

DEUTERONOMY

Lesson 12 - Chapters 9 and 10

We'll continue today in Deuteronomy chapter 9. Allow me to remind you that Deuteronomy is essentially a sermon by Moses, and so I have been (and will continue) to present Deuteronomy to you in a similar form.

It is a reality of the human condition that as time passes history gets re-written, re-interpreted, and sometimes it is lost altogether. And it really doesn't take a particularly long period of time for this to happen; a decade is often more than enough for history to become distorted or discarded.

The US Constitution is a case in point. And I use this an illustration because it demonstrates perhaps the primary reason Moses is spending a significant amount of time in revisiting Israel's history and her covenant relationship with Yehoveh.

Our Supreme Court whose job it is (at least in theory) to interpret and apply the Constitution to our justice system that must operate in an ever-evolving society consists of men and women who can be divided into two distinct philosophies. The first philosophy is of those who believe that the Constitution is a living document that is meant to change with the times, and therefore it is the purpose of the court to re-interpret and even adjust the Constitution relative to evolving societal needs as they see it. Alternatively there are those Justices who see the Constitution as written in stone and think it is the purpose of the court to but ascertain what was in the minds of the Constitution's creators and to faithfully apply that to the question at hand versus applying their own thoughts. That is they should seek out the creators' intent and apply that to each case that is brought before them.

Here in Deuteronomy Moses is revisiting the Law and the history of Israel so that the succeeding generation (these, the children of the 1st generation of the Exodus) gets more in-depth instruction concerning God's mind and purposes for the Law, and so that neither the Law's meaning nor the events that constructed and defined Israel could be misinterpreted. Note that it has been less than 40 years since the Law was first given; and further notice that Moses was NOT giving Israel a new or evolving Law; he was simply expounding on the existing Law, and how its underlying principle would operate once Israel left behind their Bedouin tents and began living a settled life in Canaan.

Hidden deep within the books of the Psalms and the Prophets we'll find the same thing: they are constantly reminding Israel of her history, relationship with God, and despite the ebbs and flows, up and downs, and constantly progressing technologies just what it is that the Lord continues to expect of His set-apart people.

When we get to the New Testament we'll find Yeshua doing what Moses is doing as Messiah revisits the Law and God's principles in light of the reality of the era and its circumstances. Christ is reminding His followers that not the tiniest feature of the Law or the divine substance upon which it rests has changed or (Heaven forbid!) been abolished. I have already drawn (in an earlier lesson) the direct pattern and parallel between Moses' Sermon on the Mount (which we are currently studying) and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount that occurred 1300 years later. By Yeshua's day, as anyone listening to me right now should understand, an enormous amount of time had passed since Abraham's day and Hebrew society looked nothing like it did during the Exodus. But predictably, since the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai, there were many attempts by various Hebrew sages and religious authorities to re-write and re-interpret the Law and to remold it to their own satisfaction. Jewish religious leaders determined that they had the authority and elite intelligence to adjust the meaning behind the Law and even to skew the foundational God-principles of Torah to reflect their personal agendas. And much of the Jewish society had accepted these relatively new ways of thinking (some of which ran completely counter to the Creator's intent) because Israel's history had been re-written a number of times OUTSIDE of the Holy Scriptures.

Now they had in their possession the ancient records of their history and of the actual Word of God as originally given: the Tanach, the Old Testament. But they preferred instead to go by the rulings of the intellectuals of their day called Sages and Rabbis; and these rulings were eventually collected into a work of prescribed traditions called the Talmud.

Few Americans (at least Americans under the age of about 50) have EVER read that rather short document that is the foundation of our entire society (the Constitution). When I was in elementary school (a long time ago) reading the Constitution and even taking an exam on it was mandatory. Over time the Constitution has been relegated to something that is unintelligible and nearing obsolescence, and so we prefer instead to let our elected representatives (and often unelected men called Judges) to decide and tell us what that document says and means. That is generally the way it was and remains with the Jewish people regarding the Torah and the Law of Moses. They much prefer to read the recordings of Tradition, and faithfully practice the rulings of Sages and Rabbis, than to refer directly to God's Word and be obedient to that. Not surprisingly Christianity has pretty much followed the same track and much prefer the doctrines laid down by our denomination's founders than what the Bible actually says because although we may be redeemed, we are still all too human.

So as we continue today in Deuteronomy chapter 9 we're going to find Moses reminding the people of things that happened only a handful of years earlier; not just because this was a new

generation that needed to hear it, but because (as we will quickly see) these wandering Israelites had already begun to re-write history and adopt strange ideas about what their relationship with Yehoveh was. And we'll see WHY this distortion occurred in the first place.

