

DEUTERONOMY

Lesson 13 - Chapters 10 and 11

Last week we ended in the midst of our study of Deuteronomy 10 by discussing this rhetorical but powerful question asked by Moses as he stood on a hilltop in Moab addressing the chosen people: “And, now, O Israel, what does the YHWH your God demand of you?”

And Moses answers his own question with this instruction: God’s redeemed ought to revere YHWH, walk in His ways, love Him, serve Him, and obey (or keep) His laws and commands. Revere, walk, love, serve, and obey. And so I asked you a rhetorical question of my own (and believe me, this is a LOADED question): do you wish only to be granted your salvation and then you float through the rest of your, carefree, done with the things of God believing that your sins are covered anyway so why worry about it? That is, do you truly believe that once you trust Yeshua our Messiah that you have utterly no further obligations to Him and there will be no consequences for your decisions and actions (or inactions)? Have you decided that you can completely separate your knowledge of what He has done for you from your worship of Him and from the way you live the rest of your life? Let me say without hesitation or doubt: that precise implication is rife within the modern (especially modern Evangelical) church and even brings into question whether any form of Believers’ obedience to the written word is actually legalism, and thus a bad thing. And I speak, today, in firm opposition to such an ungodly doctrine whose basis is nothing more than a desire to distance the gentile church from the Hebrew Torah and to make the life of a Christian seem as though from the moment of our Salvation, we have gained the right to retire from the duty to do any more than merely exist as we await heaven. Moses says, ‘redeemed of Israel, you have things to do’. Modern Christianity says, ‘redeemed of Christ, quit now and save your energy’.

We discussed this rather thoroughly last time so we won’t repeat it; but you can rest assured that I will not rest until I have done all I can to persuade you that you DO have obligations to the Lord and that simply feeling love towards Him will not suffice as the proper response to His unmatched gift of redemption. It has become a rather standard doctrine in some denominations that God seeks from us only a feeling of love in our hearts and that to do much of anything other than to enjoy ourselves in the company of other Christians, and perhaps to attend a worship service occasionally, is actually a negative. I remind you: here in Deuteronomy God is giving all of these instructions to a people that He already redeemed. And this is the pattern of God that naturally flows through to our era as do all of His patterns. FIRST we’re redeemed, and only THEN does He give us His commands and instructions. His

commands and instructions are NOT for those who are not already redeemed (saved in Christian jargon). Again: His commands and instructions (what the church derisively calls “the Law”) are not for the purpose of redemption. Redemption is a free gift, given to whomever God chooses to give it; and it has ALWAYS been a free gift even in the time of Moses. The laws of God are for the purpose of instructing redeemed persons on HOW to live out the redeemed life.

Further, the Lord demands that there is a **way** that He be shown love. One of the standard questions that a marriage counselor will ask a husband and a wife is: how do you want to be shown love? Most men struggle with that question (often not even understanding what that means), but most women instantly have an answer. And the marriage counselors I’m acquainted with say that central to problems within marriage is a spouse not being willing to show love to their partner in ways that partner can recognize and accept as genuine love.

The Bible does give us a generalization about this issue of love within human marriage: it says that women should respect their husbands, and husbands should show love to their wives. God’s Word explains that a wife submitting to her husband is how she shows him respect, which is what equates to love for a man. Alternately, a husband shows his wife the love she seeks by putting her above himself, by demonstrating that he would give up his own life to protect hers if need be, and by being kind and gentle and cognizant of her needs and concerns. Again, this is of course a generality but I think I have not run across a married couple that wouldn’t agree with that basic premise.

Of course as individuals we each have specific things that indicate “love” to us. For women often it is simply her husband saying, “I love you”, verbally, on a fairly regular basis. For others it might be a surprise remembrance like a bunch of flowers and unexpected gift. For a man it may be his wife fixing meals for him that she knows are his favorites; or doing a good job raising their children and caring for their home; or regularly seeking his advice (or even permission) on matters that even he doesn’t necessarily believe he ought to be the one who decides.

