

DEUTERONOMY

Lesson 4 - Chapters 2, 3, and 4

We continue this week in Deuteronomy chapter 2. And we'll begin with the instruction of verse 24 for Israel to commence the occupation of the Land of Canaan; or put in another way to fire the first volley in Yehoveh's Holy War. Let's re-read from verse 24 to the end of chapter 2.

RE-READ DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 2:24 - end

The beginning of the war is interesting as it greatly mirrors what happened with Pharaoh in Egypt. The King of Heshbon was offered peace. All he had to do was let Israel march through his land on the way to Canaan. Heshbon was on the EAST side of the Jordan River and as such was NOT part of the land set aside for Israel. Therefore by God's general will there was no need to conquer these people. However King Sihon refused the offer of peace and attacked Israel. The result was the annihilation of the Amorites.

Verse 30 explains that the Lord stiffened the will of King Sihon; and this was just as the Lord had done with the Pharaoh of the Exodus. The effect of stiffening Sihon's will is that God has marked Sihon for destruction (the die has been cast). The NT makes it clear that sometime (usually before death) a person who insists on resisting God's provision for redemption will (at God's discretion) be permanently left to his wicked state; the Lord will no longer pursue that person. Whether the Lord hardens the heart, or simply abandons the person to eternal doom, it is only a matter of semantics because there is no longer hope.

Now let me begin this week with yet another of the great Biblical principles that comes from these verses. And that principle is that while we can speak of the "free will" that the Lord has given to men, there are limits and boundaries to that free will.

Before we go there let me also point out yet another means to show you the difference between true Biblical Holy War and the Jihad of the Muslims (we discussed this at length last week), and that the judgments of God against Pharaoh and Egypt are actually a type of Holy War. It was a war initiated BY the Lord, not initiated by men in the Lord's name. It was a war that the Lord fought as a warrior (figuratively speaking), and the outcome was determined not by human generals and soldiers but by the Lord's actions.

And even though the Lord ordered that the “soldiers of Israel” (so to speak) were to strip Egypt of much gold and silver the vast bulk of that gold and silver was soon to be used to create the Wilderness Tabernacle and all of its necessary ritual instruments. So the **Law of Herem** (which is a central tenant of Holy War) played a role (review last weeks lesson if you don’t recall the Law of Herem), by which in general the spoils of war went to the Lord Himself and were not to be for personal material gain for the people.

Now as for our Biblical Principle concerning the limits of mankind’s free will. We like to say that God never interferes with the free will of men; well, I think that’s a bit simplistic. In fact we’re told on a number of occasions that Yehoveh hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and here in Deuteronomy that the Lord hardened King Sihon’s heart. In ancient Hebrew terms we must understand that the meaning of the term “heart” is completely unlike the totally different meaning we’ve assigned it today.

The heart in ancient times (INCLUDING New Testament times) had nothing to do with being a place where the spirit dwelled or where our will resided. The heart was also NOT a place where emotion came from. The heart was believed to be the seat of intellect, both conscious AND unconscious. Just think of the word “brain”; the ancients thought of the heart in almost precisely the same way we today think of the brain. The brain is the location of our mind. It is where our instincts live. It’s where we make well-thought-out decisions and it’s also where our knee-jerk reactions come from.

It is only the later Roman Empire Hellenists (well after the time of the Jesus and Paul) who started to transform the conception of the heart into a place of erotic love and emotion. Prior to that it was the Liver and Kidneys that were referred to as the seats of both positive and negative emotions, in almost all societies. It was only these later Hellenists who transformed the concept of love from a form of merciful and beneficent action, into an emotion. I’m not giving you opinion; this is just well documented literary and historic fact that the church has chosen to ignore for centuries.

So if you want to stop being confused about what ANY part of the Bible is getting at when it refers to the heart, just substitute the word “mind” and you’ll have it.

Now, as for free will; free will is the human version of God’s sovereignty. Free will is the amount of sovereignty over our own lives that the Lord has turned over to men; God’s divine sovereignty is above all things and therefore men’s free will is always subject (and inferior) to His will.

One of the main lessons that can be drawn from Jonah’s experience is that the realm of

man's free will is not really what it seems; there are limits that the Lord has put in place. For instance it was Jonah's will to flee from the presence of Yehoveh. But he found out that God is present everywhere and there is no escape. Denying Yehoveh's sovereignty, even His existence, is no remedy either.