Let's re-read from Deuteronomy 9:6 to the end of the chapter.

RE-READ DEUTERONOMY 9:6 to end

Moses has just finished explaining to Israel that the ONLY thing that separates them from everybody else is that God chose them. And that He didn't choose them because they had some kind of inherent righteousness that others didn't or because they did better works or had achieved some higher spiritual plane because of their own merit. Rather they were but the fortunate recipients of the Creator's special love and attention for the sake of the promise He made centuries earlier to the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Beginning in verse 7 Moses now recounts indisputable historical evidence as proof to the people that they had merited nothing, earned nothing, and deserved nothing but God's wrath; yet instead they received His greatest mercy and blessing.

Moses says that they had barely stepped foot outside of Egypt before they rebelled against the Lord. Then they did it again at Horeb (an alternate name for Mt. Sinai). Upon arrival at Sinai Moses was called by Yehoveh to come up to the summit to receive the Law; but while he was up there in the midst of cutting a covenant with God and receiving the terms of that covenant (the Law), the people were down in the valley breaking those same terms!

While Moses was away the people built a Golden Calf, a god symbol, and outlawed graven image. This was without doubt the Isis Bull, a high Egyptian deity image that was common in their everyday life back in Egypt and something with which they were greatly familiar. Let me use this moment to remind you of something that is quite pertinent to the modern church and at the same time terribly misunderstood: an animal was often used as a symbol of deity in the ancient world. It was NOT (in general) that they thought that some particular animal actually WAS deity. Rather certain animals were chosen because they were associated with particular attributes that were admired. Bulls were big and strong and powerful and so it was the attributes of the god Isis' strength and power that were symbolized by the Bull statues. Rabbits were often used to symbolize fertility and so quite often the fertility goddesses was pictured with rabbit features; but Rabbits were not actually thought to be goddesses. So in the ancient world most idols and animal symbols were exactly that....symbols.....representationsnot actual gods. And while this varied a bit from culture to culture, it is no different than today within some of the Eastern Orthodox Churches and in the Catholic Church whereby statues

represent Jesus, or Mary, or some of the great Saints of old, but they do NOT think (generally speaking) that the statues actually ARE Jesus, or Mary, or some of those Saints.

So when the Lord ordains in the 2nd commandment NOT to make a graven image of Him, and then goes on to describe all the things that should NOT be used to do such a thing, it is NOT so much that folks will think that that graven image actually IS Him, but that a created thing is being used to define or illustrate or symbolize a divine attribute or characteristic OF Him. That is the direct danger we modern Christians must always be cognizant of when we consider creating our religious icons and symbols and rationalize it all by thinking, “well, I don’t worship that symbol or actually think that it is God”. Neither did the people of ancient times but the Lord still called them idolaters. Enough said.

Last week I touched on the scene whereby Moses arrives at the bottom of the mountain, sees the people dancing around the Golden Calf, and smashes the stone tablets of the covenant that he had only just received from YHWH. Understand: at that moment, the but days-old covenant was undone. The covenant had NOT merely been violated it was now null and void; that is the standard Middle Eastern meaning of smashing the tablets upon which the terms of a covenant were written. Let me say that again: the Covenant of the Law that God had just given to Moses was terminated at that moment.

Then Moses goes on to say that as a result of the Covenant being cancelled, there really was no longer a need for Israel to exist! Israel was supposed to be God’s earthly agent for carrying out the Covenant that would lead to mankind’s redemption; but now there was no covenant to be carried out. Therefore God tells Moses that He is going to destroy Israel and form a new covenant people, all of them coming from Moses himself!

Note something else: Aharon, Moses’ brother, who was the High Priest, was also going to be destroyed. So even the Priestly line would not continue. In Exodus we didn’t see Aaron being singled out for destruction due to his role in the Golden Calf idolatry; but here we do.

Upon that threat Moses begins to beseech God NOT to do such a thing, to forgive His people and to restore them, and then God relents. Here we see perhaps the greatest moment of Moses’ intercession for Israel in all of Torah; even greater than being God’s instrument of miracles and wrath back in Egypt. For the ONLY thing that saved even the High Priest of Israel, let alone Israel itself, was that Moses was Israel’s appointed Mediator. Only Moses could intercede between God and man. Moses prayed to the Lord and asked Him to remember that these people had already been redeemed and that they were marked to be the Lord’s special people. Moses asked YHWH to remember His promise to the Patriarchs, and to forgive the wickedness of the people; that it was the Lord Himself who did all this great things FOR this people, and therefore He would simply be going back on His holy promise and showing the rest of the world that He was unable to follow through with His plan.