But here’s the thing: for the woman who craves to hear “I love you”, but has a husband that simply cannot or will not say it, she is not being loved in a way that she understands as love. And while that certainly doesn’t mean the marriage will fail, the relationship equally as certainly will not be as fulfilling as it could be or is intended to be. So it is in our relationship with God. He has unequivocally told us in very plain terms HOW He wants to be shown love. He says that for Him love begins with obedience to His laws and commands. He says that to revere Him, and to walk in the ways He has ordained, and to serve Him faithfully, and to obey Him show Him that we love Him in the way He wants to be loved. Can we NOT revere Him, NOT walk in His ways, NOT serve Him, and NOT be obedient to Him and still love Him to some degree? Perhaps from OUR side of the equation but not from His. What kind of relationship does that say we have with the Lord if we are insisting we love Him but He says

we're not?

Let's re-read the last few verses of Deuteronomy chapter 10.

RE-READ DEUTERONOMY 10:12 – end

After explaining what God requires of His redeemed people a strange statement is made in verse 16 that we'll find repeated at regular intervals in the remainder of the Old Testament and in several key places in the New. It is that the Lord wants circumcised hearts more than he wants circumcised foreskins. Remember: cross out the word "heart" (due to what "heart" means in our 21st century lingo) and instead insert the word "mind" because that is what "heart" meant to the people of the bible era. So this is saying to "circumcise our will, thoughts and mental processes".

The illustration is that to circumcise the foreskin of your heart means to remove the protective (even impenetrable) covering over your mind and decisions that keeps God from entering in. It means to stop being hard headed and thus blocking the Word of God from taking root in your thoughts. But it is also a dualism; that is in addition to what I've just explained that it illustrates, it is also explaining that while the circumcision of the flesh is the God-ordained sign of the Abrahamic covenant to be worn by all Hebrew males, a circumcised heart (a circumcised mind) should be the inward spiritual companion of that outward fleshly operation. Paul says the same thing some 1400 years after Moses first said it. In fact Paul says that a fleshly circumcision WITHOUT the accompanying change of mind that moves us towards harmony with God is eternally worthless. Further that since the advent of Messiah, one does not NEED a fleshly circumcision in order to demonstrate or achieve a circumcision of the heart. Therefore in typical Hebrew style, a literary couplet is written because the next words are "so don't be a stiff-necked people". Stiff-necked simply means stubborn and unresponsive. That is Moses is saying to Israel that by allowing your heart to be circumcised by the Holy Spirit you will no longer be a hardheaded person. Therefore God's people, do NOT be a nation of stubborn people because you have refused the circumcision of your mind by the Lord.

I need you to hear this, please: your faith in Christ does not necessarily equal a circumcised heart. Your redemption (meaning you have faith that Yeshua died for your sins) doesn't mean you have the change of mind that can only come by means of an act of God, through the Holy Spirit, by making your mind responsive to Him. Listen to this passage from the Book of Acts:

CJB

Acts 8:14 When the emissaries in Yerushalayim heard that Shomron had received the Word of God, they sent them Kefa and Yochanan,¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Ruach HaKodesh.¹⁶ For until then he had not come upon any of them; they had only been immersed into the name of the Lord Yeshua.¹⁷ Then, as Kefa and Yochanan placed their hands on them, they received the Ruach HaKodesh.

The Israelites were a redeemed people the instant of the Passover in Egypt. BUT they had not received God's laws and commands and did not yet have circumcised hearts that made their minds responsive to him. Thus they did great sins out in the Wilderness with thousands of them dying and God determining more than once to exterminate them all (saved only by Moses' arbitration on their behalf with God). As Believers we are indeed redeemed the moment we have the simplest faith that Jesus is Lord. However just as the Israelites needed circumcised minds brought about by an act of God (so that they were capable of being obedient to Him), so do we.

