

DEUTERONOMY

Lesson 32 - Chapters 23 and 24

We'll finish up Deuteronomy 23 today and move into chapter 24. The last verses of chapter 23 that we looked at were 18 and 19, the matter of the prostitutes who worked for a pagan Temple as a supposedly holy profession simply because it profited those who controlled that Temple. In the same context as prostitution was an introduction to the concept of not receiving money from ill-gotten gain and giving it to God as an offering because He would never acknowledge or accept it. And the reason for this is that what a person is actually doing with such an act is presenting to the Lord something that is the product of adultery and expecting Him to declare it as a good thing just because it is being given with good (although misguided) intentions.

Let's pick up Deuteronomy 23 at verse 20. We'll start by re-reading this short section.

RE-READ DEUTERONOMY 23:20 – end

This next law is part of that family of commandments that I labeled as the laws of “true religion” (in the same sense of Yeshua's brother James defined “true religion”). True religion means to take the spirit of the Law, add a generous helping of mercy and love, and put it into practical application with Holy Spirit guidance. This particular law has to do with making a loan to someone; and the rule is that if the borrower is a brother (an Israelite, meaning a full citizen of Israel) then interest is not to be charged. However to a foreigner (the CJB says “outsider”) charging interest is acceptable.

The word being translated as foreigner or stranger or outsider (depending on your Bible version) is *nokri*. And a *nokri* is the classification of foreigner who has no ties to Israel, does not identify himself with Israel, and generally speaking has no allegiance to Israel other than expressing some measure of gratitude for being allowed to live in peace alongside Israel in the land for one reason or another. Typically this law is considered to be referring to traveling merchants who are passing through from distant lands, or foreign merchants who have set up

a business in Israel because they can make a living there. Therefore to lend money or food or generally anything of value to this kind of person had to do with a business proposition as opposed to the underlying premise for one Hebrew lending to another Hebrew. And that premise is that the Hebrew borrower was a poor person who was in dire straits and his health and welfare were in danger if he didn't receive a helping hand.

Particularly in the days of Moses and Joshua there is no evidence that a system of loaning money (that is, silver or gold) had been set up in Israel; rather it was generally food in the form of grain or produce that was lent. Lenders of money certainly had been established elsewhere in the region and the loaning of money to the poor, for profit, was common and very expensive to the borrower. Records from Mesopotamian cultures show that interest of 25% on the loan of silver and 50% on the loan of grain was the norm. Such interest simply served to make the poor poorer and the wealthy wealthier. These *nokri* who lived in Israel undoubtedly came from nations where they COULD borrow money if they wanted to, but at horrendous interest rates. The Lord says that Israel is not obligated to subsidize these foreign businessmen by loaning them what they desire at no interest. But Israel IS obligated to loan to the poor Hebrews at no interest (and also the genuinely poor foreigner living among them) because it is an obligation among Israelites not to profit at the misfortune of another.

It is a knee jerk reaction today to look at these laws and think to ourselves how awful it is that loan companies make such fortunes lending money to average citizens. Credit Card companies charge 20% interest and more, and car title loan companies and pawnshops will charge even more interest than that and almost always it's to the socially disadvantaged in our society. But we have to be careful not to equate apples and oranges. Too much, especially in America, there are those who are labeled as "poor" because they have been terribly foolish with their money, or with their credit, or they're in a hurry and don't want to wait for something so they make a foolish bargain. Or perhaps they refuse to work or to get the education available to all to enable them to get a decent job. We also have those people who overindulge in alcohol or drugs and then lose everything and we tend to lump those in with "the poor" and disadvantaged. The Bible would generally not do so as personal responsibility and bearing the consequences of one's own decisions and actions is at the core Scripturally based living. We find numerous laws and proverbs throughout the Word (New Testament as well) that subjects the drunkard and worthless sons of parents to execution; and the lazy and foolish to suffer their own fate even though it is heartbreaking to witness it.