Right here we get the exact pattern that would eventually be demonstrated through Yeshua our Messiah. The only thing that can save ANY man is the mediation of a specially appointed man. And this is because the Law says that to intentionally sin against God is a high-handed sin, and a high-handed sin has no possibility of atonement. Who could stand between God and man in a dispute? Only a God-appointed Mediator and in all history, God has appointed exactly two: Moses and Yeshua. Yet they are not on equal footing. For Moses was but 100% man but Christ was 100% man **and** 100% God.

Moses did not appeal on the grounds of Israel's own righteousness for them to be saved from God's just wrath; rather he appealed on the grounds of God's righteousness. Yeshua appealed in exactly the same way. I've said it before and with no apologies I say it again: your wickedness and mine did NOT cease upon our redemption any more than did Israel's. Yet that redemption brings with it a special provision before the Lord; that the sins resulting from our wickedness can be forgiven. Let me say that again: ONLY redemption brings with it the ability for those sins to be forgiven. Anyone in days of old outside of the nation of Israel had absolutely NO MEANS for their wickedness to be forgiven. None. Since the advent of Christ, no one outside of His followers has any means of their wicked deeds being forgiven. None. But don't become arrogant or complacent, because direct sin against God that is termed "high-handed sin" is called "blasphemy of the Holy Spirit" in the New Testament; and for that not even Jesus' blood is sufficient.

As much as I love and support and advocate for the Jewish people there is no means outside of Yeshua for their trespasses to be forgiven. There is not one Plan of Salvation for the Jews, and a separate Plan of Salvation for everyone else. The Plan of Salvation was always meant for the Jewish people FIRST; it's just that the Lord provided for a way for the foreigner, the gentile, to be included in that plan. We'll talk about this a little more in a few minutes.

Let's move on to Deuteronomy chapter 10; but as we read this chapter remember this one important thing: the covenant that the Lord had fashioned on the top of Mt. Sinai has just been symbolically cancelled upon Moses' act of dashing to pieces those two stone tablets emblazoned with the 10 Commandments.

READ DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 10 all

Because the plan of Salvation is designed for humans, all the Lord really has to work with is humans to bring it about. Therefore all throughout human history we see the Father working out His righteousness through human institutions and societies. Then it should come as no surprise that since covenants were created and cancelled in certain customary ways in ancient

times, so we see those ancient ways used as a form the Lord uses to create His covenant with Israel. It is said that if a speaker is unable to get his message across to his audience then he isn't communicating, he's just talking. The Lord had little choice but to deal with dimly inferior humans except in ways we can understand (otherwise we'd have no idea what to make of what He was communicating).

Now a man told me recently that a certain phrase I used last week (saying that God was "working out His righteousness" through us), bothered him. I explained to Him that this was not the Tom Bradford doctrine; rather this was standard Christian theological phraseology. It was not to be taken in the quite the same way as we might think of it if we were speaking of a human "working out his righteousness". When a man is said to be working, generally it means that he is actively trying (he is attempting to do something). But it inherently carries with it the idea that what a man is working for may or may not come about in the way he was hoping for; or it may not happen at all. That's not what it means when referring to God "working out His righteousness".

The Lord working out His righteousness means that everything that **defines** His righteousness He is using to mold and shape and accomplish His plans (usually by means of directing human history). When I say that because you are a Disciple of Jesus that the Lord is working out His righteousness in you, I mean that since His plan for mankind involves forgiving you of your sins SO THAT He can have an intimate relationship with you, that God introducing Himself to you, putting faith-to-believe in you, and communing with you, IS the process of His working out His righteousness. The idea is that it is not a human righteousness being created out of our natural-born human wickedness; rather it is literally God's righteousness from on high overshadowing and overriding our natural sinful natures. Therefore we can be TOOLS in God's hand as He goes about His work of righteousness, but we can never look to our own righteousness (which none of us have) to help God out.

I readily confess that the phrase " God working out His righteousness" is inadequate to fully express either what God's righteousness is or HOW it is that (mysteriously) He uses men's free wills and inherent evil natures who are usually opposed to Him, to actually wind up carrying out His plans. But until I can find better words these are the ones I'll use.

