

DEUTERONOMY

Lesson 2 - Chapter 1

Last week we looked at an introduction to Deuteronomy in order to give us some context for studying it. But, make no mistake: the foundation for correctly interpreting this fifth book of the Torah are the previous four books; each builds upon the other. However, in general, we need to view Deuteronomy as a sermon on the Law, and I drew a parallel for you of the Sermon on the Mount, which was Yeshua's sermon about the Law.

Deuteronomy picks up the journey of Israel in Moab, with Moses giving his final addresses to the people of Israel. The 3 addresses will interlace history and law, and as we'll see quite often the precise facts of certain incidents on their 40-year wilderness trek are not presented by Moses in the same mold as we read them in the earlier Torah books because he's presenting him in the light of hindsight.

So, as we begin reading the first chapter of Deuteronomy, picture Moses as he stands on a high hill in Moab, overlooking the Promised Land that sits but a stone's throw away on the west bank of the Jordan River. He is addressing the leaders and elders of Israel even though his words are intended for all of Israel to heed; for indeed there is no practical way that his voice could have been heard by more than a few hundred people at absolute best.

READ DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 1 all

I want to take about 5 minutes to explain a very interesting phenomenon that appears in the first 5 verses of Deuteronomy because it ALSO appears at the beginning of every one of the 5 books of Torah.

And, the phenomenon is this: there is a repeating pattern of Hebrew letters that spells out the word "Torah" in a fixed sequence within the first 5 verses of Deuteronomy. Beginning with the Hebrew letter "heh" ? that is the last letter of Mosheh's name, and then counting 48 letters, we come to the Hebrew letter "reysh" ?. 48 more letters and we get the Hebrew letter "Vav" ? and then 48 more letters and we get the Hebrew letter "Tav" ?. That is, we get Torah spelled

backwards.

Now this wouldn't be so surprising if it wasn't that we see a similar pattern at the beginning of the 4 books of Torah that come before Deuteronomy. In Genesis 1:1-5 we find a repeating pattern of the word Torah, spelled forwards (normally), with each letter forming the word spaced exactly 49 letters apart. Starting with the final Hebrew letter of the word "in the beginning" (Bereshith), and then counting every 49th letter, we get the word Torah spelled out.

The exact same thing happens in Exodus 1:1-6; starting with the final letter of the 2nd word (shemot) in the opening phrase "these are the names", we get the Hebrew letter Tav. Then counting precisely 49 letters, we get a Vav; then 49 more letters and we get a reysh, and then 49 more letters and we get a heh, which forms the word Torah.

In Leviticus it shifts a bit. In Leviticus, the priestly book, we get the divine name YHVH spelled out with the letters yud-hey-vav-hey '???' spaced precisely 7 letters apart. Beginning with the yud in the first word of Leviticus "and he summoned", and then counting every 7th letter, we get God's name Yehoveh.

When we go to Numbers, we get, like in Deuteronomy, the word Torah spelled backwards in an exact interval. Beginning with the first occurrence of the word "Moses" in Numbers, we take the "heh" (the last letter of Moses....Mosheh's....name) and then count 49 letters and we get a reysh, 49 more letters and we get a Vav, 49 more letters and we get a Tav. Torah spelled in reverse.

But, then we see another pattern; beginning in Genesis we have Torah spelled forwards, in Exodus Torah spelled forwards, in Leviticus we have God's name Yehoveh, then in Numbers Torah spelled backwards and finally in Deuteronomy Torah spelled backwards.

The 49-letter spacing is key because it is 7 X 7. Of course that the divine number of God is 7, and that 7 would be spacing of the letters in God's name in Leviticus is also quite astounding.

But, the question then comes, so why is the spacing in Deuteronomy one LESS than 49? Why is the spacing of the letters of the word "Torah" 48 letters apart and not 49? I'll give you my opinion and I'd like you to consider as that: my opinion.

