have given anything to see happen as we have. But sadly the vast bulk of Messiah's church is so infatuated with the end times and looking ahead to a Rapture and Tribulation is blind to this incredible fulfillment of prophecy that is happening right now.

READ EZEKIEL 36:1 - 32

This is describing the return of the tribes of Israel from their Roman exile (and in a sense the 10 Northern Tribes from their Assyrian Exile). This is describing the return of ALL the tribes of Israel to their ancient homeland; a place that the world still insists on calling Palestine. But

what is so different about this return is especially exhibited when we read Ezekiel 36: 22 where it says that “what I am about to do for you is NOT for your sake, so don’t feel good about it”. Rather the Lord says that He is going to do something that is for the purpose of protecting HIS holy name.

In the most amazing twist of events the Lord says that while it was Israel’s job as His set-apart people (even in their exile) to take the Word of God to the nations (because He set Israel apart to be the guardians of the Word of God) instead they profaned God’s name in these foreign lands of their exile. They profaned it to the point that the people (gentiles) said: “THIS is the people who are supposedly the people of God?!” And is that not the general attitude of the world today towards the Jewish people today?

So God says that while His holy name should have been raised high by the Jews while in their exile, instead the Jews profaned it so God must RESCUE His own holy name. And the way He chose to do this was by bringing the Jews out of the nations where He scattered them and back to the Promised Land. In other words since all the Jews were doing was misrepresenting Him, He would take them out of the nations where He exiled them and bring them back to their homeland to stop it! He was going to do something so amazing that His name would be set high again, despite the apostasy of His own people.

The Lord’s solution was NOT to do as He had done in the Babylonian exile and return; nor as He required in the Assyrian exile from where the 10 tribes did NOT return. Rather as it says in Ezekiel 36:24, first He will gather the Jews (just as they are) from the far reaches of the world and bring them back to the Land, THEN He will sprinkle clean water on them and cleanse them. Even though they would not reach out to Him, He would reach out to them.

Do you see this amazing turn of events as compared to Deuteronomy 30? They will be brought back to the Promised Land while STILL in a state of rebellion, and it is THERE that the Lord shall (by an act of His divine will) begin to clean them up. No repentance was required by the Jews; no returning to the ways of the Lord was needed for their homeland to be re-established. Once the Israelites were back in the land the Lord would (as it says in Ezekiel 36:26 and 27) turn their stony hearts to flesh AND put the Spirit of God inside of them. It would be this act of divine intervention that would put the desire to be obedient to Yehoveh into them. He would put the Torah IN THEIR HEARTS.

Therefore we see this pattern of Redemption developed that Christians have counted on for centuries; the Lord woos whom He will, plants in those that He elects the desire to come to Him and the ability to obey Him, and this is done by putting the Holy Spirit inside of people. I hope you understand the radical concept that Ezekiel speaks of; it’s no wonder that those Jewish exiles living in Babylon found what he had to say either laughable or incomprehensible. The Lord had never put His Spirit inside an inherently sinful man up to that point. And in fact

such a thing would not be possible until Yeshua came, atoned for man's sins, and made us acceptable to God at a level never before attainable.

How can a modern day Church with all the knowledge available to it read these words, see with our own eyes what the Lord has done, and still think that the Hebrews have been rejected by Him? Equally how can so many Jews openly say that they are not chosen or set-apart for God (and really don't want to be) after knowing what the Lord has done for them? Believers: we have a lot of work ahead of us don't we?

Let's read Deuteronomy 31.

READ DEUTERONOMY 31 all

We have exited that 4-chapter section that held (and still holds) so much mystery and intrigue and now we enter the last 4 chapters of Deuteronomy that are an epilogue as well as a period of transition from Moses to Joshua. Really it is an epilogue to the entire Torah, not just Deuteronomy. At the center is the story of Moses' last days on earth. Moses announces that his time is over, that Joshua is the new God-ordained leader of Israel, and then Moses dies on Mt. Nebo in Moab.