So because God communicates with us in dumbed-down ways humans are capable to comprehend, and since the covenant that was just made on Mt. Sinai was now cancelled, what was to be done? Well because of Moses' intercession the Lord decided to go ahead and KEEP Israel as His covenant people; however that meant the covenant (now terminated) would have to be cut again; the covenant would have to be re-established. What we witness beginning with verse 1 of chapter 10 is the re-establishment of that covenant; and this action is expressed by the Lord instructing Moses to cut two new tablets of stone to replace the broken ones, and to bring those blank tablets back up to the Mt. Sinai's summit in order that the Lord would restore the covenant and all of its terms.

I want you to notice something here: the covenant that the Lord had made with Abraham, and then passed down to Isaac and then to on Jacob was NEVER in jeopardy. It was NOT that covenant that had any part of the discussion here in Deuteronomy. For one thing that covenant was only a promise from God; there was no quid pro quo. There was nothing mankind, or Israel, could do to break that covenant and therefore bring its cancellation. The Covenant of Moses created on Mt. Sinai was not created to replace Abraham's covenant; it was created to bring Abraham's covenant about. Recall the Lord saying that HE is going to displace the Canaanites in order to establish Israel in Canaan IN ORDER TO complete His promise (His covenant) to Abraham.

Note in verse 1 that the Lord says "make me two stone tablets LIKE the first"; this is language showing that the renewed covenant was to be exactly the same as the one that got terminated. One of the more standard commentary series on the Bible (and one of the pretty good ones) is the Tyndale series. J.A. Thompson who was a contributor to this comprehensive commentary had this to say about the termination and then the restoration of the Mt. Sinai covenant, and then compared it to the so-called New Covenant in Christ that we commonly call the New Testament. Since he refers to Jeremiah 31:31-34, allow me to read that to you before I give you his comment:

NAS Jeremiah 31:31 "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.³³ "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.³⁴ "And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

J.A. Thompson is a Baptist Seminary professor in Melbourne, Australia, and here is his comment:

"Even in the great day of renewal envisaged by Jeremiah (Je. 31:31-34) it is the SAME Law that is to be written on the heart, the eternal law of God. The SENSE in which the law would be new in that day would be that it would be differently administered, it would have a different mediator, but it would fundamentally be the SAME COVENANT...."

So even the conservative evangelical Tyndale commentator readily sees that any thought that the OLD Law (the Old Testament) being done away with and something entirely new (meaning, by definition, different) being created just doesn't hold water Scripturally either in the OT or the NT.

Notice in Jeremiah 31 verse 33 that the Lord says, "I will put MY LAW within them....." What Law? The only Law there is or has ever been. How can God put into a man something that no longer exists? How can Law be dead and gone, but God is going to put that dead-and-gone thing inside of us? Are we who claim that God never changes going to continue to maintain that He DID change but that this particular change doesn't count as changing? That He created one Law, then wadded it up and threw it away, and created a whole new one substantially different from the first? A new Law that says there is no further need for obedience? What meaning is there in a Law if there is no requirement to follow it (then it is no law at all)? Did the Lord create a new Law that says I want you to have your fire insurance in the form of belief in Jesus, and then you can just go your merry way and I expect nothing further of you? Do you recall that I showed you in the Shema of Deuteronomy 6 that the original law of Mt. Sinai was also specifically "written on the heart"? So to say that the WAY the Law is different is that the old was NOT written on the heart but the new one was, is simply Scripturally inaccurate. Are we therefore to respond ONLY to what God might decide to show us "in our hearts", as individuals (essentially each of us having our own custom, personal set of laws) what is right and wrong? Again that is not Scriptural (and you've read it yourself); rather it is simply a philosophy that men much prefer.

Also notice a rather critical point; WHO is this new covenant going to be made by and between? Between God and the House of Israel and the House of Judah. Did it say anything about foreigners or gentiles? Nope. We'll come back to that.

In any case, verses 3-5 has Moses saying that he obeyed God's instructions to him, making the Ark of the Covenant as told, and then he placed those new tablets inside of it. Then in verse 6 it has Israel leaving Mt. Sinai and moving on using place names not heretofore mentioned in the Torah: **Beeroth-bene-jaakan** and **Moserah**. And it says that Aaron died at **Moserah** and Eleazar his son took over the post of High Priest.

Notice something that attentive Bible scholars have always seen: verses 6 – 9 were not written by Moses. These verses were inserted after Moses was dead (when we aren't sure). Everything for quite some time has been spoken in the first person (I, me). Suddenly at verse 6 the narrative switches to 3rd person, "they" (meaning the Israelites). And just as abruptly at verse 10 it resumes Moses speaking in the first person.