Deuteronomy is different than the first 4 books in that this is a sermon of Moses. The first 4 books consist to one degree or another of direct oracles from God that are prefaced with words like, "And, the Lord said" thus and so. Here in Deuteronomy it is different. This is about

MOSES saying thus and so. Yes, Moses' is God's Mediator and He speaks for God but Moses is NOT God. Therefore the VALUE of what Moses' Torah (Moses instructions) is, as compared to the VALUE of what God's Torah (God's instructions) is, is less; precisely ONE less.

We've all heard something about the Bible Code and there is no doubt that what I've presented to you is not simply a mathematical anomaly or coincidence. It's not an accident; it was intentionally put there. So I am one who sees some degree of validity to the Bible Code. Where I part company is when all manner of letter sequences and letters found on diagonals and so on are said to form a "Bible Code" that tells us the future. With the enormous number of words and letters in the Bible there is no doubt that one could find spurious patterns if one looked hard enough. But I don't see them as divine.

On the other hand what I have presented to you is logical, rational, and miraculous; completely in line with God principles. Further (from a practical standpoint) by incorporating this underlying pattern, copyist mistakes and redactions and forgeries could be spotted rather easily because a misspelling or a missing word or a rearranged sentence would ruin the precise letter sequence and number count. I see the amazing pattern that has been embedded in the first 5 verses of the opening of each of the 5 books of Torah as God's guarantee to us, and I kind of ancient "spell check" that it was indeed the great I AM who gave this bible to us, and that it is valid, and it is accurate.

Thankfully the wandering is about over; the people of Israel are near to possessing the land that had been officially set-aside for them in the Covenant of Abraham 6 centuries earlier. But the possession of the land is not going to come peacefully; the 600,000 man Hebrew army is going to be taking the land by force from a number of different petty potentates and mighty kings and kingdoms who, when taken together in a general term, are called Canaanites simply because they live in the general region known as Canaan. None of these people have any intention of simply turning their territory over to Israel just because they claim that their God has given to them as their own.

This address by Moses is apparently made on his own volition. Certainly, as God's Mediator, it is His place to address the people of God as he sees fit, as it was ordained back at the burning bush that whatever Moses spoke it was as if God spoke it.

Let's immediately address a couple of issues: first is this matter that what we are getting from Moses is NOT an oracle from the Father. At first blush that might be a little unnerving; but in fact the vast bulk of the Bible consists NOT of direct oracles from Yehoveh but rather it consists of history, stories, poems, songs, progressive revelation and much commentary **about** the Lord and His commandments.

An oracle is a direct and unequivocal divine statement directly attributed to the named deity. In the Bible the MOST direct oracles from God are in the Torah and are those laws given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. The next most direct oracles come from God's Messiah, Yeshua, in the New Testament; yet even the bulk of these NT oracles are but repeats and reminders of what God spoke through the OT prophets, or are exegesis of the Law as given long ago. Of course where most Believers get tripped up is that they think that what Yeshua offered and spoke was brand new, because they've neither read nor been taught the Torah and the OT.

It's rather easy to know when we encounter a divine oracle as opposed to something else because divine oracle usually begins with the words: "**....then God said**" or "**...Yehoveh told Moses...**" or something along those lines. In other words the NAME of God was invoked as the one who has ordained that such and such was to occur or that a new law has been enacted. We rightly assume that Jesus' words are as oracle because He claims to be God, which is (of course) the entire basis of our Christianity.

Yet we cannot help but notice that there is a difference in how God the Father (or the Word in the form of Spirit of God) presents His divine oracle in the Torah in comparison to how Yeshua spoke in the New Testament; for Yeshua is this inscrutable hybrid of man and God, High Priest and Mediator, commoner and king. So even though it is generally painted in the Church that Jesus abolished the Old Law and gave mankind a new Law, even He plainly says in Matt. 5:17-19 that this is not the case. Rather, Yeshua went about separating God's Laws (as given to Moses) from Traditions that men had developed over the centuries ABOUT those laws; Traditions that had become the basis of Judaism (and much of it wrong-minded), and were often set against the spirit of the Torah. And Messiah also explained and expounded on the divinely intended MEANING of the Laws of Moses, and how many of the words of the prophets concerning the coming Messiah (now present) were fulfilled in Him.

