

DEUTERONOMY

Lesson 28 - Chapter 22

As we open our Bibles today to Deuteronomy 22, I recall thinking as I was preparing this lesson: “How am I ever going to find the words to explain the profound and far reaching impact of these laws of God to modern day Believers?”

This is one of those places in the Bible that is akin to a major highway intersection, because so much comes together. We have spent, now, going on 4 years since we started the Book of Genesis to get to this point in Torah. A long road has been traveled, much understanding has been developed, and perhaps now we can talk about some of the more challenging underlying concepts that spread out and engulf sections of the Torah we’ve already studied. We’ll be a couple of weeks in Deuteronomy 22.

My challenge in teaching Torah has always been how many layers of the onion to peel back at any given moment before enough is enough and it is time to move on; this chapter especially so.

But in the study of this chapter we also have another challenge: how to deal with the contents of this part of Moses’ sermon in a way that isn’t so offensive to our Western sensibilities that our ears are simply closed to it; because at the molten core of this chapter, and much more of the Bible than you might ever think, is the matter of human sexuality. The gentile translators of the OT as we read it today were refined urban Europeans and brought with them the reserved and puritanical European Christian mindset, as well as a not-so-hidden disdain for all things Jewish. Therefore so much of the sexual content that is inherent in God’s Word is greatly masked, and we miss it.

In our day (in the West especially) the handling of sex resides for the most part at two ends of a spectrum and there is little middle ground. It is either dealt with in a sterile and purely pragmatic scientific/medical way; or as something so intensely sensitive and private and therefore uncomfortable that most good Christians really want to simply work their way around the subject. Lately of course we have seen the progressive/secular movement to normalize

that which has historically, and biblically, been viewed as deviant and abhorrent sexual practices.

The Biblical reality is that the ancient cultures viewed sexuality quite differently than we do; it was merely part of everyday life and not hidden away. And because having large families was critical to the survival of the clan and tribe everything that surrounded human reproduction was an open and public subject that children began to understand at the earliest age. Because virtually every Hebrew family lived (quite literally) **among** domesticated farm animals the function of sex was constantly visible and understood and people were not squeamish about it.

Don't get me wrong; people of that era were generally far more modest about their sexuality in public than we are today. On the other hand, particularly as concerned large families living in small one-room huts, or as nomads living crammed together in cloth and animal skin tents, privacy was at a premium and rarely was complete privacy possible.

Human sexuality and its role in Hebrew society was, therefore, woven into their language and culture; it pervades the OT from beginning to end and is often used to present much larger spiritual pictures and principles; but at the same time it is largely hidden from our view in the Scriptures due to both the idiomatic expressions we read that are actually about sex (but we don't recognize them as such), and the rather blatant attempt by the European bible translators to hide it altogether because they found it offensive.

Please understand that what we'll be studying has nothing to do with "sex education" as it has come to be known in our public school systems. Rather it has to do with God's creation of mankind and the holy and sacred nature of God's defined roles for males and females. It also has to do with certain duties that one sex has to the other, the concept of lawful and unlawful unions, and how the underlying principles of human sexuality play out in both a physical and a spiritual way in a much wider context than we typically think about it or even recognize.

So let's open our Bibles and our minds to God's mind and His purposes for ordering human life as He has. Let's read Deuteronomy chapter 22 together.

READ DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 22 all

The first 5 verses of Deuteronomy 22 present us with something that James, brother of Jesus, had much to say about: **true religion**. He began by saying that true religion is best illustrated in taking care of widows and orphans. In Hebrew society widows and orphans represented the socially disadvantaged of that era; those who were the weakest and most vulnerable. Further,

practicing true religion kept one unstained by the ways of the world. James, Paul and Yeshua explained that true religion is not about mechanical obedience to laws but rather it is the SPIRIT one adopts when following those laws that matters. It is obedience to those laws accomplished within the context of love and trust of the lawgiver that produces the kind of righteousness that Yehoveh seeks from His worshippers. We have a legal saying in America whereby we run the risk of separating the LETTER of the law from the Spirit of the Law. When one seeks justice according to the letter but without the required spirit then love, mercy, and justice can be lost. If that is true in our manmade justice system, it is far more so in the God ordained Torah system.