God's definition of poverty is that perhaps through bad health, or being intentionally oppressed by society, or there not being work available, or because unanticipated death and destruction have befallen them, or any number of other conditions whereby through no fault of their own they are unable to reasonably support themselves or their families. Poverty is not defined as overusing your credit and then having your house repossessed, so now you have to live in a small rental apartment. Poverty is not taking a bus to work because you don't own a car (even though taking the bus may be time consuming and inconvenient). Poverty means you don't have enough to eat or you have no roof over your head, or you have no warm coat to wear

when it's cold. In the Biblical era women and children and especially widows and orphans could be found in life threatening situations because they were unable to care for themselves due to the way society traditionally operated. The disabled and ill also fell into this category, as did foreigners who came to Israel to escape slavery from their foreign masters. God says that ALL Israel is to help these folks and ensure that they have enough to survive; otherwise they will call out to Him because of the lack of mercy shown by God's people (and thus breaking the Torah commandments of humanitarianism); and those who turned their backs on the most vulnerable of society will be committing sin against the Lord and there will be consequences.

Essentially this is a law about social responsibility and inherent fairness. Yeshua had a lot to say on this subject.

The next law is stated in verses 22 –24 and it opens up a truly fascinating subject around which many doctrines of Judaism and Christianity have been formed; it is the subject of making vows to Yehoveh. This law states that WHEN you make a vow (which means that you make a promise of some sort to the Lord and invoke His name as surety) that one is to a) keep that promise, and b) perform it in a timely fashion. To NOT keep that vow is itself a sin, regardless of the nature of that vow or how circumstances might have radically changed since you made the vow (even circumstances that you could never have reasonably imagined).

Since it seems like practically every chapter in the Bible deals with people making or breaking vows of one sort or another, let's examine this a bit so that we can wrap our minds around this very ancient custom of vow-making to a god.

It is good in our current era to remember that in times past the existence of gods and goddesses (and other spirit beings as well) was as universally accepted and believed as the necessity for a human to breathe air and drink water if he wanted to live. It's only since the period of the Enlightenment in the early 1700's that certain philosophers like Kant, and Voltaire, and Hume challenged that universal belief and said that only the unenlightened and ignorant accepted such superstitious nonsense that there is an invisible all-powerful god, or that there were angels or spirit beings, because this premise was not scientifically verifiable. Thus we have the birth of atheism and secular humanism barely 300 years ago.

My point is that prior to the 1700's vow making to the gods was as usual as eating a meal. It was no different for the Israelites than for the rest of the world except for one thing: it is said of the pagan deities that they WANT their followers to make those vows and pledges but the Lord God of Israel says He would just as soon a person did NOT make vows and pledges to Him. Why did those pagan temples with their pagan priests enthusiastically endorse vow making? Because vow making meant bringing a gift to that god. In the end, of course, that gift wound up in the hands of the temple priests. It was no different in Israel because when a person made a vow it required a sacrifice and an offering to begin it and complete it, and many of those

offerings were given to the priesthood.

In Israel the purposes for making a vow varied widely. In general a vow was a petition to the Lord for His assistance. Maybe a person desperately wanted something to happen (or NOT happen); or perhaps they needed relief from trouble. They may have sought victory in battle or healing from disease. The one who made the vow customarily promised to do something for the Lord if He would acknowledge their need or desire. The payment or offering to the Lord was usually something of value; in the case of a Nazarite vow however, the initial offering was often to abstain from something that brought personal pleasure (like wine).

In the pagan world vows were basically designed as bribes. It was expected that the worshipper was literally purchasing the favor of some particular god or goddess by means of their vow offering. Yehoveh says that He doesn't need food, or drink, and that He already is the owner of everything in existence, so to offer Him some kind of money or valuable object in exchange for His action has no value to Him. Further, He is sovereign and His will cannot be purchased. That still didn't keep a significant portion of the Hebrew population from trying, though. And the results were often terrible.