The point is that Moses (here in Deuteronomy) is speaking as God's official Mediator; but Moses is using his own words (as inspired as they are) and is making these addresses not because there are NEW oracles coming from God, but because Moses has decided it is needed at this point. Most of Moses' words are a recounting of the wilderness journey and lengthy explanations of how the Law for this new generation of Hebrews, most of whom were either small children or as yet unborn when Moses first received the Law almost 40 years earlier, should apply these laws in the new settled condition they are about to find themselves in. Much of the time Christ is also speaking as God's Mediator (albeit a higher Mediator than Moses), and so He does not say that He is invoking new laws or changing old laws, either.

The 2nd issue I'd like to address concerns the so-called Holy War that Israel is about to begin for the conquest of the Land of Canaan. We must be careful not to get sucked into a debate or a defense that the current Holy War of the Muslims against the world (called Jihad) is the same thing that God has ordained in the Torah regarding the taking of Canaan. This is one of those many instances when the meaning of a small phrase changes over the years and takes on a

different context; but that small change in meaning can have larger consequences. I have heard Muslim spokesmen, news commentators, journalists and even Pastors discuss the Muslim Holy War as being comparable to the OT Holy War of Moses and Joshua upon Canaan.

The difference between the two is night and day: Islamic Jihad is about forcibly converting the world to their religion. It is about an army of Muslims violently establishing a worldwide Caliphate (that is, a one-world Islamic theocracy); it is about killing those who choose not to convert as a direct instruction from the Koran (although the Koran does seem to give somewhat of an out to Jews and Christians who might have their lives spared if they'll agree to be ruled by Islam and submit fully to the Islamic government).

There is NO thought in the Torah of the conquering of Canaan in order to spread the religion of the Hebrews to foreigners. This coming Holy War is NOT about converting those of the pagan Canaanite religions to the worship of Yehoveh, and killing the holdouts. Rather it is a war over land; a very specifically called-out piece of land. In fact Moses carefully recounts in coming verses how the Israelites avoided conflict with the Edomites and Moabites wherever possible because these gentiles rightfully own the land they possessed since the Lord has set it aside for them and assigned it to them. Does that surprise you that God would ordain certain territory for gentiles, non-Israelites, and then enforce their right to keep it? Well, it really shouldn't. Although we call Him the God of Israel, Yehoveh makes plain that He is the God of everyone and everything; that His reign is supreme over the earth, the Universe and beyond. So of course He has predetermined who shall live where, when, under what circumstances and so forth, and that includes both gentiles and Hebrews. The place he assigned for the Hebrews was Canaan.

So we must never fall prey to the specious argument that what Islam is currently doing is somehow akin to what the Hebrews were doing as they conquered Canaan. Nor should we imagine terrorism or the Terrorist purpose and mindset as being akin to the OT conquering of Canaan. God's only earthly Kingdom was to be within the well-defined boundaries of what was currently on record as being the Land of Canaan, and NOT beyond. There was no command to convert Canaanites, nor was there a command to commit genocide upon them. The goal was for the gentiles of Canaan to be driven out; only those who chose to stay and fight to the death rather than leave were subject to being killed.

Now hear me please: in perhaps the oddest irony, it is NOT the "OT God" who says to Canaan and other foreigners, "convert or die" as so many misinformed Christians think (and is at the core of much Christian opinion on the OT, the Law, and the Jewish people); rather, the only God-directed "convert or die" scenario in the Bible is in the NT, in the book of Revelation, when Jesus Christ is leading the Saints in Holy War (usually called Armageddon) in which the only people who are allowed to remain alive on the face of the planet are those who accept Yeshua as Lord and Master. Armageddon is a battle for the entire earth, not for Canaan. There

IS nowhere for those who are against the Lord to move to.

Moses for a short time, and then his protégé Joshua, would lead God's people in a battle for an earthly kingdom located in a specific place. Yeshua has instructed us, His protégés, to lead God's people in a battle for a **spiritual** kingdom. Joshua (his given Hebrew name being Yehoshua) would lead a battle using spears and swords; Jesus (His given Hebrew name being Yehoshua) has instructed us to PUT DOWN our spears and swords and to lead a battle using primarily our faith, the Gospel truth and our loving deeds. Yet when Yeshua returns, He will fight a bloody physical war just as Moses and Joshua were about to do.