Therefore especially as regards these first 5 verses of Deuteronomy 22, the instructions revolve around the overall ATTITUDE of the worshipper. Here we don't see the typical formula of the laws of criminality that we're more used to seeing in the Torah; we don't see, "IF you do this, THEN this is what will happen to you; and to return to peace with God you have to atone by means of thus and so sacrifice". Instead these laws are done in the spirit of what Messiah says is the basis for all the Torah commands and laws: love the Lord your God with all your being, and "love your neighbor as yourself". **Love your neighbor** is not a rule or regulation; it is not a law that has a direct consequence for violation; it is a call to all who call Yehoveh their God to have a holy mindset. It is a reminder that striving for holiness is the goal of the Law and that this kind of holiness is expressed on earth, in this age of human history, by loving your neighbor as yourself.

The first illustration of HOW to love your neighbor as yourself (in a practical application) regards what happens if your brother's ox or sheep go astray, and you happen to stumble across those animals. Notice the use of the term "brother" in describing whom it is that is being defined as one's neighbor. In Hebrew the word is **ach**, and it is technically referring to a kinsman. In the sense of it as meant here it means a member of your clan or tribe, and in a broader sense yet a member of your nation, Israel. Later Yeshua went on to explain that in the Lord's eyes your "brother" extends to anyone in need and used the example of the Good Samaritan to demonstrate his point. However in the strictest sense this passage could easily read, "You are not to watch a fellow Israelite's ox or sheep straying....."

And the Lord says that when you witness a brother's domestic animals straying you do NOT have the option of inaction. One cannot turn his back on what he knows is a circumstance that demands his active help even though this help is not of personal benefit.

The concept is that indifference to the need of another human (specially your **ach**, your brother) is unacceptable to Yehoveh. Indifference to the need of another is the opposite of "love your neighbor". This law is actually given in its first form back in Exodus 23:

^{CJB} **Exodus 23:4** *"If you come upon your enemy's ox or donkey straying, you must return it to him."*

So these verses of Deuteronomy 22 elaborate on the basic law of Exodus 23. Recall that I've mentioned on numerous occasions that Deuteronomy is a sermon by Moses, and this sermon is a predecessor and pattern that Yeshua would follow on His own on the Mount. This sermon of Moses generally is in the form of taking a basic law from Exodus and expounding upon it and often adding life applications as examples of how one should apply a law.

Therefore in verse 2 is the complicating situation of what to do if your brother is nowhere around to claim the stray animal, or if he doesn't live close by, or if you have no idea who owns the beast. Indifference is still not an option, nor is it acceptable to go by the philosophy we all learned as children: finder's keepers loser's weepers. Rather one must capture the animal, take it home and care for it as your own, and wait for the owner to claim it and then give it back to him. Interestingly the phrase about bringing the animal home literally instructs: "bring it **INSIDE** your house!" And that is exactly what is meant because in that era (and in many parts of the Middle East to this very day) a person's house was built around an outdoor courtyard, or the home was two levels. Animals and humans together inhabited the first floor and the courtyard; animals were valuable so they needed to be protected from predators and thieves and inclement weather just as much as family members did.

Moses (who as a leader of 3 million people) must have learned to be quite the psychologist during his 40 years as their leader because he knew that this was not enough information and that the search for loopholes would begin immediately; so he goes on to explain that this attitude concerning finding someone's lost property is not limited only to the finding of oxen and sheep; it pertains to a donkey, a goat, or anything else for that matter that belongs to another. Please notice something else that is emphasized here that we've touched on a number of occasions in Torah Class: loving your neighbor isn't having an emotional "concern" or warm feeling for your neighbor, it is jumping in to actively help your neighbor in his time of need.

Next in verse 4 is a regulation that is related to the one before it: if you see your brother's beast of burden collapse under the weight of its load you are to assist the **ANIMAL**. The previous regulation is about concern for the well being of your brother; this one is about concern for the well being of your brother's animal. In neither case is ignoring the situation the proper attitude of a worshipper of the God of Israel.