Though not encouraging vows the Lord also doesn't say that there is anything wrong or sinful with it. So in verse 23 it says that if one chooses NOT to ever make a vow to Yehoveh, it is NOT sin. Christ goes so far as to say it is far better to just make your yes, yes and your no, no and avoid the whole vow-making process to begin with. Why? Because as it says in the next verse (and I paraphrase): "WHATEVER you promised to Me you WILL perform it.....or else."

You see it's the unintended consequences of making a promise to the Lord that is the issue. We can't see one second ahead into the future so how can we be sure we can follow through with something that we vow to do (or not do) that might be weeks or months in the making, or involve someone else, or be something over which we have little control? Perhaps the most tragic consequence in the entire Bible of having the best of intentions in making a vow but experiencing the most horrific of unintended consequence is the story of Jephthah, who wanted the Lord to bless him in battle and so vowed that IF the Lord would win the victory for him he would offer as a burnt offering the first thing that walked through his door when he returned home from his military campaign. Naturally expecting it would be some kind of animal that would greet him he was devastated when his only daughter excitedly burst through the door to rush to him. Since the battle had indeed been won, he piously followed through with his vow. There are many lessons to this story that we won't get into today; just know that Jephthah followed through because he fully understood that this law of Deuteronomy 23 has NO exceptions. The only two things I want to mention for now about what we can learn from this episode are that 1) God did not want nor ask for nor accept the human sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter, and 2) God also did NOT require a vow from Jephthah in order to provide the victory he had hoped for.

I'm sure if he could speak from his grave Jephthah's advice to all of us would be that (other than for perhaps your wedding vows) don't make any because doing so is very dangerous not just for you but for others who may be affected by your vow.

The final commandment of this chapter occurs in verses 25 and 26 and it concerns the right to eat from a neighbor's crops. And the rule is that a person can pinch off some heads of grain and eat them, or pluck some grapes and eat them to satisfy their immediate hunger. But they can't ask for a doggy bag. They can't come and fill a basket, nor take a sickle and actually harvest and take it away.

This really wasn't about feeding the poor because for the poor the laws of gleaning had already been established. And indeed the poor weren't restricted to only eating what they could consume on the spot. Rather this particular law is for travelers. It was perfectly permissible in ancient times to walk through someone's field on a journey. Not everywhere one needed to travel had a well defined path or road. Sometimes it was necessary to simply head out in a general direction; and since fields were laid out everywhere it would have been much too arduous to walk around the edges of the fields to reach your destination. Plus there were no rest stops and hostels along the way and since most common folks traveled on foot they didn't want to carry large loads. So as they were passing through a field or a vineyard and became hungry the law permitted them to eat the produce of that field or vine in a limited way.

We get an interesting picture of this exact situation in the New Testament in Matthew 12 when Yeshua and his disciples got into a dispute with some Pharisees over they're plucking and eating some grain from a field they had been walking through (in accordance with this law of travelers in Deuteronomy 23). But the issue was not about stealing or taking advantage of a farmer; rather it was that this happened on a Sabbath and thus Yeshua was accused of defiling the Sabbath. Undoubtedly this was because he had walked MORE than the distance permitted on a Sabbath (as defined by the Pharisees) in order to have been in the field outside of town and he was gathering" grain to eat, therefore that was also considered work according to some Traditions. Yeshua didn't seem to think that the Laws He gave to Moses 1300 years earlier should be countermanded by the latest series of manmade doctrines that Judaism had come up with.

Let's move on to Deuteronomy chapter 24.

READ DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 24 all

It is interesting that although we read often in the Torah and the Bible about a Hebrew man giving his wife a writ of divorce (a **get** in Hebrew) in fact there are no direct and definitive laws of divorce in the Torah. In other words, while we do find laws about marriage and even re-marriage, we don't find procedures or rules about how or why divorce was accomplished. Apparently since divorce was customary and usual in the Middle East the Hebrews generally took it for granted; and the reasons for divorce and the procedures that they also followed were simply long standing customs. So long standing and of such common knowledge was the divorce protocol that the explanation of them is not even written down in the Bible. We only get hints and pieces in the Psalms, the Prophets, and in Proverbs and in a few of the Biblical narrative stories.

