

DEUTERONOMY

Lesson 6 - Chapter 4 Continued

Let's continue our study of Deuteronomy chapter 4; my personal choice as perhaps one of the 10 most critical and central chapters in all the Bible for understanding the God of Israel, His attributes and character, the principles that under gird ALL of His laws, what happens to those who DO obey, what happens to those who rebel, and what the proper response of a worshipper ought to be to redemption and deliverance that He has given to us.

Last week I took several minutes to remind you of just WHY it is that particularly in our day and age it is incumbent upon us to recover the Word of God and to stop relying on worn out and misguided doctrines and traditions of men that (while perhaps serving a useful purpose for a time in Salvation history) discarded the Torah and Israel in favor of intellectual philosophies and the preeminence of gentiles. One of the most disturbing things that has been taught by Christians since about the time of Constantine (4th century AD) is that the attribute of God that Christians MOST rely on (His grace) came about only at the time of the advent of Jesus Christ and was not in play before then; and therefore grace is a strictly New Testament phenomenon or dispensation.

And this belief shows up primarily in the firmly entrenched Church axiom that the greatest choice that is laid out to every human as regards our relationship with the Lord is to select between "His Law and His Grace". That to choose one way is right and the other is wrong; that Law and Grace are mutually exclusive and have no connection between them. That to choose Law is to deny Christ and to choose grace is to accept Him. Naturally since pagans or atheists have no concept of either of these terms (Law and Grace) this challenge is rooted primarily as a repudiation of the religion of the Jewish people. Or better, gentile Believers are to make a choice between the way of the Jews (the Law), and the way of Christ (Grace).

But is that really the choice that is set before us? Is it that the Law is the enemy of Grace, and Grace the opponent of the Law? I ran across a wonderfully articulate statement that puts this dichotomy of Law versus Grace into perspective. And what makes it all the more interesting is its source: I am taking this out of one of the more progressive, modern, scholarly, and admired commentaries on the Bible, the World Bible Commentary. This multi-volume work is recommended by most contemporary Evangelical Seminaries and Bible colleges as perhaps the ultimate and most up-to-date Bible commentary in existence today, as it was first published only about 10 years ago.

Duane Christensen, the editor of the World Bible Commentary volume on Deuteronomy, is anything but a conservative leaning person or an apologist for Israel and the Jewish people; his training is from MIT and Harvard so I don't think I have to say much more. Professor Christensen speaks of an undeniable reality that the Lord has shown him about the Old Testament and he wants other Christians and serious students of the Bible to benefit from it; I quote:

“The popular view that identifies Law with the OT and gospel with the NT will certainly not stand up against a careful reading of the book of Deuteronomy as G. Braulik has shown. To understand Deuteronomy, one must recognize God’s PRIOR grace to sinners; that is, the PRIORTY OF GOSPEL (grace) OVER LAW IN THE OT as well as in the NT. Though Deuteronomy stresses that obedience to God’s Torah is essential, it even MORE strongly emphasizes that such obedience is dependent on the grace of God.....”

Let me say it another way: God's grace is contained IN His Law, and the Law demonstrates His grace. His law and His grace are inseparable and the proper spirit of obedience to, and carrying out of, the Law is predicated on grace. Speaking of one with out the other is like speaking of Yeshua and the Holy Spirit as being mutually exclusive. That Yeshua or the Holy Spirit could exist and function without the other, or that the redemptive process is the exclusive work of one and not the other is unthinkable and would defy every Biblical tenet of just who God is. Remove the work of the Holy Spirit and our Salvation cannot be. Remove the work of Yeshua and our Salvation cannot be. We can certainly speak of Yeshua and of the Holy Spirit separately; and we can study them and discuss them in isolated fashion and even apply different terms and characteristics but practically speaking they cannot actually be separated. God, over and over again, says that He is Echad, ONE, a divine unity that cannot be broken apart. We are treading on dangerous ground when our doctrines seek to emphasize or even prefer one above the other, and even go so far as to say that one could exist and operate and the other cease to exist or no longer have a meaningful function.

So it is with Law and Grace. We certainly can, to a degree, identify the somewhat unique purposes and attributes inherent to each, but we can no more CHOOSE between Law and Grace (or law and gospel) as is almost universally demanded of us by the Church, than we can choose BETWEEN the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ. Rabbi Baruch and I were discussing this subject at length some time ago, and I told him that it occurred to me that the mainstream church had become so willing to do exactly that, that for a Believer to simply determine that he or she will be obedient to God's commands, or to even take them seriously, is now called "legalism" or a desire to adopt Judaism.

