

### DEUTERONOMY

#### Lesson 25 - Chapter 20

We began Deuteronomy chapter 20 last weekend but ended at verse 9. Tonight's lesson is one of the more difficult ones because the over arching subject is Holy War and I hope you understand that Holy War is a war started by God at His direct command and is overseen and ENDED by God at His direct command. The fighting of the countless other wars during our lifetimes and the millennia preceding our era may have had good and just causes and many were fought using God's holy name as a supposed pretext. But as we have discussed on numerous occasions man has no authority to declare anything as "holy" no matter how "godly" or righteous we might think it to be.

The Lord holds the sole right to declare what is holy and what is common or unclean. To be sure many wars are fought in the name of religion but that is not a Holy War. Thus there are special rules that apply to Holy warfare and that is at the heart of what we are studying today.

It might not seem so at first glance but the words of chapter 20 (especially verses 10 to the end that we are about to encounter) has far reaching effects. There are entire books written on nothing but these 11 verses so profound is they're impact on understanding the book of Joshua in particular and also almost all the recorded and unrecorded history of Israel in the Promised Land.

Of late a new realm of theological understanding is coming forward all based on the God-ordained protocols of Holy War. And this realm is what has come to be called "spiritual warfare", of which many books have now been written (some good, some so fanciful and full of witchcraft as to be dangerous). That is while warfare seems to be a strictly human endeavor (the result of colossal human failures, really) in the Bible we even read of war in heaven. Therefore there can be no doubt that warfare among men (at least HOLY warfare) has a definite and discernable spiritual component to it; and in fact in addition to human warfare there is also a kind of warfare in the spirit world that is CONFINED to the spirit world. But the subject of spiritual warfare as is discussed in our modern era lies somewhere in between these two extremes; spiritual warfare is a strange mix between the human and the spiritual.

While in the Holy War to conquer Canaan we see men fighting men, behind the scenes Yehoveh was operating and orchestrating such that the outcome was predetermined; so at times supernatural things occurred to secure the victory for Israel (such as when the walls of Jericho fell down). Strictly speaking this was not spiritual warfare; rather the spiritual warfare that a few in the modern church are now recognizing as something that is apparently meant for our era to experience, is about flesh and blood humans (Believers in Messiah) coming into direct confrontation with evil spirit beings.

Now I don't know if or when we'll ever discuss spiritual warfare in detail in Torah Class; if the Lord directs it we will certainly will. I only bring this up because the way spiritual warfare is to be prosecuted is primarily based on what it is we're about to study. In other words the concept of warfare as a paradigm that God uses to achieve His ultimate goal of "peace on earth and goodwill among all men" begins here in Deuteronomy where the subject is Holy War.

All throughout the Bible we find kings, prophets, and even New Testament writers using warfare metaphors and illustrations to help explain what God is doing, what Israel should do in response, and what Christ's mission is and therefore what our duties are as His followers. St. Paul in Ephesians and Corinthians used warfare metaphors to motivate the followers of Yeshua to right living and to obedience to the Word of God: **".....put on the whole armor of God.....wear the helmet of Salvation.....wield the sword of the Spirit.....be fellow soldiers with Christ our warrior leader in a battle against evil....."**

Warfare was going to be the way the Lord brought all mankind under submission to Him but not necessarily warfare as man thinks of it, nor practiced as men practice it. HOLY warfare is a confrontation with evil that has been authorized by God and all other warfare is not holy warfare. Most of the wars we see in the Bible represent unauthorized warfare. Those wars were about men's agendas and their disinterest in following God's laws and commands in Spirit and in truth.

J. Maxwell said this about warfare in order to help us understand that while HOLY war was indeed an instrument of bringing divine policy, war itself (common war as determined by men) does NOT carry with it the stamp of God's approval: **"Even in the OT, David is denied the privilege of building the Temple because his hands are stained with blood. One of the features of the coming Messianic Kingdom is the abolition of war. That our society today still resorts to war proves nothing except that men are terribly resistant to the grace of God....."**

King David's wars of conquest were not all necessarily Holy Wars. And when they were Holy Wars to some degree, he did NOT always prosecute them within the strict boundaries of God's laws concerning Holy War. A Holy Warrior doing things God's ways does not have to live with blood guilt on his head; David bore blood guilt for the express reason that many of his

decisions were carnal and self-serving in nature and the blood he spilled was at times for personal reasons and glory; and he paid a steep price for it.