The next law in verse 5 is one that has caused a lot of debate. Some of the debate is, frankly, hollow academic nonsense and other of it helps to bring clarity. The words explain that a man is not to wear things that a woman normally would, and vice versa. Most translations say that this is referring to clothing; in fact the more accurate translation is not clothing, but is the more

broad “things pertaining to” being a man or a woman. Therefore, particularly in regards to that era, it could mean weapons of war, or jewelry, or hairstyles, or (of course) garments. For sure transvestism is at the center of this. For those of you who have led more sheltered lives than others, in our day a transvestite is a person who wears the clothing of the opposite sex (men wearing women’s clothes or women wearing men’s clothes). But that is ONLY how we see it today; more correctly it is referring to a person of one sex taking on the characteristics of the opposite sex whether it is appearance, roles, or clothing. This is NOT talking about sex change operations rather it is about confusion and deception; it is about pretending to be, or identifying yourself as, the sex you’re not.

Now the hollow academic nonsense I spoke of centers around a raging debate over WHY God doesn’t want one sex pretending to be the other. The reality is that the underlying reason for even having this debate is that progressive and liberal scholars would like to prove that God no longer sees these sorts of deviant behaviors that the Bible says (as it does here) are abhorrent before the Lord, as still valid. Just as it has become prevalent in the church that homosexuality should no longer be seen as a sin, so these particular scholars want to say that such behavior as transvestism was strictly confined to a certain era, among a certain culture, and besides Christ’s new “law of love” means that any behavior that is personal and that doesn’t harm anyone else is now OK in the Lord’s eyes. Or that the comment by Paul in Galatians 3 that under Yeshua, “....there is no male and no female..” means that God has voided that whole concept of sexuality. Let me assure you that that comment in Galatians simply meant that the spiritual STATUS of a human before the Lord (whether a person was acceptable or unacceptable to Him) depended on his or her relationship with Messiah; not on whether a person was a male or female.

On the other side of the coin it is interesting to see from a practical point of view where this idea first played a role in ancient societies. We have historical records that among the Mesopotamian cultures it was customary for a male priest to don certain female garments, or to wear expressly female jewelry, or even to be painted using female cosmetics when the deity he was worshipping was a goddess. The idea was to “disguise” himself as a female to identify with the feminine attributes of the female god.

Another well attested circumstance of ancient times was of men who would dress like women and hide in plain sight in hopes they wouldn’t be drafted into the military. Conversely we had women who cut their hair short, wore men’s clothing and armor, and used man-sized weapons in HOPES of being taken for a man so that they could fight in battles.

I have no doubt that this law of verse 5 covers these sorts of things, and might have even been used quite often to directly counter men and women who attempted them; but the real purpose was more broad and deep than simply these examples I gave you. And some of that is clear when we see the context of the laws that surround this one in Deuteronomy 22. Once again, this law against transvestism is speaking to attitude and a condition of the heart; it speaks to

the spirit of obeying God's laws and staying true to the way He ordered the Universe. Here, at least partly, it speaks to deception and confusion that is always bad in the Lord's economy. It also speaks of homosexuality that is also a matter of attitude and moral choice. We'll look at another aspect of this outlawed sexual behavior later on.

These laws of "true religion" (which refers to the worshipper operating within the spirit of the law) continues with the admonition of verse 6 that prohibits the capture of the mother bird along with her chicks.

There are two main points to this law: the first is that it extends the humanitarian security blanket of concern for **domestic** animals (that we saw with the regulation requiring assistance for the ox or donkey that has collapsed or fallen under his load) over to wild animals (in this case a bird). Part of the reason this needs to be stated is that a wild bird has little to no value when compared to the sizable economic value of a sheep or a donkey or an ox to an Israelite. Therefore the Lord is demonstrating that the principle of humanitarianism extends to all of God's creatures, and their economic value is to be held as secondary. Even more, just as James says that true religion is demonstrated in caring for the most vulnerable and least valuable of human society, this same principle applies to the most vulnerable and least valuable of the animal kingdom.

The second point is that the reverence to a parent-child relationship does not end with humans. Rabbis often use this explanation as the reason for the strange law of Deuteronomy 14:2 that says a kid (a baby goat) is not to be boiled in its mother's milk. We can be sure of the link between the mother bird and her children, and humans and our children, because the author of Deuteronomy structured his narrative in a way that connects the two together in a familiar form.

Recall the 5th Commandment of ^{CJB} **Exodus 20:12 "Honor your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land which ADONAI your God is giving you.**

Here in Deuteronomy 22:7 it says: ^{CJB} **Deuteronomy 22:7 You must let the mother go, but you may take the chicks for yourself; so that things will go well with you, and you will prolong your life.**

It is essentially the same thought in basically the same language as the 5th Commandment; that by showing proper respect to the value of the parent and their relationship with their offspring (sparing the life of the mother bird) you will live long and things will go well with you (you will experience God's shalom as a blessing).