Moses continues with his argument as to why Israel should be obedient and pay attention to Yehoveh and it is that God is the greatest of all beings. He uses words that were well understood for that day: Lord of Lords, God of gods. This language sounds like an acknowledgement of multiple gods (with one god, YHWH, higher than the other gods) even though it is actually a statement of monotheism. But common language of the day, within the common understanding of the day, is what is needed and used to get a point across and that is the sense of it here. But Yehoveh is a very unique God who doesn't take bribes (customary for those times), and His justice insists that Israelite widows and orphans be tenderly cared for by Israelite society. Even more God loves those who aren't even part of Israel; and therefore the stranger, the resident alien that lives among Israel (the **ger** in Hebrew), must also have food and clothing provided if they have no means to obtain it due to poverty or circumstance. Because God is no respecter of individuals (He's not impressed with aristocrats) He wants equal justice for all. Therefore as the Lord's earthly representatives, Israel is to love the **ger** in order to show them that the God of Israel loves the **ger**.

This should all sound pretty familiar to us as these are (of course) exactly the same principles that Jesus taught. And it also explains why the Lord made a way for non-Hebrews (gentiles) to be redeemed; He loves all humanity not just those born to a certain tribe or nation. Yet it is indeed ONLY by means of divine covenants made with a certain people (the people spawned by Jacob) that foreigners can be redeemed; they (we) don't get a separate gentile covenant or a European Messiah of our own apart from Israel's.

Let's move on to chapter 11.

READ DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 11 all

So far in Deuteronomy Moses' sermon has been covering the broad and underlying (foundational) God-principles of the Law rather than specific ordinances. He's reviewed Israel's history, God's gracious election of them as His set-apart people, what happened to them out in the Wilderness and how the Lord cared for them, and what their attitude should be about the proposition that has been set before them. That is, Yehoveh has made Israel an offer that Israel can most certainly refuse. He has offered to be their God, and in turn they will be His people. He has offered to establish a special and unique relationship and union with Israel but only if they want it. And the way they must show God that they indeed do want it is to ratify this new covenant that has been made at Mt. Sinai by a) agreeing with it corporately, and b) by diligently following its terms.

Look; sometimes we miss a rather significant point about Israel's acceptance of this Covenant of Moses; it's NOT that if Israel accepts it that they receive the blessings of that covenant, and if they reject it they receive the curses contained in the covenant. It's that IF they choose NOT to accept the covenant, if they choose to refuse the offer of friendship with God, then so be it; Israel is simply thrown back into the generic pool of nations that forms all the earth's people (the pool from which they were taken in the first place), and they will be looked upon as no better or worse or different than any of the rest. They will not be eligible for special blessings contained in the Law, nor will they be subjected to special curses of the Law more than any other of the millions of people on planet Earth. The deal is that IF they DO accept the covenant, if they DO enter into a special covenant relationship with Yehoveh, THEN they will be subject to its blessings and its curses. Blessings come from following the terms of the covenant (following its laws) and curses come from violating the terms of the covenant (breaking its laws). However these blessings AND curses only apply to those with whom God has made the covenant; it's not for others. Israel's acceptance of the Covenant at Mt. Sinai doesn't put pagan, gentile Mesopotamia under the curses of the Law, for example. I tell you this for two reasons: 1) because it's a common misconception that those NOT under the covenant therefore suffer the curses of the Law and those who ARE under it automatically receive the blessings of the Law and 2) because this helps to further cement the reason that Paul went to such length (particularly in his letter to the Church at Rome) to explain that gentiles get grafted INTO Israel (meaning into Israel's covenants with God) when they come to faith in Yeshua. If we didn't get grafted into Israel's covenants, then we have no right to partake of their terms. But gentile Christians remember this: the covenant DOES have terms. And when you and I accepted Jesus, we accepted ALL of the Covenant's terms, not just those we prefer.