It has always been known that not all of the Torah was written by Moses even though it is sometimes referred to as the Law of Moses, or the 5 Books of Moses, or it is said in a general

way that Moses wrote the Torah. We will have several places where Moses obviously couldn't have written it because it discusses his death and what happened afterward. And here in these particular passages we have something where some editor thought an explanation of why the Levites had received no land inheritance had to be inserted. This is not a problem in any way; it precisely agrees with what we read in both Exodus and Numbers on the subject.

By way of quick review however (because the subject of the Levites and land inheritance is an important issue that shapes the rest of the Bible right on through Revelation), just as God separated Israel from the rest of the world to make them a separate people for Him, so He separated the tribe of Levi from the rest of Israel to be a separate Priesthood for Him. In both cases the election of Israel and then the tribe of Levi to be set apart was accomplished by means of a declaration by God and had absolutely nothing to do with merit or some unique level of righteousness. Even though the Hebrews were set apart they didn't stop being human beings that lived on planet earth and shared it with everyone else; but they were given a different purpose and different status and even a set apart land. So even though the Levites were set apart from Israel they didn't stop being Hebrews; but they were given a different purpose and a different status for the other 12 tribes. As Believers in Yeshua we haven't stopped being human nor are we to stop living in the world; but we have been given a different purpose and status than those who do not believe. And this special purpose and status is accomplished by means of a declaration of the Lord and nothing else.

As a result of this special status given to the Levites to be attendants to Yehoveh, they were not permitted to share in the land inheritance that the rest of Israel received; instead this special status was in itself their inheritance. And contained within these inserted verses (6-9) we also get a very important piece of information: it is that the Levites have 3 principle functions to perform. First, they are to carry the Ark of the Covenant. Second, they are to stand before the Lord in attendance to Him. Third, they are to bless His holy name.

The Levites are the ONLY ones who can carry the Ark; anyone else who does that will be killed. But even the Levites are only permitted to touch the carrying poles that slide through rings molded into the Ark for the purpose of transport.

To "stand before the Lord" is a Hebrew idiom that means to serve in an official capacity. And to bless His holy name means that the Levite Priests are the only ones permitted to perform the sacrificial rituals to Yehoveh.

From this point forward (starting with verse 12) Moses makes a call for the commitment of the people of Israel to obey all that God has demanded; because verse 12 begins with this rhetorical question: "And now, O Israel, what does Yehoveh your elohim demand of you?" Short question, huge implications because the people are about to be asked for a personal decision on the issue. The enormity of the decision was this: to agree would be to apprehend

the blessings laid out in Torah; to decline would be mean to experience the curses.

Here is one the forgotten principles found in the Bible; here we have stated in direct language the requirement NOT on how to **become** redeemed, but rather on how to live the redeemed life in harmony with the Redeemer AFTER we've been redeemed. Let me ask you a rhetorical question: do you want to live in harmony and peace with God during the duration of your life? Or do you ONLY want to know be assured of salvation and nothing more? If you only want to be sure of Salvation, this verse is definitely not addressed to you. If you are interested in knowing what the Lord expects of you as a saved person, then please pay attention:

Moses says as a reply to what the Lord demands of HIS people: a) revere Him, b) walk in His paths, c) love Him, d) serve Him, and e) keep (obey) the Lord's commandments and laws. Folks this is NOT for people who are not His. This is not for pagans. The Lord has placed no demand upon non-Believers to revere Him or obey Him. But for those who do rely on Yeshua He has these 5 basic demands of us. Let's say them again: revere, walk, love, serve, obey (keep).

I'll get in trouble with some of you for this but notice that "love" is not the only demand. Interestingly even though earlier in Deuteronomy and later in the NT we'll be told that the Torah can be summed up by "Love Yehoveh your God with all of your mind, soul, and strength....", in other verses we are told repeatedly what God's definition of loving Him means. And this is where we get in trouble; we insist on deciding for ourselves how to love Him. First and foremost the Lord says that the expression of love towards Him that He seeks from each and every one of us is obedience to His commands. Yet, in another vein, these 5 demands that He places on us.....to revere, walk, love, serve, and obey.....are all inter-related and interwoven. It's not a deal where we can pick the best 3 out of 5 and forget the remainder. The man who loves God will revere Him, walk in His ways, serve Him and keep His commandments. The man who keeps His commandments loves God, reveres God, walks in His ways, and serves Him.....and so on. All of these attitudes are organically interdependent. The underlying principle here is so very clear: our worship of God, and the way we live our lives, cannot be separated and compartmentalized (although it seems as though we try and try, don't we?)

We'll finish chapter 10 and get into chapter 11 the next time we meet.