Therefore please take today's opening remarks as a reminder of the context of Deuteronomy (and all the Torah for that matter) that grace is at its center, that grace is indispensable at all stages of God's interaction with humans in any age, and that the Laws contained herein are

organically connected to, and built upon, and dependent upon God's grace. In God's economy without grace there can be no Law.

Let's re-read some of this marvelous chapter that is so essential to our understanding of the Word in general.

RE-READ DEUTERONOMY 4:21 - end

Picking up in Deuteronomy 4:21: after his diatribe against idol worship Moses digresses a bit and once again mourns the fact that even as the Lord's Mediator (one of only two Mediators that will ever exist), he is not going to enjoy the fruits of the Promised Land (as will his youthful audience, the 2nd generation of the Exodus) because of the actions of the Israelites that prompted his rash behavior. Therefore, says Moses, take notice of what is happening to me (that is, Moses being barred from going into the Promised Land) and take care that YOU scrupulously obey every element of the covenant the Lord has made with Israel so that it doesn't happen to you. And this is because since the Lord God is a consuming fire it is not possible for anything or anyone to withstand His judgment for wrongdoing, and the Lord is no respecter of persons so your socio-economic or political status won't help you (not even Moses is exempt when it comes to trespasses against Yehoveh).

With idol worship STILL front and center as the cause for Moses' words of caution to the people in this chapter, he says to be careful not to break this command against all forms of idolatry and therefore perish as a result. Note that perish doesn't mean, "utterly destroyed" in the current usage; it actually more means "brought to ruin", or "severely and painfully punished and diminished". Now notice something interesting and involving a principle that we really haven't seen used this way until now: in Leviticus it was a God-ordained requirement that any judicial trial that involved a matter that could result in the death penalty had to rest on the testimony of at least two witnesses. Such crimes were, of course, always considered first and foremost as acts of disobedience towards God and it included the worst offenses such as murder, adultery, and idolatry.

I know many of you are prophecy buffs so here's a tidbit that might interest you. Although we'll not follow the thread of the "two witnesses" principle through the Bible and discuss it at length today (as interesting as it is to do), I do want you to recognize that the mysterious Two Witnesses who will appear during the time of Tribulation in Jerusalem (the Two Witnesses of the Lord that the Anti-Christ will kill and let their bodies lay in the streets of Jerusalem for all the world to see) are but an extension of the requirement that the Lord set down that there MUST be at least two witnesses to judge a man for destruction (the death penalty). Here in Deuteronomy Moses invites the two witnesses against Israel to be **the heavens and the earth**. Moses says he calls on the heavens and the earth as the required two witnesses

against Israel should they commit idolatry. This two-witnesses law was an absolute legal must in the Lord's justice system, one that God even imposed on Himself (which is why in the end-times Two Witnesses is a must since He is sentencing all Unbelievers to physical and eternal death). Since the punishment for idolatry was death, if Israel was to perish (was to be catastrophically chastised) as a nation as a consequence for their corporate idolatry, WHO could possibly be left to qualify as the TWO witnesses to testify against them? Moses says it will be the heavens and the earth for they are subject to God in the same way as is mankind.

So, Moses says, it is not IF but WHEN you (Israel) start again worshipping idols that all the wonderful promises of land and security and peace will be reversed. In verse 27 Moses says that Yehoveh will remove Israel from His land and scatter them into other nations (all gentile nations of course) and that while not ALL Israelites will be killed in those nations, many will, and many more will simply assimilate and lose their Hebrew identities. In fact Moses says only a few will survive the exile. Then he says something that I think has been somewhat misconstrued; Moses says that in those gentile nations Israel will serve man-made gods, false gods.

In general this verse has been assumed to mean that the Hebrews will be persecuted and forcefully made to bow down to the gods of those nations. Historically speaking that has indeed happened in isolated cases (such as demonstrated in the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace when the Jews were exiled to Babylon); but in the vast majority of cases the Hebrew were NOT forced to worship other gods because that simply was not the thinking or methods of ancient Middle Eastern conquerors of the Biblical Era.