Recall last week that we read that pivotal chapter in Jeremiah 31 whereby it explains that the Lord is going to create a New Covenant (this is one that will later be called the New Covenant under Christ); BUT let's remember with whom the covenant was being created by and

between:

^{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,*

Between the Lord and the House of Judah and the House of Israel there was to be a new covenant; essentially between exactly the same people who the Covenant of Moses has been established. Therefore the issue for gentiles is how to gain access to the wonderful provisions of that provision that Christians call "The New Covenant" that belongs exclusively to Israel and all who would be joined to Israel. And the answer to that issue is that faith in the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua of Nazareth, brings us into the fold. That is the one and only entry ticket allowed and needed for joining into the redemption provided by Israel's covenants.

Verse 1 of chapter 11 opens with the basic foundational rule for Israel that is ALSO the attitude with which Israel is to enter into the covenant relationship with God: LOVE HIM! Notice that immediately upon saying, "love Him", what that means is laid down: always obey His laws, rules, and commandments.

Now there is a subtle but important shift in the issue being dealt with in Deuteronomy 11 versus chapter 10. In chapter 10 the issue is acceptance or rejection of the covenant relationship with God; does Israel choose to enter into the covenant that is being offered or not? In chapter 11 the issue is that once that covenant is accepted, the next decision for Israel (both corporately and as individuals) is obedience or disobedience to the terms of the covenant and what the consequences for both are. I want that difference to be well stamped onto your minds so let me illustrate it. If you want to purchase a home and you find one you like, a contract is drawn up. You look that contract over, see what the provisions and terms the seller demands are, and make a decision as to whether you want to enter into that contract or not. If you decide "no", then there is nothing gained or lost except maybe a little time. You have no obligations and there are no penalties at that point because there never was an agreed-to deal. That is the situation with Israel up to Deuteronomy chapter 10; the contract (the Mosaic Covenant) with all of its terms (the blessings and the curses) has been presented to Israel by God through Moses, and now its up to Israel to enter into the proposed contract or not. If they decide "no" then there is nothing gained but there is also no inherent penalty that we're aware of.

Back to the house analogy: if you do decide to accept the terms of that house contract and sign the papers (indicating a free-will acceptance of its terms), then everything changes. If you follow through with the terms you get the enjoyment and security of that house that will provide you with security and shelter; but if you violate the contract's terms you lose the house and there are often stiff penalties to boot. That is what Israel is doing in Chapter 11; it is presumed

that they HAVE accepted the terms of the Mosaic Covenant, they have entered into the contract with God, and so now what is being contemplated is what the results will be for following through with the deal, as well as the penalties for violating its terms.

From verses 2 – 7 Moses explains that he is not asking Israel to take on mere faith the experiences from another generation, but many of them have themselves personally witnessed what he is calling to mind of their history. Certainly many Hebrews who are now about 60 have seen even what happened in Egypt because they would have been about 20 when they left Egypt; and this is because (generally speaking) even though all the 1st generation of the Exodus had to die off before God allowed them to enter into the Promised Land, those affected were 20 years and older at the time of the Egyptian Passover; it was that age group (20 years and older) that was considered to be the age of personal accountability. So as you can imagine all that happened in Egypt and then in the 40 years of Wilderness wandering was quite vivid and real in the minds of those in their 50's. Not all of those standing before Moses personally experienced everything Moses was speaking about; most of those alive at this moment were born during this arduous journey. However a great number of Hebrews experienced at least some of it, so they had no reason to doubt Moses' or to deny what they had personally seen.

Therefore, Moses says in verse 8, if you want to experience the blessings of what the Lord has waiting for you in Canaan then obey God's commands. The bottom line: that you were born as Hebrews is not sufficient for you to be blessed by the good things of the land; rather you must also be obedient to the covenant you have just agreed to accept. Obedience was the key to all that lay ahead for Israel.