That the Messianic Kingdom (the 1000-year reign of Messiah) will endure no war is true. Yet (as is the irony that I've already stated earlier) it is the Battle at Armageddon, the war to end all wars. that will propel us into the age when there will be no more war. Why? Because this is Holy War, and Yeshua will carry it out the way Joshua should have; all of God's enemies will be brought to destruction and so (at least for a time) wickedness on earth will cease to exist.

Let me give you some other food for thought on yet another difficult and controversial topic and then we'll read the remainder of Deuteronomy 20: last Saturday evening we discussed the purpose, intent, and context for the Torah principle of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth". And I said that this was a principle meant to be used as a foundation for God's civil and criminal justice system; it was not a life principle to be used in personal relationships. We have a tendency in the world of Judeo-Christianity to mix up those Godly instructions meant for use in the legal context with those used within inter-personal relationships. And I mentioned that Messiah spoke extensively on the difference between the two.

Since Holy warfare involves much destruction of animals, property, and human life then here is another Torah principle that needs to be brought back into proper context. The Holy War rules of engagement demonstrate absolute intolerance and lack of mercy towards those whom the Lord has marked for destruction. So how do we square that God-principle with one of Christ's most famous admonitions to, "love your enemies"?

I'll tell you straightaway that a common answer to that dilemma is this: the god of the OT is different than the god of the new. The god, whose nature never changes, changed.

Turn your Bibles to Matthew 5:38.

### **READ MATTHEW 5:38 to end**

Notice very carefully the context within which Yeshua spoke His words to "love your enemies". It's said in the context of being over and against "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" because an eye for an eye was all about proper proportionality in the legal justice system. When Jesus spoke of loving your enemies, it was NOT about the reversal of the legal aspect of God's justice system, it was about personal relationships. "Your enemies" are those acquaintances or relatives or anyone who have something against you (for good reason or not); it's not referring to a thief who might come and commit the crime of robbery against you.

Your enemies (in this context) also refer to those in authority over you, or someone who might be close to you that treats you unfairly, insults you, offends you, and hurts your feelings; it's not referring to someone who took a knife and killed your child in an act of violence. Being slapped on the cheek and your turning the other is all about being unjustly berated or unfairly dealt with and your refusing to take revenge and to do the same right back. Slapping someone on the cheek was a Hebrew idiom for humiliating someone; it's not about assault and battery. In the Middle East humiliating someone caused them to lose face, and so it was usual that revenge (even to the point of blood feuds and murder) was in order. So it's not about the commission of a crime like moving a boundary marker hoping to steal land. In one case there is a justice system set up to deal with those civil and criminal violations against you, and in the other (love your enemies) these are personal issues left for YOU to deal with on a personal level.

You see there is an enormous gulf between God's enemies, and OUR enemies. Christ tells us to love OUR enemies; NEVER does He tell us to love God's enemies. For us to love God's enemies is to dissolve any union with God. We are never to accept that which God rejects. How can we love what God hates, and then call that unity? Conversely even though we may not have anything personally against God's enemies we are NOT to accept them. We are to reject them just as God does. Now, let me be clear: someone who goes to a different congregation than you do, and adheres to some different set of doctrines, is probably NOT God's enemy. Someone that you might view as a really bad person because of their immorality is not necessarily God's enemy. God defines His enemies as those who are in total rebellion against Him to such a degree that they will not ever be eligible for redemption; it is those who He has marked for destruction because of their determined bent against Him, and who instead stand with the Evil One. Most of the time we might not be able to discern which is which from an earthly point of view, so we have to be very careful in how we choose. And we need to err on the side of love and mercy. If ever the guidance of the Torah and the Spirit is needed in our lives, it is with this issue.

Also understand that from a Biblical perspective (and I've covered this in depth in past lessons) to HATE someone is NOT so much about an enormous emotional dislike bordering on the homicidal as we tend to think of it. It MUCH more means to thoroughly reject something or someone, or in some cases to reject what that person believes or stands for. To love, conversely, is to wholeheartedly accept, rather than to simply like a person on a deeply emotional level (and please, don't think I'm saying that emotion is not part of the equation, it is.....it is just much less than what we typically ascribe to it whereby we make love and hate almost purely emotional). A person that is "hated" by God is rejected by God. A person who is loved by God is accepted by God. And that is the sense of hate (and love) that we need to grasp as we read the Holy Scriptures, and it is the sense that (as Believers) we need to emulate.