Rather the consequence is that the Israelites will do what all people do: they'll assimilate to one degree or another into whatever culture they are exiled. Or, just as ominous, they will not be permitted by that culture's government to openly continue with their well-established worship practices of Yehoveh (as outlined in Torah) so they'll compromise so as to go unnoticed. Or, perhaps worse, because by definition they will no longer be residing on God's holy land (Israel), and because the Temple was the only place they could go to sacrifice and atone for their sins against God, their spiritual state OUTSIDE of the Land was as if they were defiled and never able to be cleansed. Worse, since they were defiled and impure, this automatically meant that they were unable to commune with Yehoveh.

Let me put the horror of that in perspective: it would be as though, as a Christian, you had your salvation yanked from you. You didn't WANT it removed, but it was anyway. You retained a complete memory for it, why it was so critical for you to possess, a desire to maintain it, and you didn't intend to lose it, but the consequences of your actions were so grievous to God that He turned you over to the forces of evil and separated Himself from you. Can you imagine such a thing? While we'll not get into whether that is possible at all for a Believer (and generally speaking it is NOT possible, so relax), but just imagine if it were! That is tantamount to what Moses is saying will happen to Israel (and in fact it DID happen) should they rebel

against God (and by the way the central trespass of this rebellion is committing idolatry).

In my Hebrew Roots of Christianity seminar I try to relate the state of mind of the Jews up in Babylon; how aware they were of their exile not just from their homeland of Judah but also from God Himself. They felt that the very air they breathed was defiled; the food that they ate was impure, NOT kosher; that they lived in a perpetual state of uncleanness from which there was no escape. The women couldn't properly and legally cleanse themselves from their monthly cycles, nor could the men cleanse themselves after sexual intimacy with their wives as was required by the Law. They couldn't obey the commandment to make the 3 pilgrimages each year to Jerusalem for the God-ordained festivals; they couldn't tithe, the priests couldn't teach or perform their sacrificial rituals, so the Jews couldn't offer a sacrifice of atonement when they sinned. They were in Hell.

Yet Moses says rescue and restoration is possible for God's people! He says that if (as difficult as it might be to do in their circumstances of exile), IF you will repent and seek God with all your heart and soul (remember, in the Bible the word "heart" is synonymous with our modern word "mind"), He will ALLOW Israel to rekindle their relationship with Him. And this is because (as it says in verse 31) another attribute of God that operates at the other end of the scale from His wrath is His compassion and mercy. He says that on a corporate or national level He will NOT let Israel be wiped out as an identifiable people and that He will NOT forget His covenant promise that He made with Israel's fathers. Oh, this is so central to our overall understanding of the Bible.

First, saying "your fathers" is only another way of saying "the Patriarchs", meaning Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So this has Moses saying that Yehoveh will not fail Israel nor will He let Israel (as a people) be completely wiped out; and that He will NOT forget about the Abrahamic Covenant (the covenant made with Abraham, then handed down to Isaac, then handed down to Jacob).

Second, let's understand what the meaning of this concept of the Lord NOT **forgetting** the Abrahamic Covenant is: to "forget" a covenant means to abolish it, to invalidate it. Let that sink in for a minute. Over and over in the OT the Lord says this same thing: He will NEVER forget (He will never invalidate) His covenant with Abraham. Yeshua, of course, backs that up in Matthew 5:17 when He says that HE did not come to invalidate, abolish, "forget", the Torah and it's contents (which is where the covenants are established). Let me say that again: in Hebrew thinking to FORGET a promise or a covenant is to abolish or abrogate it; to REMEMBER a promise or a covenant is to validate it, uphold it and stick with its terms. Particularly as concerns God, forgetting and remembering has nothing to do with His memory or ability to recall.

Now I told you that Deuteronomy 4 is just crammed with important stuff, so here is another

important concept that kind of whizzes right by us. While you and I just read this passage and say, "Ok, so God says that since He's compassionate that wherever it is they are scattered He will allow the Israelites to seek Him out." That's great, but pretty straightforward. Well it's only straightforward for us because we understand that there exists ONLY one God. The Hebrews of this era did NOT believe that. Just as you and I wouldn't ever argue the point that the world consists of a multitude of various people groups: black people, brown people, white people, Asians, and so on, so would the Hebrews simply take as common knowledge that the spiritual world consists of a multitude of gods, each dedicated to one or the other of the various people groups and nations. Thus it's only that Yehoveh is Israel's particular god. So in Deuteronomy, Moses is (for the first time that I can detect in Torah) beginning to make it crystal clear that Yehoveh is the ONLY god in existence, not just Israel's ONLY god. So Moses is telling Israel that WHEN they are scattered all over the earth for their idolatry that they WILL commit, that they can take comfort in knowing that their God will be wherever they are. That (unlike the universal thought of that era) the Hebrews will NOT have to switch allegiance to the god or gods of whatever nations they wind up in, in order to have some god or another to help them. That Yehoveh's power and presence is everywhere on this earth and He is not restrained by territorial boundaries, as are the non-existent gods of the pagan nations.