Moses says in verse 2 that he has become an old man of 120 years. Further, despite what the CJB says as does most versions, Moses declares that he can no longer "go out and come in". Usually this is translated with the sense that Moses is simply tired and feeble (pretty understandable at this advanced age); that he just can't get around anymore. That's incorrect. As I explained in a previous lesson the phrase to "go out and come in" was a purely military term. It referred to an army gathering together for battle, going out and fighting, and then returning (hopefully victorious). Moses was not saying that he was too old and infirm to lead Israel in battle; rather he was saying that because the Lord had decided that Moses would NOT cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land that his meter had simply run out. His time was up, and a new leader would lead the coming Holy War upon Canaan.

By the way, you can believe that Moses was 120 years old with no trouble. Even though we read reports that the average life span in that era was around 30 years (due to disease and war and high infant mortality), we also have records from Middle Eastern societies that prove that it was not uncommon for people (gentiles) to live to 110 and even occasionally up to 140 years. But it is also interesting how the 120 years assigned to Moses is so consistent with what God ordained back in Genesis. Genesis 6:3 says this:

CJB Genesis 6:3 ADONAI said, "My Spirit will not live in human beings forever, for they too are flesh; therefore their life span is to be 120 years."

Moses lived to the maximum ideal life span that God ordained.

Moses says that the Lord will not permit him to cross over the Jordan. Rather the Lord Himself will cross over ahead of Israel and then Joshua will lead Israel to cross over. Notice the multiple use of the term "cross over"; I think this is significant. A long time ago when we were studying Genesis I told you that the word "Hebrew" was thought to be a derivative of the Akkadian word *Ipuru*, which means "one who crossed over". It was, back then, referring to Abraham who crossed over the Great River (the Euphrates) in order to go to the land that God said He would show to Abraham. Now in this context it is referring to Moses being held back from crossing over, but God crossing over ahead of Joshua and Israel into the Promised Land of Canaan.

This entire theme of "crossing over" is not hard to grasp; crossing over means to leave one side and go to the other. It is a decisive moment in time when a change in status occurs. Because the Torah operates more in the earthly realm (bringing Heavenly principles into a physical form), these great and fundamental God-principles it elucidates are always presented in a way that man can see with his own eyes. Men literally and physically LIVED the experience of "crossing over". They lived the reality of leaving behind an old existence for a new one. They physically experienced crossing over mountains and territorial boundaries and rivers in order that a purpose is fulfilled even though they might not know that God was behind it all.

Today those who would be part of God's people are still called to "cross over"; to cross over from unclean to clean. To cross over from common to holy. To cross over from eternal death to eternal life. To be spiritual *Ipuru*, Hebrews, ones who chose to cross over. Instead of the need for us to enter into a new territory, or to change nationality, or to travel a distance it has become a spiritual issue of trusting the One who created us and provided for our redemption. Just as Israel had to cross over into the land of their rest, Canaan, so we have to cross over into the land of our rest, Yeshua. Israel couldn't just stay in the Wilderness and have the land brought to them; they would, by their own choice, have to cross over into it. We can't remain in the Wilderness of this world and have the land of our rest, our shalom, brought to us; in a spiritual journey we, too, must actively and purposely cross over in order to possess our inheritance and leave the wilderness of the world behind.

In verse 4 the Lord promises to do what He did to those nations on the east side of the Jordan River (in the area of the Transjordan where Reuben, Gad, and ½ of the tribe of Manasseh settled) to the current inhabitants of Canaan on the west bank of the Jordan: wipe them out. And Joshua would replace Moses as the supreme military commander of Israel. The theme of

Holy War is once again thrust forward. Verse 6 paints the picture of God as a Holy Warrior leading His people to a victory that is a foregone conclusion.