Let's read the remainder of Deuteronomy 20.

### READ DEUTERONOMY 20: 10 to end

This is a most challenging chapter. It has led to all kinds of doctrines and apologies and rationalizations and misunderstandings among Believers. That is why I wanted to prepare you (to a small degree at least) before we continued in order to gain some perspective. And, here is a little more perspective.

We don't have to become very old before we look back upon our lives and see that there were golden opportunities to do something important and worthwhile and lasting, but they were missed. And often that opportunity never arises again in quite that same impactful way. The reason is usually that a fork in the road of life has been encountered, and one-way sets us on one track, and the other way sets us on a different track.

Further, on a higher level, as societies evolve and change some practices and customs become perceived as ancient and outdated and (except in the most extreme cases) they are jettisoned never to be seen again. Therefore what was possible at one time in history (say, 300 years ago) is no longer possible today. Technology and civilization has moved on.

For instance: what would have happened in the late 1930's had the world not decided to stick our collective heads in the sand and ignore what Hitler was doing in Europe? What if we did what so many military leaders and world leaders KNEW we should do but there was no political will TO do. For one thing, half of the world's Jewish population would not have been murdered. A hundred million human lives from scores of nations probably would have been spared if ONLY we would have taken the opportunity to stop a madman before he became so powerful that the price to end his reign of terror would be a World War.

The world is a different place now (and not for the better I might add), and there is no going back. The opportunity was missed.

Well Joshua and Israel were about to be given an opportunity to exterminate unimaginable wickedness. It would have meant a large-scale destruction of human beings done in a manner we consider so barbaric and ruthless as to be almost unconscionable. Yet the world of that era operated precisely in a way that warfare of that kind was the norm, not the exception... It was awful, but it was usual. Everyone understood the rules of tribal societies and the constant warfare, how nations came and went, and that people dying en masse was not abnormal. The Israelites indeed could have not only pushed out the undesired from Canaan, but could have destroyed God's enemies that He instructed Israel to destroy if they chose to; but instead they chose to go another way. They allowed God's enemies to remain and found out the hard way that if you are a friend of God, then eventually God's enemies will become your enemies as

well (like it or not).

Let's see if we can wade through this section of Deuteronomy, eyes wide open, and ready to accept what God is teaching us without judging it. First, in verse 10 for Israel to offer a town "peace" before they attack it means they offer it favorable terms of surrender. This is not about making them buddies. That town is given an opportunity to simply open their gates to Israel's army and submit. Ah, but it means even more. It also inherently means that the leadership of that town agrees to become part of the community of Israel. The LEVEL of how integrated they will become into Israel depends on whether they are satisfied to be resident aliens (part of Israel, living among Israel and subject to Israel's laws) but NOT becoming official Israelites. Resident aliens are those who wish to retain their foreign identity while at the same time living within the community of God. The other extreme is that anyone, including those mentioned in verses 10-15, who wishes to become an Israelite (to reject their own gods, their own heritage, and to have a circumcision ceremony) may freely do so. And just like in society today, back then there were shades of gray in between these two extremes and this would determine their precise status in the Israelite community.

Those cities and villages who surrendered when the army of Israel approached were to be spared. However they were then to become a vassal to Israel in the sense that (as resident aliens) they could be forced to work on behalf of Israel and pay tribute to Israel. This was actually normal and usual terms of surrender to a mightier force in those days even though in most cases we'd find that unacceptable behavior today. And don't necessarily envision horrible chain gangs overseen by a cruel taskmaster and half-starved people with sunken eyes, wearing rags and barely surviving when you think of those resident aliens as "forced labor". The Law of Moses goes to great length to demand humane treatment of slaves and to give rights to servants. It's mainly that the government of Israel could call on them from time to time to do work and they had no choice. No doubt some of those who surrendered were handed over to individual families as servants, depending on the circumstances.

Verse 12 says what to do if that village or city refuses to surrender and instead decides to fight the army of Israel: that town is to be put under siege and then when the city falls every **male** resident is to be executed and all the women and "little ones", along with the livestock and all the people's possessions, are to be taken as spoils of war. Pretty harsh; but it's about to get even worse.