The other thing we instantly recognize is that as common as was divorce in Moses' era, so was remarriage. Therefore just as with the making of vows whereby the only real set of rules that the Lord gives about a vow is that if you make one your are to keep it or it is sin, so it is that the Lord says that IF you divorce there are some prohibitions concerning getting married again. There is no written law per se that says you cannot divorce, and yet the Lord makes it clear that marriage was to be for a lifetime.

The prohibition concerning remarriage that we find in the first few verses of chapter 24 is that if a man decides to divorce his wife, and then she goes and gets remarried to another man; and then her new husband either dies or he, too, divorces this woman, she cannot remarry her original husband. About 800 years ago the Rambam (Maimonides) said that he believed that the reason for this law was to stop what was essentially a rampant wife swapping scheme whereby a man would marry and the by design divorce his wife, take on another for a short-term tryst, remarry his first wife and then repeat this process fairly often with other women. The idea was that by legally marrying and divorcing and marrying again and divorcing again he would be having his sexual lusts met with different women because technically he was married to each woman.....even if it was only for a few days. Therefore he would not be breaking the laws of adultery by having sex outside of his marriage or outside of wedlock. Like I've said, it seems whether Jew or Christian we're always on the lookout for a good loophole. But let's be clear: the Lord does NOT condone divorce.

^{CJB} Malachi 2:16 "For I hate divorce," says ADONAI the God of Isra'el, "and him who covers his clothing with violence," says ADONAI-Tzva'ot. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and don't break faith.

Now the reason stated here in Deuteronomy for the 1st husband not being allowed to remarry the ex-wife that he had divorced AFTER she had remarried and divorced, is stated in verse 4: it says she is now defiled. Therefore if that 1st husband did such a thing as to remarry an ex-wife under these circumstances he'd bring down that defilement upon the land of Israel and

the land is too sanctified to allow it.

Now let me point out one thing before we move on: where it says in verse 1 that the REASON the man divorces his wife is because (depending on your translation) he finds something obnoxious about her, or he hates her, or she displeases him, this is not an attempt to create an exhaustive list of divinely acceptable reasons for a man to divorce his wife. This is simply a generality explaining that obviously the man doesn't want her anymore for whatever reason. And it is also not saying that it's fine in God's eyes that a man doesn't really have to have a good reason to divorce. This law was vague enough that we find St. Paul commenting on what he believes is the only good reasons for divorce and even then the whole thing is very distasteful and ugly at best. It is instructive that the Bible looks at divorce as primarily a failure of marriage. That is, while marriage is an institution, divorce is NOT an institution it is but an improperly broken union.

CJB 1 Corinthians 7:15 But if the unbelieving spouse separates himself, let him be separated. In circumstances like these, the brother or sister is not enslaved- God has called you to a life of peace.

Jesus also had some direct words about the subject:

CJB Matthew 19:9 Now what I say to you is that whoever divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery!"

Remember that in the Bible era it was men who did the divorcing. So don't stretch this meaning to say that while a man can divorce his wife for her adultery, a woman can NOT divorce a man for his.

Now take note of this: at least according to the law of Deuteronomy 23 there is NO objection to a man divorcing his wife (and technically vice versa) and then their getting remarried. The prohibition against remarriage is ONLY as concerns one partner getting married to another person in the interim.

Starting in verse 5 we begin to move away from the theme that has been the context for the past two chapters: the 7th commandment prohibiting adultery. Now we enter a section that focuses more on humanitarian issues. And the first regulation is that a man who is just married can be deferred from military service for a year. The stated reason is to bring happiness to his wife.

Now versions vary a bit but literally what this says in verse 5 is: “when a man takes a **new** wife.....” It is the words “new wife” that is key because this doesn’t apply to remarriage. That is it only applies to a wife that a man has never before been married to, therefore she is “new”.