If we're going to apprehend the context of Deuteronomy (and much of the Torah since Exodus) we have to keep reminding ourselves that at the center of it all (like it or not) is Holy War. Phase One of God's Holy War was the escape from Egypt and the annihilation of the kings Og and Bashon, who were Amorites. Phase Two of the Holy War is the conquest of Canaan. I won't spend much time here but I urge you to write it well into your memories that so much of the language that we'll encounter in the book of Joshua (which we'll begin within a month from now) will be Holy War language. And this is important because God's Holy War has strict rules of engagement and protocol, the violation of which has severe consequences. But as I have lightly touched on before, we must not ever suspect that God's role as the warrior leader of His army in Holy War ended with the close of the Old Testament.

The greatest damage ever done to the Church (a damage that is ongoing and woven into the doctrine of the modern Institutional Church) was when Christian leaders declared (against Yeshua's direct statement to the contrary in Matthew 5) that the old god of the Old Testament was no longer in control and that the new god of the New Testament has taken over. That the god who never changes, has changed in dramatic fashion; that the attribute of the Lord as a divine warrior king has been discarded in favor of a pacifist who wouldn't harm a fly. I realize that I am perhaps preaching to the choir on this subject, but I equally realize that the concept of Our Messiah as the Conquering Warrior who will slay millions in Holy War runs contrary to the image of many more Christians who might be hearing this for the first time. This is such a core issue for us to deal with; and since Deuteronomy has led us right to it let's take another detour today to the book of Revelation.

Open your Bibles to Revelation chapter 14.

READ REVELATION 14 all

Here we have it: God's fury is poured out and His agents of death are no less than the Lamb of God and His warrior angels as essentially His army officers. The Lamb, sweeping His sickle and harvesting both the saved to glory and the unsaved to eternal damnation; blood flowing at the hand of Christ as high as a horse's bridle in the valley of Armageddon is all present here. Where is the pacifist God of the New Testament that knows only personal sacrifice and mercy, love for all men; the one who always turns the other cheek and wouldn't punish anyone? Do not ever think that any of God's attributes have been set aside; He bears them all at all times. Of course there are times when one attribute seems to be more prevalent than others.

If you have been paying attention over the last few years as we have worked our way through the Torah you watched a subtle principle evolve; agents of God operate in opposite ways simultaneously. Salt is an agent of God; it can be used to season and preserve and seal a covenant, or it can be used to poison and end life when a covenant is broken. Blood is an agent of God; the unjust spilling of it can be the source of death or just and sacrificial spilling of it can be the source of life. The Torah itself is an agent of God that brings curses on the one hand and blessings on the other. Angels can rescue and they can destroy. Jesus poured out His own blood as a meek Lamb, and He will soon spill the blood of countless millions as the fiercest Warrior the world has ever seen.

Just as conquering the Transjordan was Holy War phase 1, and conquering Canaan was Holy War phase 2, the looming Battle of Armageddon and all the pouring out of God's wrath on the end-times world is Holy War phase 3. And of course by definition it is God who orders it and it is God (in phase 3 in His attribute as Messiah) who leads His Holy Warriors to certain victory.

Verses 7 and 8 recount the official passing of the torch from Moses to Joshua; in a public ceremony for all to see Joshua is now the supreme human commander of Israel. I love the exhortation in verse 8 where Moses tells Joshua not to fear because "the Lord is with you". How I love to sing the song, "Emmanuel", meaning God is with us; a name that the Bible gives to Messiah.

We get a little piece of information that is useful especially because soon we will begin our study of the book of Joshua. Moses instructs Joshua that he is to apportion the land among the people. But wait; I thought back in the book of Numbers Moses had already done that, by the drawing of lots? In fact we get an entire listing of the tribes and the regions they'll occupy in Numbers 34.

What happened was this: Moses indeed assigned general regions that were determined by the drawing of lots (drawing lots was seen as a way to let God decide the matter). However the exact dimensions of each region was to be determined according to the population of each tribe; the more people in the tribe, the larger that tribe's territory. It would be Joshua who would preside over that event.