One more thing about Holy War (and I do this because it is at the core of **why** the OT is so maligned and our NT so misunderstood): a Holy War is NOT one that is led in the **name** of God, but one that is actually led **by** GOD. That is, it is made clear in the Torah that God has gone **ahead** of Moses and Joshua to defeat those whom are intended to be defeated. That in essence all that is left for Israel to do in a Holy War is to come in and pick up the pieces; God would deliver the enemy into their hands. It is made clear that God is the supreme commander of the Israeli military, and it is also made clear that this Holy War is ordained by direct oracle from God (it is not at the choice of Moses or Israel).

One of the characteristics of this true Biblical Holy War is that the **Law of Herem** is in place. The **Law of Herem** says that the captured booty is to be destroyed and this is because since the Lord is the Supreme Commander, it all belongs to Him. In Hebrew thinking the Lord God is quite literally a warrior. The destruction of the booty is as a sacrifice to the Supreme Commander, Yehoveh, because Biblical Holy War has little to do with material gain. So Biblical Holy War (of the OT kind, anyway) is not a war whose purpose is religious conversion, nor of the extraction of riches and tribute from the vanquished, nor enslaving the enemy. It is also not a war to determine who wins; the outcome has already been decided.

However usually when we see so-called "Holy Wars" fought in the NAME of God (even though there is absolutely NO oracle from God to start such a conflict), these wars are of an entirely different character than those Holy Wars led BY GOD. Those fought "in the name of God" DO at times look more like Islamic Jihad. They ARE at times about forced conversions, enslavement and the taking of booty and the paying of tribute by the enemy (the Crusades being such an endeavor, and the Inquisition another).

In verse 3 we get the ONLY date given to us in Deuteronomy: it was the first day of the 11th month of the 40th year that this particular address of Moses is being given. Now just to be clear, this does NOT mean that it has been 40 years and 11 months since they left Egypt. The way the Bible counts years (and so does archaeology) is that year one begins on the 1st day and ends on the last day of the 11th month. So when Israel was gone from Egypt for, say, 3 months, it would have been called the 3rd month of the 1st year. In other words there is no year

called “zero”.

Therefore what we’re being told is that Israel has been gone from Egypt for 39 years and 11 months (one more month and it will be 40 years exactly). And we know that the wars with Midian and the Amorites are behind them because verse 4 speaks of the defeat of Sihon and Og; so we have a good marker in time.

Beginning in verse 6 is a retrospective on the journey through the wilderness and it includes a reminder of the mighty acts that God performed in order that Israel would see Him as their God. Not surprisingly it begins with the first part of the journey and therefore is speaking NOT about the people of the generation of Israel now standing before Moses in Moab, but rather about the FIRST generation of the Exodus (the previous generation to the one he’s now addressing) who are now all dead and gone. And Moses reminds them that Israel was told by God (in a rather impatient manner) that it was time to leave Mt. Sinai and move on into the Promised Land He had so long prepared for them.

The point that was not lost on this new generation of Israelites is that they COULD have been born inside a land of milk and honey instead of inside a goatskin tent on a dusty trail next to a desert oasis if only their parents had been obedient. Israel SHOULD have already been settled in Canaan, enjoying the fruits of the land, some 38 or so years earlier. Let not you and I lose the point of this as it applies directly to us and our reluctance to lay hold of the victories God has already given us, but expects us to go forward and claim in deed and action.

Israel was basically spiritually and physically dormant for 40 years because they lacked faith. They marched in circles, marking time, merely existing. They weren’t any closer to the Promised Land in year 40 than when they were barely over a year after they left Egypt. 38 years earlier rather than entering into God’s promise as the Lord bid them, they said, “no thanks, looks a little scary.....think we’ll just march back to our previous lives in Egypt”. You see the problem was that the 1st generation **believed** in God, but they didn’t TRUST HIM. They constantly irritated Moses (and Yehoveh) by asking the rhetorical question: “Why did God bring us out here in the wilderness just to die?” They knew who Yehoveh was; they believed He existed and that He was their God. But they didn’t trust in His ability to care for them or His determination to protect and guide them. And so it took Israel 40 years to gain what they could have had much earlier. James, brother of Jesus, put this in another way in ^{NAS} **James 2:19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.²⁰ But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?**