On the surface this just seems like a very nice thing to do (giving a new bride and groom a year to be together and enjoy each other’s company before he has to leave for war). But the “happiness” that the man brings his new wife has far more to do with her getting pregnant AND giving birth than simply the pleasure and excitement typical of newlyweds (although allowing time for that indeed is part of this law’s purpose). Today it is in vogue (and is usually the parental advice) for a recently married couple to put off having children until they have settled into their married life and had a sufficient amount of time as just “a couple”. But in the biblical era it was the greatest hope that on their wedding night the new wife would become pregnant (and if not then, then as soon as absolutely possible). Having children (and hopefully a son) was everything for a new family; and especially so in the case where a man is soon leaving to fight in battle with the real possibility that he may die. Having a son meant that man’s life essence and bloodline would carry on; and for the wife it meant that she would not have to bear the shame of having been married but not producing children. Remember: for the Hebrews the primary duty they bore in the Abrahamic Covenant was to be fruitful (to reproduce). For a man or woman to fail to procreate was a failure to live up to that covenant and it was very serious matter that brought great public shame.

The next laws contained in verses 6 and 7 are much broader than it might seem at a casual reading. These laws are about respect for life. The first one concerns what happens when a person loans a very poor person some money or food, and wants some type of guarantee (collateral) for his loan. And the example given is that the lender may not take the upper millstone from the borrower as collateral.

A grain mill was an essential tool in every Middle Eastern family. These devices, though primitive, were expensive and difficult to make. They would be handed down from generation to generation and it was common that a grain mill would be used for hundreds of years before a new one was needed. It consisted of two parts called an upper and lower millstone. The lower part was a heavy flat stone surface where the grain would lay, and the upper was the smaller part a person would hold in their hand. The upper millstone was used to crush the grain against the lower part. If the upper millstone was taken or lost, then the grain mill was essentially useless.

Grain was ground daily into meal or flour. To take a family’s mill from them was to deny them a means of sustenance; to deny a family a means of sustenance was to deny them life. And this is exactly the point of this law; and also of the next one that deals with kidnapping.

The principle is one that at times gets pushed to the rear in our wealth oriented capitalistic society and it is this: no matter what the situation might be, it is morally reprehensible to take from a person the only means they have to make a living, especially when it is merely to guarantee or satisfy a loan.

So it follows that a person must not steal another life (which is what kidnapping amounts to). In the Bible kidnapping refers to taking someone for the purpose of enslaving them for your personal use or selling them to another for profit. It typically understood that mistreatment was also involved; treating the victim more like an animal or chattel. The penalty for doing this is to be expected: a life for a life, execution of the criminal. When we consider what this means, we have to take into account the way society operated at that time. In battle it was perfectly usual for the victors to take people and use them as slaves. This was not considered kidnapping but rather the spoils of war. In addition, especially among Israel, it was usual that the women and children would be assimilated into Israeli society rather than be viewed as “the property” of some particular individual. We have seen in earlier laws that mistreatment of slaves and servants, foreign or Hebrew, is banned. A good example of this was the Shechem incident when Levi and Simeon massacred all the adult males, and the women and children of the city were taken “as slaves”. Basically this meant that they were forcibly added to the population of Israel, yet at the same time they were not considered sub-human or people to mercilessly for cheap labor.

While the law of kidnapping didn't necessarily pertain ONLY to potential Israelite citizens as the victims, the way it is phrased in verse 7 means that this was the point of this particular regulation.

I want to end this week's lesson by making a point that I hope I'm able to explain well enough, because the next few laws in particular are excellent examples of what I'm about to tell you. Further, when we can but finally internalize the amazing existence and nature of the patterns in God's Word then we are finally in a position to understand His Word more fully, and also able to better untangle the prophecies that we all anxiously (and perhaps fearfully) wait to be fulfilled in the near future.