Beginning in verse 9 the matter of the Torah itself as a holy document is addressed. Here we are told that Moses wrote it down and then gave it to the priests of the tribe of Levi. The term used here "THIS Torah" is referring specifically to Deuteronomy. The earlier Torah had been handed down orally. Sages tell us that while the finger of God had indeed written the 10 Commandments the bulk of the laws and commands as given to Moses were memorized and handed down by word of mouth. Only later were these oral transmissions written on scrolls. This idea unnerves some people in our modern times but one must understand that such a thing was the norm for this era, and actually it had its advantages.

The tribal elders were always responsible to maintain the integrity of the traditions that they taught to the following generation, and the next generation taught when it was their turn, and so on; so there were always those elders who knew the truths of the traditions who were alive. If the next generation tried to change something the older generation was there to refute it. And remember; it is only in our modern era where respect for the knowledge and wisdom of the elderly has become lost. This system of checks and balances on oral traditions works very well. In the modern era of written documents memorization and the telling of the stories is generally a lost medium of communicating a society's history and ethics. Books and written records are now considered our best (and the only valid) sources of reference; but make no mistake, they can be corrupted and destroyed. When men want to radically change societies the first thing they do is to denounce and destroy the records and literature from the previous generation thus breaking the link. And it is many ways much easier to do now, since the system of oral tradition is no longer operable at least in Western Culture.

Moses gave the writings to the priests, to the Levites who carried the Ark, and to the leaders of Israel because it was their duty to faithfully transmit God's Word to the following generations. Then we get a very interesting instruction: the entire book of Deuteronomy (this Torah) was to be read to all Israel every 7th year during the Feast of Sukkot (also called the Feast of Booths or Feast of Tabernacles). The 7-year Sabbatical cycle was to be used to ensure that all generations of Israel knew the words of Torah. The 7th year of that cycle was known as the year of ***shmittah*** (the year of release) because in that 7th year Hebrew slaves were to be released, land taken as collateral on loans was to be returned to the original owner, and debts of all kinds were to be forgiven.

The instruction includes that the whole congregation of Israel is to assemble at the site God will choose (meaning wherever God decided to put the central sanctuary, the Temple) on the occasion of Sukkot. Further, while the "whole congregation" usually means the male representatives of each household, in this case verse 12 makes it clear that women, children, and even foreigners were to present themselves at the Temple on the 7th year at Sukkot.

Recall that Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles) is one of 3 God-prescribed pilgrimage festivals that require the whole congregation of Israel to come to the Temple. However "whole congregation" usually only meant the adult males. In the 7th year however, that would expand to mean that EVERY Israelite regardless of age or sex was ordered to come to the Temple at Sukkot. And the reason was so that everyone could hear the reading of the Torah (which was primarily Deuteronomy). Unfortunately just as we NEVER read of the Hebrews obeying the law of Jubilee (the 50 year cycle), neither do we read of but two occasions when this law of reading the Torah on the Sabbatical Year Feast of Tabernacles actually happened. One time was when King Josiah ordered it (2 Kings 23) and the other was when Ezra ordered the same at the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile (Neh.7, 8, and 9).

Moses' expounding on the laws given at Sinai, and his emphasis on the spirit of the law as the key element necessary for the proper carrying out of the written laws, makes Deuteronomy the important document that it is. It is in this same vein that we should view Yeshua's Sermon on the Mount. On the hillside above the Sea of Galilee Messiah is sermonizing; He is attempting to revive the spirit of the law that Moses had spoken of because the religious leaders had since turned the Law into a mechanical system of rules and regulations and it had become a heavy burden. Yeshua's teachings are the essence of all of the Word of God, just as Moses' teaching in Deuteronomy is the essence of the entire Torah.

A favorite and appropriate teaching of the modern Church comes from Galatians 3 when Paul says that there is no more male and female and that all disciples of Yeshua are one new person. Paul is dealing with the principle that is being established here in Deuteronomy 31: ALL of God's people, including women and children, are to be given equal access to His Word. Further, men and women (laypeople) are perfectly capable of understanding the Torah and of carrying out their appropriate Torah-defined roles.