There are conscious and unconscious forces that abound within men that are frustratingly mysterious; Paul writes about these forces in this way: ***".....when I want to do right, I do evil. For I delight in the Laws of the Lord, deep inside my inmost self; but I see in my body parts another law that is at war with the laws of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my flesh."*** (Romans 7)

Paul is speaking, at least partly, of our free will and how it seems so susceptible to the influence of other forces. And indeed that is what we see when we read of the Lord hardening men's wills AGAINST the Lord for the purpose of exacting the Lord's justice and the Lord's purposes using these same men.

The Pharaoh of the Exodus was not stupid. After the almost complete destruction of Egypt and the self-evident invincibility of the God of the Hebrews, he STILL sought to do battle with the Lord and it resulted in the annihilation of Pharaoh's army and a loss of world-class status for Egypt and for Pharaoh. King Sihon of Heshbon knew full well his army was no match for Israel's. Forget any spiritual element; Israel's military outmanned Sihon's probably a hundred to one. It was suicide to take on Israel and King Sihon knew it; yet in some inscrutable combination of Yehoveh delving into the King's unconscious mind, combined with the King's own stubborn pride, the King did exactly what Yehoveh determined He wanted done.

The Greeks well recognized this phenomenon and wrote extensively about it in their Classic literature. The theme was that somehow history unfolded in a way that seems so full of serendipity when it was happening, but in retrospect there is an obviously pre-determined destiny being played out. But, pre-determined by whom? To what pre-ordained conclusion is history heading? And in the end, history is nothing more that God working within the lives of men, and that somehow in concert with the working out of men's will. And, it is all working towards an end that He set in stone eons ago. So despite the flowery statements and ear-tickling philosophies and religious doctrines men have created about how free will works, our free wills are ***not entirely*** free nor are they well understood.

Let's move on to chapter 3.

READ DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 3 all

The first 1/3 rd or so of Deuteronomy 3 is a basically a repeat of the Numbers 21 account of the victory over Og and what happened immediately thereafter.

Let me remind you of the reason for what seems to be simply a repetition of events: at this moment Moses is speaking to the new generation of Hebrews, the 2nd generation of the Exodus. The older generation, the 1st generation of the Exodus (all of whom had been eye witnesses to the 10 plagues and had celebrated the first Passover and walked through the opening in the Red Sea) was now dead and gone as a prerequisite for Israel being allowed to enter and possess the Promised Land. The majority of the generation Moses is addressing in Deuteronomy is getting a history lesson because they had either been born AFTER most of the great events he was speaking about OR they were young children when these things occurred and they really didn't comprehend the significance of all that had happened.

This is the reason that while the stories of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers are essentially the same as what are being re-told in Deuteronomy, some of the details, the point of emphasis, and the **presentation** is a little different because the circumstances are now different. You don't address the people who are in the midst of a current event in the same way you recount those same stories to a later generation as past history.

And Moses says Israel had marched north, encountered King Og of Bashan and defeated him. Bashan was an area of the Trans-Jordan EAST of the Jordan River and slightly to the north and northeast of what would eventually be called Galilee. This area was highly fertile, contained ideal pastureland and was well forested. There were 60 towns in Bashan (undoubtedly just a round number) all of which were either walled cities or somewhat fortified towns, along with an undisclosed (but larger) number of small unprotected villages, all of which were seized by Israel. A walled city indicated the presence of a sizeable number of people and a high degree of urbanization; for there to be several of these walled communities meant the existence of a robust government and good planning. For its era this was no primitive or disorganized territory of Bedouin-like tribes; they towns of Bashan had metal gate bars and hinges, roads, standing armies, and well-defined laws and a sophisticated government.

Beginning in verse 8 we get a summary of all the territory (on the east side of the Jordan River) seized by Israel, and it begins as far north as Mt. Hermon (and that area is still known by the same name to this day so we know exactly where it is). Notice that Deuteronomy says that Mt. Hermon was ALSO called Hermon, Sirion (in the Sidonian language), and Senir by the Amorites. I've stated on numerous occasions that we have to watch carefully in the Bible because as we thumb through the pages of history we'll see the same place called by a number of different names due to a) actual name changes, and b) the name is often recorded according to how it was called by several different languages.