Here is the point: I have said many times that the Law of Moses is not only real and tangible; it is at the same time a type and a shadow of things to come. It is not one or the other; the Law is both. It is a duality that exists and operates on at least two levels simultaneously. In some cases those shadowy “things to come” have already happened as a result of the advent of Messiah Yeshua. On the other hand the Laws given through Moses on Mt. Sinai were not parables, nor glib sayings, nor were they impossible ideals and therefore there was no serious expectation by Yehoveh that they would be obeyed.

^{CJB} Deuteronomy 30:10 ***"However, all this will happen only if you pay attention to what ADONAI your God says, so that you obey his mitzvot and regulations which are written in this book of the Torah, if you turn to ADONAI your God with all your heart and all your being.¹¹ For this mitzvah which I am giving you today is not too hard for you, it is not beyond your reach.***

God fully intended that all of these rules and regulations of Torah Law be followed: He did not give Moses "The 10 Suggestions" and then follow-up with 603 more "guidelines". And yet we know that underlying all of these laws were foundational principles on the one hand, and on the other the laws and commandments were a means to demonstrate these underlying principles and ideals that would eventually be brought to an ultimate fruition by Messiah. It is no wonder that folks for ages and ages have struggled with the connection between the Law and Christ.

I took you here to tell you that the pattern of demonstrating God's principles by embedding them in the many Biblical narratives and stories of whatever time period they took place, only to have those same principles become better understood and then more broadly applied in the stories that took place in yet later generations, is not limited only to the giving of the Law that was later realized in the life of Jesus Christ. Therefore as we look closer we see that the principles embedded in the story of Creation were expounded upon in the marvelous stories of the Patriarchs. The principles embedded in the stories of the Patriarchs were expanded upon and made even more visible in the giving of the Law. The principles laid out in the Law were taken to another level of intent and operation with the coming of Yeshua as He more fully explained the spirit with which they were to be obeyed. And the principles acted-out in Jesus' life, and spoken about in His parables, will become even more refined and further realized as He rules and reigns in the Millennial Kingdom.

So perfectly do all these God-principles connect that despite the thousands of years of progression in mankind's history, and the amazing changes and variations within human societies, we will see the same exact principles employed in the perfection of the Millennial Kingdom that we did in the Creation Story. And this is because these Scriptural God-principles are immutable; they never change. They even remain the same whether applied in Heaven or on Earth, or even on the New Earth to come.

When we read the fascinating stories in the Torah that took place in the era of the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), those underlying core God-principles (that are frankly not always so easy to pull out and identify) are actually setting the stage for the many laws and commandments that Moses will give at a later date on Mt. Sinai to the people of Israel. As we read and learn about the Law (as we are in Deuteronomy) it is a worthwhile exercise to take some of these laws, go back to the book of Genesis, and then watch the principles expressed in these laws appear and play out within these stories and see how it all connects. Principles we've never recognized before in these early Bible stories suddenly and plainly appear to us.

Many 20th and 21st century Bible scholars have become so acutely aware of these impossibly seamless and perfectly interlaced connections that they can only conclude that it was all manufactured and woven together after the fact by some ingenious editors. It is now the position of many modern academics that (for instance) the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy ***had*** to be written BEFORE the book of Genesis (or that Genesis had major modifications to it at a later date). And that the reason these anonymous editors perpetrated this sham was in order for the Laws of Mt. Sinai to appear (in their underlying principles) back in the stories about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that had occurred hundreds of years earlier. They draw this assumption because while their intellect is large their faith is small; they just cannot accept that God's principles could be present so early in the Bible and then remain utterly unchanged, consistent and even growing in their depth as the centuries rolled by, all the way through the book of Revelation.

Fellow Believers, if you truly want to know what God is going to do in the future, look to the patterns of the past. If someone says to you that an as yet unfulfilled Biblical prophecy must happen in a way that undoes prior God-principles in favor of new ones, be skeptical.

Next week we'll take a couple of these laws from Deuteronomy 24 and go back in time to watch the foundation of these laws appear in the story of the Patriarchs.