The next several verses seem straightforward but there are some interesting insights that you might appreciate that add to their impact. The land of Egypt and the land of Canaan are hereby compared and contrasted, and Moses says that Canaan is not at all like Egypt because in Egypt you had to work to get water to your fields. But in Canaan God would water your fields for you.

Egypt was a relatively flat land, but Canaan is generally hilly with the resulting valleys. Egypt was like any other land on earth in that it became whatever its inhabitants made of it; but Canaan, says the Lord in verse 12, He looks after and tends.

Let me share something with you that can be a little bit hard to understand; in verse 10 the CJB says that "there (Egypt) you would sow your seed and had to use your feet to operate its irrigation system...." This rather standard English translation is what is called a dynamic translation and it is probably a good one because what is being described here is indeed the manmade irrigation system so vital to Egypt's agriculture; a system of canals, reservoirs, and channels were built to water the fields using the water from the Nile (essentially Egypt's only substantial source of water).

Human feet were used in several different kinds of operations to make the irrigation system work. They used in some cases a kind of waterwheel, which was usually human powered. They also employed a Shaduf that was essentially a bucket on a rope with one end tied to a lever. A person would allow the bucket to dip into a reservoir of water and then using leverage would lift the filled bucket up and dump it into an irrigation channel. There was a lot of work involved here because it is estimated that during the approximately 100-day growing season in Egypt 1000 tons of water was needed PER ACRE to ensure a proper crop.

The system Egypt devised was amazing; they used scores of thousands of shadufs, and hundreds of waterwheels, and several other clever methods as well for getting water into those channels and out to the fields. Now don't confuse this process with the natural overflow of the Nile during the flooding season that didn't so much water the land as it provided needed rich nutrients contained in the silt to fertilize the fields before they were planted.

Also understand that Egypt was for the most part a desert; practically no rainfall occurred at all. The waters of the Nile came from deep within another area of Africa, upstream, from melting mountain snow packs. Egypt simply benefited from the river's flow. So, with all this as a background it is easy to imagine how proud Egypt felt to have developed this elaborate irrigation infrastructure and how they felt dependent only upon their own efforts to grow crops.

That situation would be reversed in Canaan. In Canaan the Lord says they won't need human powered irrigation systems. Instead He would bring rain from the sky upon their crops. And for this all they had to do was wait and be obedient and to keep their hearts (their minds) firmly set upon Him. The rains would be sufficient to provide grain for the people, grapes from the vines, fruit from the trees and grass for the herds. And they wouldn't have to work to have it.

However, warns Moses, don't fall prey to your own human inclinations by giving the praise for the rains and the good crops and the ease at which they happen to one of the Canaanite gods. And of course, that is exactly what the Israelites would eventually do. But the temptation to misdirect their gratitude would have been great because they were going to live among a people who had long ago cleared the land and added fertilizers and made stone fences to both pen in the animals and keep them out of the crops. It was a difficult task NOT to offer sacrifices to the gods of these peoples even if just trying to be tolerant in order to maintain peace. And God says IF you succumb to this evil THEN He will turn off the rain and the ground will become hard and Israel will suffer and perhaps won't survive.

Therefore, counsels Moses in verses 18-21, employ the several God-ordained visual reminders to stay faithful to Yehoveh. And among these reminders are the Tefillin, the Mezuzah, the presence of the Priesthood and the Tabernacle, and the constant teaching of God's laws to the children. And if Israel will do this then they will possess the land forever.

Step one of Israel possessing the land is for Canaan to be emptied of its current residents; and the Lord says if Israel will demonstrate love towards God in the form of obedience then the Lord Himself will expel those Canaanites and enable Israel to succeed. Therefore the promise of victory over Canaan is entirely conditional on Israel following through with the terms of the Mosaic Covenant (those terms contained is what we usually call The Law).