The conquered area referred to in verse 10 as the “tableland” means the Moabite plateau that eventually became the territory of Reuben, and it was where the namesake of the Book of Ruth was born.

Now recalling our discussion last week about a classification of people called Rephaim, we are told that King Og was actually the last of the remnant of the Rephaim (at least in his region). The Rephaim were the post-flood version of the Nephilim, a race of evil and usually large men. In fact verse 11 speaks of a King Og’s iron bed (which resides in what is known as present-day Amman, Jordan) that is 13-14 feet long and 6 feet wide! Of course a decent bed is always bigger than the man who uses it, but it just indicates how tall King Og was. And completely independent Egyptian records from that same era ALSO make mention of this King’s enormous bed, and the astounding finding of several skeletal remains of men in the region of Bashan who were about 9 feet tall.

Moses next recalls how he agreed to give much of the area of the Kingdom of Sihon to the Israelite tribe Gad, and other parts of it to a group of clans who represented approximately ½ of the population of the tribe of Manesseh (they had determined that they did NOT want to go into the Land of Canaan instead preferring the vast pasturelands of Sihon because they had enormous herds of goats and sheep as their main economy).

By way of further explanation, this same section says that the district known as Argob was assigned to Jair son of Manesseh, and the district known as Gilead was assigned to another son of Manesseh named Makhir. At this time both Jair and Makhir were NOT specific men, they were the clans who were the descendants of these 2 men. Jair and Makhir were the two dominant clans of Manesseh who decided they preferred the Trans-Jordan to the Land of Canaan. Other clans of Manesseh decided to cross the Jordan along with the other tribes of Israel. This is probably a good time to mention that the term “son” (like in Jair son of Manesseh) in Hebrew is **ben**. So the Hebrew meaning is that this land was given to Ya’ir Ben Manesseh (Jair son of Manesseh). In this context, son is not always used the way we typically think of it. In the Bible the term “ben” (son) as often as not refers to a grandchild or it can be as general as any male member of a certain clan. Only occasionally does son refer to a direct male offspring such as Solomon son of David.

By way of further description of the land that was conquered by Israel, verse 17 says that they took the region beginning at Kinnareth and continuing on down to the Dead Sea. For those of you who have made pilgrimage to Israel you’ll perhaps recognize the name “Kinnareth”. It is an alternate (and much more ancient) name for the Sea of Galilee, still in use to this day.

Next Moses reminds the people that the condition for granting Reuben, Gad, and those 2 clans of Manesseh the rights to these conquered territories of the Trans-Jordan was that they send a large contingent of their crack troops with the other Israelite tribes to help conquer the

Promised Land. Their women, children, and livestock could remain behind (along with a sizeable army for the homeland defense), but these elite troops could not come back until the job of seizing Canaan was completed. Many years later we find this recorded in the book of Joshua: NAS **Joshua 22:1** *Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh,² and said to them, "You have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and have listened to my voice in all that I commanded you."³ "You have not forsaken your brothers these many days to this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God."⁴ "And now the LORD your God has given rest to your brothers, as He spoke to them; therefore turn now and go to your tents, to the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you beyond the Jordan.*

So indeed these tribes met their obligation and Joshua eventually released them to return to their homes on the east bank of the Jordan River.

Let me point out a principle that is sort of hidden in this matter of the 2 ½ tribes sending troops with their brethren: in all respects Israel was to act as a group or congregation. They were to work together for a common cause, under the leadership of Yehoveh. This God-principle is central for all who think of themselves as God's people whether it concerns physical Israelites or those called the Church who has been spiritually joined to Israel.

In verse 26 begins an impassioned plea by Moses to God to change His mind on harsh decision that had been made some time earlier. Recall that the Lord had judged Moses in a similar manner as He had judged the 1st generation of the Exodus; they would NOT be allowed to enter the Promised Land. Moses had been given a bit of a break by at least being allowed to lead Israel in the conquering of the Trans-Jordan region and he was also allowed to see the Promised Land from a distance.