By Jesus' day the religious authorities had abolished this principle. They set up barriers in the Temple between men and women (we've all heard of the women's court in the Temple courtyard). Today there are usually separate men and women's sections in Synagogues. If you go to Israel there is even a men's side and a women's side with a barrier in between at the Wailing Wall, the Kotel. Young girls are given different material to learn about Torah than young boys are. The concept of women as "lesser" and males as "greater" was firmly entrenched in Judaism and it was something that Yeshua, Paul, and others had to deal with delicately. This idea of women as lower was not Biblical but it certainly suited the male-dominated Middle Eastern society that had moved far away from the Lord. Equally as certain the Bible carefully defines different roles for each sex but the roles are viewed Scripturally as of equal importance and the sexes as of equal value. Since Paul found himself as an emissary to the gentiles of the Roman Empire, but at times also dealt with Messianic Jews, he had to not only deal with Jewish customs in this regard but also with the various customs of other nations as well. Some cultures didn't mind women taking roles as teachers or priests, while others were vehemently against it; some wanted women to play a central role in their religious ritual, others wanted them to simply comply with whatever their husbands decided for them. In general unless the customs were outlandishly bigoted Paul advised disciples of Yeshua to not make it an issue (where possible) and to simply operate within it so as not to offend those to whom the Good News was to be presented.

But now comes that moment (in verse 14) where Yehoveh tells Moses that indeed the meter has expired; Moses is going to die very soon. Therefore Moses is to gather up Joshua and come to the tent of meeting (the Tabernacle) where the Lord will be present. The Lord appeared as a cloud in FRONT of the tent of meeting, above the entrance, and there gave Moses and Joshua their marching orders.

Notice that while Moses would go inside the tent and meet with the Lord, Joshua could not enter and so this meeting took place OUTSIDE the tent. This was because as a Levite and God's Mediator, Moses was entitled to go inside the sanctuary but Joshua was of the tribe of Ephraim and therefore was not permitted.

Yehoveh is recorded as having used the typical vocabulary of that era, in that He tells Moses he is going to soon be with his ancestors (he is going to die). This reflects ancestor worship concepts that while part of their language and to a degree their thinking, was of course not being validated by Yehoveh. We have things that we say that we know what we MEAN, but they don't mean what they say. And usually we don't even know where such an expression came from. What does it mean, "that's how the cookie crumbles?" How does a cookie crumbling help us to understand a situation? How about "letting the cat out of the bag?" Anybody have any idea where that American idiom meaning to divulge a secret came about? We say it, and it certainly has nothing to do with cats or bags but we do understand what we mean so we retain it. It's kind of like that with some of these sayings in the Bible; we have to ascertain more what that phrase communicated to the people of that era and less what the words technically and literally mean.

Then Yehoveh delivers some bad news: He tells Moses and Joshua that after both of them are dead and gone the Israelites WILL do all these things that God has warned against, which amounts to breaking the terms of the covenant. As a consequence the Lord's anger will flare up against Israel and the Lord will "hide His face" from them. In Hebrew the Lord will hide His *panim* from them. *Panim* used in this way means His Presence. God will pull away from the Hebrews. To be in someone's *panim*, face, presence means more than merely being there, just as *shema* means more than merely hearing something. It implies that person's favor and blessing. So God says that because of this coming apostasy of Israel after Joshua's death, He will remove Himself (and therefore His protection and blessing) from over the people of Israel.

The people will feign ignorance. They'll ask the question that is asked in verse 17: "Haven't these calamities come upon us because our God isn't here with us?" In other words they realize that for some reason or another, the Lord has removed Himself from their midst and therefore all these terrible things are happening to them. But, gee, we really don't understand why. The Lord confirms it by saying indeed it is so; He has removed Himself from them because of their evil of turning to other gods.

But the Lord wants not to destroy but to discipline His people. He wants them to learn and understand just what it is that they have done, and what the remedy for their situation is. Therefore He instructs Moses to write a song and to teach it to Israel right away. To teach it to them, so they can memorize, and have it well before the rebellion they will commit actually comes about. This song, this Song of Moses, will be the subject of our next lesson.