Look: this was probably as difficult a thing for Israel to immediately swallow as truth (because it ran counter to what at that time passed for common sense) as it is initially for new Christians to accept that a divine attribute of God called "The Holy Spirit" has invisibly and otherwise undetectably taken up residence inside of us. On the one hand reliable church authorities tell us that this is the case; and we HOPE this is so, but on the other hand how do you prove and tangibly verify such a thing? The only way is through time and experience with the Lord that begins with simple faith. So let's try and grasp what a revolutionary concept that Moses was talking about here. But also let's try and grasp that another part of what Moses was saying was ominously prophetic: that in the future Israel WOULD rebel against God by means of idolatry, they WOULD be ejected from the Land and scattered, they WOULD be killed and put under subjugation in gentile nations, they WOULD be put under societal pressures to worship other gods, and many (if not most Israelites) WOULD succumb to one element or another of this.

Really, Moses puts this in such general terms that only hindsight enables us to validate the truth in it: it's not that Israel would do this on ONE occasion and then God would respond with exile, but that what is being introduced to Israel is a PRINCIPLE that would be repeated in regular cycles; Israel WOULD rebel in idolatry and God WOULD, each time, respond the same way with their exile from their homeland.

Ah, but as always, Moses brings a balance to the situation. Restoration WILL occur just as surely as Israel WILL rebel. And beginning in verse 31 Moses says that the grounds for this hope of restoration and reconnecting with God that Israel should always hope for is twofold: 1) because the Lord loved the Patriarchs and 2) because God is inherently merciful. And from

here Moses gives a sermon about this radical concept that YHWH is the ONLY god that exists.

This sermon that introduces Israel to monotheism says that the PROOF that there is only one god and that His name is YHWH is contained in history itself. That from the time that the earth was formed until today, what society or culture has EVER had such things happen to it as had Israel? What society has EVER actually HEARD the voice of God? Not just some priests CLAIMING that THEY heard a god, but rather the general population being eyewitnesses to it occurring. When has there EVER been a God who set apart a selected group of people from the world in general, gave them a Law and a covenant, brought down supernatural destruction on their oppressors (like in Egypt), and then led them by means of a VISIBLE cloud and pillar of fire that was available NOT just for Israel to see but for anyone within close proximity to actually witness?

Folks let me explain something to you that perhaps you haven't considered: do you know WHY Israel is looked upon as so strange and weird and threatening from the moment of their sanctification and separation right on up until today? Moses is telling you in Deuteronomy. It's because in fact they ARE different, and they have had their path set upon an entirely unique history and set of morals and principles that run counter to any other society, ever. Humans just can't stand diversity and difference despite the absurd and disingenuous academic worship of it today. At the same moment the world calls for an acceptance of diversity, tolerance and multi-culturalism every effort is made to pressure everybody to be the same. My goodness, like no other time in history there is the greatest effort to erase the distinction between male and female. To pound everyone into the same mold, for everyone to accept the same philosophies and morals, to have one world dominating body to govern all nations under the same rules and laws. And anyone who refuses to submit to this is regarded as a renegade, unintelligent, a hater, something to be stomped on and eradicated like an unwelcome cockroach.

Moses is claiming that no one has ever been in Israel's position, and no one has ever had such perfect laws and commands to live by than what they have been presented by Yehoveh. What he hasn't said yet is that the world is going to hate Israel for this and that the world as led by their own evil inclinations, at Satan's direction, will NEVER stop trying to rid itself of these strange people, simply because they are DIFFERENT.

Well, wake up Christians; the Jews aren't alone anymore. YOU have become a target for re-education or extermination. YOU are too different to live side-by-side with everyone else. And how has the Church responded to this challenge? Generally in the same way the Jews eventually did, to blend in; to look more like the world than the world itself. The Jews worked to dissolve the separation between them and the other inhabitants of this planet. Jews who emigrated from Europe as early as the 1800's gave up not only their Jewish identities but also their family names so that they could vanish into a sea of gentiles. In our time Christians by the 1000's, entire denominations en masse, are giving up the virgin birth, the deity of Jesus, and

any vestige of separateness and different-ness from the world. Christians by the millions are accepting and celebrating homosexuality, same sex marriage, and our freedom to choose abortion. Christians don't WANT our true faith history: we just want our fire insurance and our social group of friends and activities that's based around a church building. Of course I'm speaking in general and this is not every case, but it is, at the least, becoming the new norm.