Here Moses ONCE AGAIN says it was because of the people of Israel (meaning the general leadership) that he sinned in such a way as to be barred from entering Canaan. His argument is that Israel provoked him to behave in a rash way. But this argument fell on deaf ears: the Lord says, "enough! Never speak to me of this matter again!" (very powerful and definite words of the Lord's divine irritation with Moses for trying to persuade Him to alter His just ruling in the matter of Moses' rebellion). The justice of the situation is that just as those who sinned in the Wilderness were sentenced to DIE in the Wilderness, so it had to be for Moses. Moses could not have been given special dispensation for even though he was assigned a high position BY GOD as His earthly mediator to Israel, Moses was still but a flawed man who sinned just as other men. Not even God's Mediator could be saved from the penalty that was declared so long ago, during the time of Adam and Eve; all men would be appointed to experience the grave.

There are certainly parallels between Moses the Mediator and Yeshua the Mediator in this regard but there are also distinct dissimilarities. Yeshua was a man (even though He was also God) and therefore death for Jesus was as unavoidable as it was for Moses. However the statement that Moses died “on account of the people” did NOT mean that Moses died IN PLACE OF the people, or for their good; Moses was NOT a substitute of atonement as was Yeshua. Nor did Yeshua die as a result of being a sinful or flawed man, as did Moses. Moses died because, as all men, he sinned; Jesus Christ died because, unlike any other man, He was sinless.

Let us also not bypass the God-principle expressed in the relationship between the leader and those who were being led; because they (and we) are inextricably bound up together. It is paramount in God’s economy that a leader always do what is right in the eyes of the Lord regardless of what other men may WANT him to do. The consequences for standing firm with the Lord are legendary; the reward for unswerving allegiance to Yehoveh is often martyrdom in one form or another. Hardly ever does one of God’s chosen leaders stand in good stead with adoring applause from the world. In fact if a man is being applauded and admired by the world it is inevitable that he is a less than god-led person. The motto of one who decides to accept Yehoveh’s offer to be a leader of His flock is: “Do what is righteous and holy, and let the chips fall where they may”; easier said than done as Moses (and all leaders in service to God) soon find out. Nonetheless as expressed here in Deuteronomy, the Lord’s requirements of His leaders are non-negotiable, just as is the penalty for sin and rebellion.

So this chapter ends in a bittersweet fashion with Moses saying in effect, “the reason I cannot lead you into the Promised Land is my personal failures. I am a sinner and so death is my reward.” Therefore, says Moses, Joshua is now your appointed leader (appointed by God) and it is he who shall apportion the Land of Canaan among the tribes.

By the way: Joshua was NOT given Moses’ full authority, rather he simply became head of the Israeli military. Joshua did NOT become a replacement Mediator for Moses, nor was he to be a leader to who even the High Priest was beholden. Israel would not have another Mediator in the order of Moses for almost 1300 years, and that Mediator would be none other than God Himself in the form of Yeshua of Nazareth.

Let’s start to transition, now, to chapter 4.

I would like to set the mood and tone of Deuteronomy 4 before we read it. Therefore I would like to approach you with this question: if you knew with certainty that your time on earth was coming to close in a matter of but days or weeks, what is it that you would like to say to those you have loved, and educated, and cared for? What has life taught you that is so valuable that

in the limited time you have remaining you desperately want those who will carry on after your death to know about, and to take it to heart, and hopefully put it to work? That is the context of Deuteronomy 4. Moses is literally pleading with the generation that will succeed him to carry on with the good work that the Lord has begun; but not to make the same mistakes that he and their parents made.

Let's read the opening verses of Deuteronomy chapter 4 together.

READ DEUTERONOMY 4:1 - 4

Moses begins by exhorting the people to obey God's Laws and then goes on to explain WHY they should obey God's Laws. And interestingly Moses' explanation revolves around a history lesson. That is Moses says that it is Israel's somewhat recent historical experiences that validate and set in context the reasons and purposes for the Lord handing down these rulings and commands for Israel to live by. In other words the Laws of Moses are not abstract, they are not idealistic and unattainable, and they were not set down in a vacuum. The Laws were of course given in cultural terms of that era, in a specific language (Hebrew), at a particular time in history, and then the application of these laws were demonstrated in a number of settings and circumstances. In fact some of the laws were not even to be observed until they entered Canaan because those particular laws revolved around agriculture (something the Israelites could not participate in while they were living in tents out in the wilderness).