The subject of an Israelite's requirement to be humanitarian in attitude and action now takes on another light in the requirement to build a parapet around the roof of one's home. Obviously this is looking forward to the time that was a few months away, when Joshua would lead Israel to conquer Canaan and the Israelites would put away their tents and begin living in permanent housing.

A parapet is essentially a balcony railing that goes around the edge of the roof of a home. Its purpose is so someone would not accidentally fall off. The typical Middle Eastern home was built using a flat roof, and the roof was essentially just another living area of the house to be utilized like the ones below it. Stairs or ladders were built so that the roof was always accessible. On the roof drying and storing produce and fish would occur, as would socializing on a pleasant day, or even sleeping during the furnace-like summer months. Therefore it was only common sense that a fence was built around the roof's edges so that a person would not fall and be seriously injured or even killed.

This is verified because the end of verse 8 declares that the SPIRITUAL reason this precaution was necessary is that the danger was sufficient enough that NOT to build that parapet constituted criminal negligence. In other words one could reasonably expect that eventually somebody would fall off of that unprotected roof. Death as the result of such wanton disregard for the welfare of others would bring bloodguilt upon the home's owner, the family that lived there, and the community whose government did not enforce this law of God. And by now you should all understand the serious spiritual and physical consequence of bloodguilt: the responsible party must forfeit his life. A person who built a house without a guardrail on the roof was guilty of negligent homicide if someone died as a result. This was an unjust death and the life of the responsible party would be required as payment

This ends the rather easy and straightforward part of Deuteronomy 22; from here on it begins to get complicated and a little dicey.

The next few verses give us three laws on what is commonly called "illicit mixtures"; we've already been given one illicit mixture but it was spoken of in a different context: transvestism. Illicit means unauthorized, not approved. It is a gross misuse of something. So the idea of these 3 forbidden mixtures we will be discussing (plus the one concerning transvestites) is that these are combinations that create **unions** that must never be permitted. These various unions fly in the face of God's order of Creation and are a severe form of rebellion. It's not just the action that is the issue; it is the blasphemous attitude of the violator that is the crux of the matter.

The first of this group is found in verse 9; it is that a farmer is not to sow 2 kinds of seeds in the area of soil that is located between the rows of grape vines in his vineyard. The second is in verse 10: an ox and a donkey should not be yoked together to pull a plow. And the third is

verse 11: one is not to wear clothing made of two distinct kinds of thread that have been woven together: wool and linen.

These 3 laws are repeats and extensions taken from Leviticus 19:19:

CJB Leviticus 19:19 "Observe my regulations. "Don't let your livestock mate with those of another kind, don't sow your field with two different kinds of grain, and don't wear a garment of cloth made with two different kinds of thread."

Any kind of mixture or union that is against God's law is called *kilayim* in Hebrew, which translates literally to "more than one kind". So seriously did the Hebrews regard violation of these laws that they dedicated an entire tractate in the Talmud to it; it's name: *Kilayim*.

Yet as serious a matter as they knew this to be, just WHY God prohibited cross-dressing, 2 kinds of seeds being planted together, wearing a garment made of 2 kinds of material, and a donkey and an ox to be yoked to the same plow was a mystery to even the greatest Rabbis. Rashi explains them as simply sovereign decrees of God for which no reason need be given. While I understand Rashi's great humility in this matter in declining to delve into the WHY of these laws, I think we might be able to add at least some grist to the mill. So clear your heads and get ready to see some amazing connections grow right before your eyes.

To begin: each of these 4 laws on illicit mixtures are associated with the 7th Commandment; the law against adultery. Perhaps that might seem odd to you but soon I think you'll see that they can be nothing else. Let me say that again: these laws on unauthorized mixtures represent several aspects of adultery.