This God-principle of passive faith versus active faithfulness remains. Acceptance of redemption is one thing; **acting** on the obligations you now have to God as a redeemed person; and on the commands of God that are really ONLY for the redeemed anyway, are

another. Israel was redeemed BEFORE God gave them His Laws and commands. But, even as a redeemed people they were utterly useless to the Lord, His Kingdom and His purposes for them UNTIL they were ready to trust God and act on that trust.

I cannot stress enough that the current modern passive attitude of Christianity is wrong and powerless. Our doctrines have literally turned the God-principle expressed here on its head. We have made our acceptance of God's redemption (our salvation) as the first and last obligations or acts of obedience to the Lord that are needed or required in our walk with Him. No. No. FIRST we accept our redemption (and as Paul says, that isn't really to be considered an act of work or a good deed on our part) and once that occurs, NOW we are expected to act upon our trust in God. And guess what happens if we don't ACT? We're basically put into a state of dormancy. Want to get saved and then go into suspended animation? Fine. The Lord has a name for that: it's called "rebellion".

When we are redeemed and then given knowledge that EVERY last redeemed person has obligations to meet, and every person has a purpose for being elected to the Kingdom, NOT to pursue those obligations is disobedience. Do you wonder why you've been a Christian for 10 or 20 or more years and you don't seem to be much further in your walk than when you first were saved? Do you feel like you're walking in circles like the Israelites and know in your heart that there really isn't any noticeable difference between you and the world? Then I have a question for you: what are you DOING? If you're not DOING according to God's will then you are exactly where Israel was for 40 years. If you don't trust God and insist on sitting on the sidelines that is disobedience. You're wandering and God is waiting and He can wait a lot longer than you can wander. But, oh, how miserable is our condition when we choose that route. How miserable were those Israelites who couldn't grasp that believing IN God is not the same thing as TRUSTING God sufficiently to live it out. And redemption is not a good work of man; redemption was then, and is still today, a good work of GOD. Our good works are what happens AFTER redemption. And without those good works, as James says, our faith is a dead faith.

In verses 6 and 7 Moses calls out the areas of land that Israel is supposed to take: first mentioned is the "hill country of the Amorites". This is key to our understanding in our day and age because this is the area that is almost precisely what is today termed "The West Bank". And of course wouldn't you just know that the so-called Palestinians claim this land and say the Jews have no right to it. The hill country of the Amorites is mentioned first because it will become the heartland for Israel. Even after the time of King Solomon when Israel split into two kingdoms (Ephraim-Israel to the north and Judah to the south), this hill country will overlap into both kingdoms. It is mountainous, mild in climate, fertile, and has good water available. When the Lord speaks of the mountains of Israel the West Bank is the area that is being described.

Next is the land of the Arabah, which is mostly north of the Dead Sea. It includes the Jordan Valley and the hills that surround it; another highly rich, fertile, and beautiful area.

The Shephelah is that area of land that we might term “foothills” that runs along the Mediterranean Seacoast; it is important because it contained vital ports and harbors that allowed trade and travel by means of sea routes to the islands of the Mediterranean, south to the African continent and north to modern day areas like Turkey.

The Negeb is also included in the Promised Land (and BTW, please don't call this area the Ne-jev; in Hebrew there is no soft “g” that sounds like a “j”; all “g” sounds are a hard “g” like in goat or go. So, it is pronounced Ne-Gev). The Negeb is a general area south of the mountain regions and goes all the way to the Sinai Peninsula; it is mostly desert and is where Beersheva and Kadesh-Barnea are located.

And finally please take notice that it speaks of the Seacoast of the Canaanites and of Lebanon as far as the Great River. The Great River is NOT the Nile River, it is the Euphrates. And, this makes sense. The Promised Land that the Lord lays out goes more north than we typically think of it, and it includes modern day Syria and Lebanon. Lebanon is sometimes referred to in the Bible as Lebo-hamath. The Euphrates River actually flows through Syria on its way to Turkey. And, during David and Solomon's reigns, this area was indeed part of Israel (except for part of the northern seacoast which became Phoenicia).