In verse 1 Moses says they should obey all the laws given on Mt. Sinai, ***“so that you may live....”*** Moses says that life itself (at least for God's people) depends on obedience to the Lord, and obedience was demonstrated by observance of His commandments. Israel (in general) took Moses advice as literally as he meant it. In Proverbs 19:16 we find King Solomon say, ***“He who has regard for his life pays regard to the commandments; he who is heedless of his ways will die.”*** The Hebrews firmly believed that walking in the ways of the Lord not only brought Shalom (well being in all of it's aspects), it extended one's life to the maximum human life span; conversely rebellion brought calamity and an earlier-than-normal physical death. Moses is pleading with Israel to be obedient FOR THEIR OWN SAKES.

In a historical context there were several recorded instances during the wilderness journey when rebellion brought death to God's people at God's hand. In fact when we consider that since it had only been 38 years since Israel's refusal to enter the Promised Land (when God decreed that no man of an age of accountability would be allowed to live long enough to enter Canaan); and that the age of accountability began at about 20 years old, that means that no one older than 58 or 59 years old was now living among the Israelites as they began their conquest. Rebellion brought instant death to some, lingering death to others, and earlier than normal death to the greater portion of the population. Hebrews of that era typically lived well

into their 70's. I'm saying to you that Moses was not making some super-spiritualized statement about only the Heavenly value of being obedience to Yehoveh; he was reminding the people that their own recent history showed them the proof that obedience to YHWH is life and rebellion is death. So choose obedience.

I would also like to point out a tiny word or phrase in the first verse; and depending on your translation it will say, "hear", or "hearken", or "observe". The Hebrew word that is being translated is **Shema**. Those of you who have been around the Hebrew Roots type of teaching for a while should recognize that word as it has even become a Traditional name for a commandment in Deuteronomy 6. It is also known as the "hear O Israel".

Here's the point: in our modern English we make little distinction between the words "hear" and "hearken". We think that hearken is just a very formal old English way of saying hear. Not true. **Shema** is an instruction to DO something. It is a call to action. So in our modern vocabulary "listen and obey" or "observe" better captures the sense of the word **shema** or its English counterpart hearken. In Medieval times **hearken** specifically meant to act on what you're being told.

Just as I have explained in earlier lessons that when our Bibles say "believe in God", we should mentally cross out the word "believe" and insert instead "trust" in order to align the Biblical sense of it with 21st century vocabulary, so it is when we run across the words "hear" or "hearken" we should mentally cross out those words and replace them with "listen and obey" or "observe". That is because just as "believe" has become a rather weak word that indicates a passive intellectual acceptance of something, so has "hear and hearken" become words that just mean our ears perceived some sounds and we intellectually comprehended them. That is not at all, or ever was, the sense of the word **Shema**. It means that we hear and DO. We are to ACT upon what we hear.

Therefore let me recite the **Shema** for you in the sense it was always meant (and the sense in which the Hebrews understood it) and just see if the changing of that one little word from hear to obey doesn't suddenly put a whole new light on it:

^{NAS} Deuteronomy 6:4 "OBEY, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!"⁵ "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Further let me remind you of two things: where the word LORD is, in Hebrew it is actually YHWH. And where the word heart is used, heart was NOT thought of (in that era) as the place where our emotions reside. Rather the heart was the equivalent of brain. The heart was the

where our intellect resided. In our modern vocabulary we should cross our heart whenever we see it in the Bible (OT or NT) and insert the word mind.

Let me read this basic God-principle called the **Shema** for you once again, and then we'll close. And remember, Yeshua says that the **Shema** is the MOST foundational God-principle of them all; the 10 Words (10 Commandments) are based on the **Shema**, as are all the 613 laws. So it's important that we get the truest possible sense of what God is communicating to us.

^{NAS} Deuteronomy 6:4 ***"OBEY, O Israel! YEHOVEH is our God, YEHOVEH is one!"⁵ "And you shall love YEHOVEH your God with all your MIND and with all your soul and with all your might.***

That puts it in a little different perspective doesn't it? Do you see the strength and passion of this statement and do-ability of that statement? This is a kingly decree that is not to be ignored. The requirement is that we understand who God is intellectually and THEN let it envelope our souls as well, and then we ACT upon this understanding with every fiber of our physical and spiritual being. HEAR or HEARKEN are powerful, not passive, Biblical words. And we will find those same words, with the same meaning and intent, in the New Testament as well.

We'll continue with Moses' eloquent and impassioned sermon next week.