Notice that from a purely practical, rational standpoint none of these laws of mixtures causes serious harm to anyone or anything, and in fact there can be great benefit in a physical sense from doing some of the things that are prohibited. For instance it has long been known and practiced that planting two different types of seeds (plants, crops) together can bring all kinds of good results. This is called inter-cropping and has been employed especially in areas where farming in more primitive areas is done. Sometimes one kind of plant attracts a type of insect that can be beneficial to both kinds of plants for purposes of pollination. In other instances one kind of plant produces a needed nutrient that the other takes from the soil, thus slowing the depletion of the soil. On another level one can make maximum use of the arable land by planting two kinds of crops in the same space that are symbiotic and provide maximum food production using a minimum amount of land. It can even protect against crop failure by growing two different kinds of plants that are each susceptible to different hazards.

The case of Deuteronomy 22:9 (of not planting a crop of a different kind among the vineyards) is such that grape vines must be planted in rows that are spaced well apart so that they can thrive. So what good purpose is served to let the significant amount of ground in between those rows go to waste? Goodness, if the precious water that is used to water the vines can be doubly used to water the vegetables or grain that grow on the ground beneath those vines, is that not man being a good shepherd over limited environmental resources?

It is also a reality that weaving fine linen and wool together produces a high quality cloth of beauty and durability; so why is that bad in God's eyes? It was nearly impossible in the minds of the great Hebrew Sages to find any earthly fault or inherent evil in wearing such a material. Yet, there sits that law prohibiting it and it cannot be seen as a mistake or misinterpretation as it is so explicit and straightforward. Therefore the prohibition was strictly mandated and strictly observed by the most pious Hebrews, right on up to today.

Is there really harm in yoking an ox and a donkey to a plow? No; despite all the efforts of teachers and preachers to explain that the plow would always be turning to the direction of the weaker animal or that the stronger animal would harm the weaker one, or that it would be terribly inefficient, in real life this is really not so. In fact such a thing as having two different kinds of animals pull a plow or wagon together was very common in the ancient world as much because a man was quite fortunate if he owned ONE Ox along with ONE donkey. An Ox was better at pulling something than carrying it, but it could carry things. A donkey was better designed to carry things than to pull things, but it could do either. When a plow needed the horsepower that it took two animals to provide, the ancients saw nothing wrong with those two animals being a Donkey and an Ox working together; and from an earthly sense no lasting harm came to either of those beasts of burden just because they weren't equal in strength.

I give great credit to the Rabbis who at least have been much more forthcoming about their lack of understanding of the WHY of these laws rather than creating the great allegorical explanations that have pervaded Christianity and tend to lead us down highly questionable paths. At the same time it has always been the tendency of the Rabbis to see the earthly physical side of God's laws and prophecies rather than their heavenly spiritual side. Let's see if we can look at all this, then, from a little different angle.

Suffice it to say it is obvious that these laws of illicit mixture cannot have been ordained by God in order that by avoiding doing these things animals, plants, or men would benefit from a physical standpoint. It is equally obvious that there is nothing inherently evil by planting 2 different kinds of seeds in close proximity; wickedness doesn't spontaneously erupt when linen thread is mixed with wool; and it is not devilishly inhumane to attach a Donkey and an Ox to the same plow yoke.

This reality should not surprise us. I have discussed with you that every attempt by Biblical

scholars to explain why certain animals were designated by God as ritually clean while others as ritually unclean have become frustrated. Every time they come up with a rational or scientific system, something else in the Scriptures shoots it down. Why are certain foods Kosher, but others not? Why is it OK to sacrifice a goat, but not a pig? Why can a Bull be offered to God, but a camel can't? What about a not having a cloven hoof or not chewing a cud makes that animal unsuitable for purposes of holiness?

As Rashi says about the 4 laws of illicit mixture: God is sovereign, He decreed it, and it is not necessary that we know **why** in order to observe these laws. In fact I maintain that the search for "why?" in the Bible is a boondoggle of major proportions on most accounts. The issue for followers of God ought not to be "why?" but rather "which?" Which pattern or law should be applied to any given circumstance is what ought to matter, NOT WHY God ordained that law.

I further maintain that like the kosher food laws and the laws of animals deemed suitable for sacrifice, these laws of illicit mixture illustrate in a physical visible way some immutable spiritual principles. It's the illustration and what is learned from them that is the point. It's not that the actions or materials or creatures themselves ARE the principle; it's what they demonstrate that is the principle.

Next week we'll continue by looking at some connections in the Scriptures (OT and New) that intertwine illicit mixtures, sexuality, and adultery.