The extent of the land holdings that Israel would receive is now outlined in verse 24 and only during King David's time did Israel ever possess anything close to this wide range of territory. In essence this is the heavenly ideal for the mass of land set aside for Israel's possession; but since the deal was conditional and the Hebrews started breaking the terms of the covenant almost immediately after crossing the Jordan River, the penalty (the curse) was that God didn't expel all the peoples that occupied Canaan and so Israel never gained all that had been set aside for them.

So before we enter chapter 12 (that begins to enumerate the individual laws and rules and what they mean) from verse 26 to the end of this current chapter speaks of the moment of decision for Israel. Now the decision to ACCEPT the covenant is foregone; what is meant here by curse and blessing is that the covenant they have accepted contains both and so Israel must decide to abide by what they have agreed to or experience God's severity. And the first thing God enjoins Israel from doing is bowing down to the gods of the Canaanites.

However in verses 29-30 a different agenda is discussed. It is that once they enter into the land (with Joshua in the lead) they are to have a ceremony that reaffirms the Mosaic Covenant to which they had agreed about a year after leaving Egypt. Now in Deuteronomy chapter 27 this topic is taken up in more detail and indeed in the book of Joshua 8:35 we find the ceremony of reaffirmation actually occur.

Why was this renewal (or reaffirmation) necessary? It is interesting that this will be the 3rd time the Covenant of Moses has been ratified. The first time was at Mt. Sinai, the second is what we just covered in the last couple of chapters of Deuteronomy in the land of Moab, and the 3rd time will be after Israel has entered the Promised Land. At least one theory about this series of reaffirmations is that it was customary of most covenants and treaties of that era. When a leader with whom the treaty was made died, then the new leader had to re-validate the covenant and this was accomplished with a ceremony. Moses died after the 2nd agreement to affirm the covenant and so with Joshua as the new leader of Israel the 3rd affirmation was required (at least in the eyes of these Middle Eastern people of that era).

But (again, in the eyes of the people) it also probably had to do with leaving behind the spiritual authority of one territory and entering into spiritual sphere of influence of another. That is, as Israel left Mt. Sinai (the dwelling place of Yehoveh) and entered Moab (where another god was

thought to rule) it would have been customary to reaffirm a treaty with the spiritual authority over that land. Recall as we've discussed on numerous occasions that the ancients thought that various gods controlled various parcels of land. So since it was a basic necessity of all treaties that a vow was made, and that a vow by definition meant invoking the name of a god, and the name of the god invoked had to be the one who was in charge of the territory where the treaty was made. If one were in Egypt then Egypt's god would be invoked; but if one were in Moab a different god would necessarily have to be invoked. By reaffirming the Mosaic Covenant in the land of Moab the name of Yehoveh's authority was being attached to that territory. By reaffirming the covenant yet again in Canaan, Yehoveh's authority was being extended to that territory.

It is interesting as well that the place where this covenant reaffirmation ceremony was to eventually take place was defined; Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. The road to Shechem cuts in between them with Gerizim to the south of the road and Ebal to the north. Now what is interesting is that it is on Mount Gerizim that the blessings of the Torah are to be proclaimed; but on Mount Ebal the curses of the Torah are to be proclaimed. Believe it or not, there is logic and pattern behind this choice.

Recall our study of the spiritual significance of the direction east. Also recall in our study of how the encampment of Israel was ordered such that certain groups were assigned permanent camping locations according to the 4 major compass directions. East is always preeminent. So when one faces east, what direction is to your right? South. When facing east Mount Gerizim was to the right, the south. Since the right side is the mightier and the more regal, then Mount Gerizim was given the privilege of having the covenant blessings read from it. As one faces east, then to the left is north; and to the north was Mount Ebal. Left is not necessarily a cursed direction, it's just not as good or mighty as the right. So the curses of the Law were pronounced from Mount Ebal that was to the left side, the north.

By the way: these two mountains, the very place where the covenant of Moses was reaffirmed, now lies in what the world calls "disputed territory": the so-called West Bank.

Next week we'll begin Deuteronomy chapter 12.