Let's understand a couple of important points; first, when it refers to all males being executed it means all ADULT males. This generally refers to men 20 years of age and up, although in this case it probably includes males in their later teens because most Middle Eastern societies conscripted males for their military at age 16 or 17. The term "little ones" (who are to be spared) means ALL children, male and female. So the Hebrews were not being ordered to exterminate young male children. Second, every town and village had another choice that (while distasteful to be sure) was always open to them: they could simply pack up and leave

before Israel attacked them. In other words the people of Canaan knew full well what Israel was up to, and they were aware of it when the army of Israel was getting near where they lived, and they knew what to expect when they arrived. So there was plenty of time to move out of the Land of Canaan and start a new life somewhere else with the only consequence being a loss of their land and probably a lot of heartache and disruption.

The Lord's main interest was in emptying the Land (His set apart land) of a wicked people that He wanted out so as to establish the Kingdom of God there. There is no instruction to chase down those who did not fight but merely fled before the armies of Israel or to kill those who surrendered without first making war.

Verse 15 makes it clear just WHICH towns and cities this particular treatment that I have described pertains to: it is those cities and towns that are DISTANT from the land God is giving Israel. So in general this does NOT deal with those locations within the boundaries of what was understood to be Canaan, the land of Israel's inheritance (the Promised Land). These particular towns and cities were outside the Land of Canaan (in the Trans-Jordan for instance) and therefore were afforded a different set of choices than for the inhabitants of Canaan.

Conversely the rather merciful instructions of verses 10-15 were not available to those who Deuteronomy 20 next discusses. And these are described as "the towns of THESE peoples". In a general sense "these peoples" are all Canaanites. More in detail there is a group of 7 nations that God wants eradicated. Unlike the subject of the previous verses these Canaanites are not to be allowed to live; not males, females, children, not even animals they have cultivated. THIS is where it all starts to get sticky.

There is a group of 7 nations that the Lord says are so evil that He doesn't want them pushed out, He wants them dead. These nations are the Hittites, Emorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Girgashites, and Amorites. Please note what I just told you because it can get confusing. The term "Canaanites" is both a general name for anyone living in the Land of Canaan, but more technically it is a tribe or nation of direct descendants from Noah's grandson Canaan so from a genealogical and tribal standpoint they are not necessarily related to those other 6 nations listed. Here's the problem with those 7 nations who represent most of the inhabitants of the Land of Canaan: they worship false gods, have abominable practices, and stand firmly in opposition to Yehoveh. Further they represent a severe spiritual danger to Israel because Israel is certain to adopt some of their wicked practices if these pagan folks are allowed to survive and intermingle with God's set apart people.

In other words these various Canaanite tribes would represent such a bad influence on the Hebrews that it was an unconditional requirement by God upon Israel to annihilate these people showing no mercy whatsoever. It is interesting to note (so that we don't get the wrong idea) that it was NOT the belief system of the Canaanites that was the real problem; rather it

was their abominable ritual practices that God so detested. That all of these 7 nations worshipped the astronomical bodies as their gods and goddesses was not counted against them as necessarily fatal because back in Deuteronomy 4 (and later in chapter 32) we saw that God actually ASSIGNED worship of the stars, moon, and sun to them. Rather the problem was the sexual perversion, the sacrifice of human children, drinking blood, and all other manner of infectious BEHAVIORS that the Lord could not tolerate to exist anywhere near His set-apart people.

Since Holy War HAD to be made upon these 7 nations who lived within the Land of Canaan and their destruction was to be final and unequivocal, God made some other rules to deal with matters that would naturally occur in the process. One rule concerned how to treat the trees that grew outside the walls of a walled Canaanite city.

Siege warfare was the standard method to attack walled cities in that era. The whole idea was that the invading army would surround the city, cut off food supplies and perhaps their water source, and then merely wait for starvation and dehydration to do its job upon the inhabitants. Some cities had enough wherewithals to build the city walls around their water supply to protect it, and also to build sufficient storehouses to have a substantial supply of food for the inhabitants. So siege warfare could be a VERY long process that tied up the attacking army for months. So to speed it up various methods of attacking and breaching the formidable stone walls were developed.

When we think of a siege we often picture the Romans and their tall towers on wheels and their catapults and battering rams with protective coverings and so on; but that is a much later development. Earlier siege warfare involved devices as simple as ladders to get the soldiers to the top of the walls. Or they might build a fire at the base of the wall especially if the wall was made of limestone blocks because the moisture trapped inside the limestone would turn to steam because of the heat of the fire, and literally explode the rock, thereby creating a path for the invaders to enter.