The rush to abandon our Savior is at a fever pitch in Europe and is bound to spread. England is leading the way as a group now offers Anti-Baptism certificates so that a Christian can officially renounce all allegiance to his God, have his name officially removed from every kind of list that identifies him as a Christian, and then receive a certificate as legal proof of his repudiation of Christianity. Within the past year alone over 100,000 people have done so.

In verse 39 Moses makes the definitive statement: “ ***Know therefore this day and keep in mind that Yehoveh is God in heaven above and on earth below; there is no other.***” This statement marks a turning point in the history of mankind. And next Moses says that the REASON you want to believe and observe this command is so that it will go well with you and your children and you can remain in God's care on God's land. If for no other reason, Israel, obey God for you own selfish reasons that you will survive and prosper. Moses says, don't do this because God needs it; it's because YOU need it. Don't do this because God benefits; rather its because YOU benefit.

Nothing has changed. Salvation is not and has never been for God's benefit; it's for ours. God doesn't “lose” because so many fail to take advantage of His free gift; those who don't see the truth, lose.

Moses ends this portion of his address to the people by officially naming the cities of refuge (the sanctuary cities) that will be established on the east side of the Jordan River, in the territory that Reuben, Gad, and ½ of the tribe of Manessah will inhabit. These are cities that will be owned and administered by the Levites FOR THE SAKE of the tribes who have chosen to live and operate in the Trans-Jordan. Recall that a city of refuge is a place where a man who has killed another man can reside and be safe; he may not be harmed if he escapes to one of these 3 cities. Also recall that this law does NOT cover the crime of murder and a murderer may not take up residence there. The primary crime that these cities are set aside for is manslaughter, the unintended or accidental killing of a human.

It's not that those who come to a city of refuge are there to avoid prosecution, in fact they will be brought to a certain place for trial and if they're determined NOT to be guilty of murder THEN they can go back to the city of refuge and remain there in safety. The inhabitants of a sanctuary city are NOT in prison they are actually being protected. In fact they were free to leave those cities any time they chose to. The problem is that they were being protected against the Kinsman Redeemer (***go'el ha'dam***) whose traditional duty it was to avenge the

death of the relative who that person killed even if it were accidental. But if the killer chose to live outside the protection of the sanctuary city then they became fair game and the Kinsman Redeemer could extract his blood revenge without consequence.

To end chapter 4 I'll just make a quick comment on verses 44 –49. There is some disagreement as to whether these particular verses ought to NOT be the end of chapter 4 but rather should be included as the first words of chapter 5. Otherwise it seems terribly redundant.

I'd like to offer a different possibility: verses 1 –43 were like an introduction, a forward, to what Moses was about to say beginning in Deut.4:44 and then essentially continuing for the next several chapters.

In other words perhaps in modern jargon we could have Moses saying: “Now, after all that I have just given to you as a background, here is FINALLY the teaching I want you to have.....” So, indeed, I would agree with those who say that while the translation is perfectly fine, chapter 5 should have begun earlier at what is currently designated as Deut. 4:44. Before you start accusing me of trying to “change the Bible”, please just remember that the Bible NEVER had chapter marks, OT or NT. Scholars added them many centuries later, only for a means to help study and communicate the various passages. The same goes with verse numbering; it was an arbitrary system and nothing wrong with that because it changes nothing.

However because in modern literature paragraphs and chapters DO have significant meaning (usually indicating that one scene ends and new one begins, or one thought pattern ends and a new one begins) it CAN have an impact IF we apply that same type of literary criteria to the Bible. What I'm telling you is: try NOT to read the Bible according to paragraphs and chapters like we read a modern book. All too often a certain train of thought simply continues from the last verse of one chapter right on into the first verse of the next; but because it SEEMS to be interrupted due to a new paragraph or a new chapter number then our minds tend to end the context of what has been said up to that point and we attempt to create a whole NEW context from scratch. This is a MAJOR mistake and unfortunately this is probably the way that the vast majority of Believers, Bible students, Sunday School Teacher, and even Bible College professors actually read and teach the Bible.

Next week we'll take up Deuteronomy chapter 5.