We discussed a few weeks back that the Torah description of the Promised Land differs from the Ezekiel description of the Promised Land. And, in essence the difference is that in Ezekiel the land extends somewhat farther EAST than what is spoken of in the Torah. And, I offered the explanation that Ezekiel's version takes place during the Millennial Kingdom time. In any case had Israel followed the Lord's instructions as they attempted their conquering of Canaan, they would not be fighting over scraps of land like they are today; they would possess all the land from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, and from the edge of the Sinai Peninsula all the way up to the southern border of Turkey, a substantial and defensible hunk of real estate.

From verses 9 through 18 Moses recounts how he organized Israel, and how he set up a hierarchy of government and leadership. We won't go into detail but it is informative how this does NOT exactly follow what we saw in the book of Numbers; for instance in Numbers it is said that Moses' father-in-law Yitro observed Moses as the sole judge and arbitrator for Israel, and the people standing in long lines from sunup to sundown waiting to have their matters heard. And, it was Yitro who told Moses that he needed to delegate authority and suggested a system to do so.

In the Deuteronomy account Moses says, in essence, he grew frustrated and exhausted from the judging process and told the tribal leaders that he needed help. And therefore he instituted his secular justice/leadership hierarchy, which would have involved hundreds and hundreds of

men from every tribe. Even more, while in Numbers we have a hint that the people had a large say in choosing those leaders and judges, here in verse 13 Moses says outright that he told the people “to pick” those who would be in authority over them. If EVER there was a solid description and example of a democratic (or, perhaps better, a representative) system of government in the Bible, this is it.

And then Moses says he took tribal leaders (meaning men who had inherited rights of authority among their own tribe), as well as wise and trustworthy men, whom the people had chosen and ordained them as the leaders. So, apparently Moses had input in this process and could likely suggest some men and reject others as leaders.

And it is further explained that these leaders at every level (depending on their exact area of responsibility) are to be upright men; men who listen carefully and respectfully, and then decide justly. Further, they are NOT to favor an Israelite over a foreigner or vice versa. They are not to regard social status, and not to favor the rich over the poor. And, then there is little sentence buried in verse 17 that really explains something that both Jews and Christians have set aside, each for our own reasons, and have produced tragic results: **“Fear no man, for judgment is God’s”**.

In other words, since God and God alone is the lawgiver, these chosen leaders of Israel are to follow God’s laws and apply the appropriate repercussions ascribed to every violation. The consequences of following God’s laws are God’s to be concerned with, not these leaders. Men don’t have to decide what is right and what is wrong: they simply must **apply** what God has already told them is right and wrong in HIS eyes. What is right and wrong in MEN’s eyes is to have little to no bearing in the judgment process.

Let me put this in another way: the Law (the Torah) had to be given FIRST before a system of government was established, otherwise men could not properly administer justice. God’s justice is completely wrapped up in His Laws. His Laws aren’t just mechanical codes and ordinances or a robotic system of do’s and don’ts; part and parcel within the Law is the Lord’s desire and call for mercy, and love, and grace, and forgiveness. Today, the Jewish state of Israel is almost completely secular and has no regard for God’s Laws, so they have invented their own system and installed their own ideals according to their own philosophies, and the results are apparent. Within Christianity we have become divided into literally thousands of denominations, and unity and brotherhood is a distant memory; some denominations even denying Jesus as Savior, others denying His deity, and still others denying the written word of God as inerrant or even as anything more than poem and fable. Almost ALL Christians deny that God’s justice system even exists anymore. And, there is the rub. By setting aside God’s law in the Church, we cannot **“fear no man, for judgment is God’s”**. Instead, our judgments are of men who use a particular denomination’s bylaws and articles of faith as their standard, based on the belief that what we do is according to what seems right “to our hearts”. And, the results of setting aside God’s Laws in favor of what

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resides in “our hearts” are apparent.

We'll continue in chapter 1 next time.