Invariably a siege involved the tactical use of wood to make the ladders and to stoke the fires. The Lord instructs Israel that they are NOT to use fruit trees to make siege implements with, because those trees provide edible food and it would defy common sense to destroy fruit trees that will soon be very valuable to Israel once the enemy is dispatched. Rather they are to use ONLY the non-fruit bearing trees for their siege implements of war.

Now, Israel was not stupid and they well understood the value of fruit trees. So why did God think He had to tell them not to destroy their own food resources, as it were, by avoiding the destruction of those fruit trees? It was because Israel was operating under the law of **herem**. Don't get confused: I'm saying **herem** NOT harem. **Herem** literally translates as "ban", while a harem is a social unit that consists of a group of wives and concubines and their children that



belong to a king or potentate.

The Law of **Herem** is not totally unique to Israel. The goal for Israel, however, is that since this is a Holy War, and God is Israel's Holy Commander-in-Chief, then all spoils of the Holy War belong to Him. He will decide what is to be done with it. And since God is not a man that needs gold or silver or exquisite jewelry, or beautiful fabric, or sumptuous foods, or slaves to do His bidding, then the only means to set aside these items as God's alone is to make them unavailable for use by anybody else. Since they are set-aside for the Lord, these items are considered to be holy and therefore no man can partake in what is holy to God. Therefore all of these things were destroyed because they belonged to Yehoveh.

Now we can look at this principle and scratch our heads and be terribly bothered by it. But this IS God's law. Don't let it concern you too much that you didn't like some of what you heard today. Most Christian scholars don't like it either, and long ago Jewish sages and Rabbis found these instructions to be in conflict with their own sensibilities, so they began to write commentary that twisted and turned the plain direct meaning of what has been said. Christian scholars and Jewish Rabbis alike have found these laws and commands on Holy War so intolerant, so lacking in mercy, so very harsh and severe that it seemed to conflict with their (and our) views of repentance and the expressed hope that someday everyone would turn to the Lord. In effect modern Christian doctrines and Jewish Halakah have used interpretation and allegory to modify and tone down these commands of Holy War in deference to other, more valued and preferred manmade principles.

I have a friend who often reminds me that he would rather not discuss OT matters because, even though he's a Believer, the blood spilling and killing and ruthlessness ascribed to God makes him terribly uncomfortable. Like so many of my Christian friends, the ONLY aspect of God that he really wants to think on is God's love. I've stated many times that this is not only dangerous to us, it also smacks of idolatry when we think that way for we are shaping God into our image when we do that. God has multiple aspects to His nature and when we keep the ones we like and prune away the ones we don't, we are now redefining Almighty God. How can justice exist if there are no boundaries and no consequences for violating those boundaries? To deny God's judgment and wrath as necessary aspects of His nature is to deny His sovereignty over us, His created creatures.

Here's the thing that we can lose track of: in the very near future, the most horrible war ever to befall mankind will happen. It will be a war that most evangelicals claim to look forward to: the War of Armageddon. In that war all who claims Yeshua as Savior will survive and all others will be destroyed. No mercy. No exceptions. Already the Lord has identified non-Believers as His enemies, but in His mercy has determined that some of these will repent of and trust in Him so He has withheld final judgment for a time. But at the Battle of Armageddon that time is past. It won't matter if millions throw their hands up to the Heavens and shout, "Oh we've been so wrong! Now that I see Messiah in His unbelievable glory, I believe!" Too late. They will die to

eternal separation from God knowing the truth, but unable to take advantage of it. Once the final Holy War is begun, the list of those who are defined as God's enemies is etched in stone and closed up.

The Battle of Armageddon will operate precisely on the rules of Holy Warfare as outlined in Deuteronomy 20 and 21, because like the conquest of Canaan the Battle of Armageddon is a Holy War started by God and led by God and it will be ended by God. Our meek and mild pacifist Messiah Jesus will be our leader in the annihilation not of millions, but of billions. You see, just as the law of **Herem** is to be carried out by Israel in Canaan, so will it also be carried out by Yeshua and His army of saints and angels at Armageddon. The spoils of this war, the people, animals, everything) belongs to God, the leader of the war, and so in order that no man can utilize those spoils they must be destroyed. Therefore just as ordered for those 7 Canaanite nations, so it will be for the whole world of rebels: total annihilation.

Next week we'll begin Deuteronomy chapter 21.

chapter 21.