

DEUTERONOMY

Lesson 44 - Chapter 32

Last week was essentially a preparation for what we'll study today. We ended the lesson by briefly discussing the history of the means by which the Bible that is in use today came about including its progression from the beginning books of Moses (called the Torah) on up to what has been dubbed by Believers in Yeshua as the New Testament or B'rit Hadashah.

The purpose of our preparation was to examine how best to approach Holy Scripture in the sense of prioritizing it (or even if we should do such a thing). We learned that early on the Hebrew Sages taught that it was necessary to carefully consider which of God's laws and principles might carry more weight than others because inevitably there would be circumstances (as a regular course of living) when we'll have to choose one over the other because both laws or principles cannot be obeyed simultaneously. The example I have used on a few occasions is the well-known WWII story of Corrie Ten-boom who hid Jews destined for the work camps and eventual extermination by the Nazis; but when asked if she knew the whereabouts of these missing Jewish fugitives she was hiding, she said she did not. By all that is holy she lied to her human governmental authorities; that is a sin and God never permits lying under any circumstances. Yet if she had not lied, those Jews that she was protecting would have been arrested and in time killed. She chose to save innocent human life and she was right to do so. God holds the principle of preserving human life higher than the principle of always being truthful.

In the modern era it has become the general mode of the Western Church (and much of the Eastern Church) to locate the first cut at prioritizing Scriptures and Laws at the end of the Old Testament and beginning of the New. In other words we are to make the New Testament preeminent over the Old in virtually every instance. But even more the general mode is to say that the Old Testament must be read in light of the New. That in essence we are to make the New Testament the foundation of the Old. The simplest solution for that is to declare the Old Testament as irrelevant and abolished and therefore for the Believer our Bible IS the New Testament and nothing more.

Here is a quote that confronts this challenging subject of the creation and position of the New Testament as addressed in the Catholic Encyclopedia:

“The idea of a complete and clear-cut canon of the New Testament existing from the

beginning, that is from Apostolic times, has no foundation in history. The Canon of the New Testament, like that of the Old, is the result of a development, of a process at once stimulated by disputes with doubters, both within and without the Church, and retarded by certain obscurities and natural hesitations, and which did not reach its final term until the dogmatic definition of the Tridentine Council”.

As we found last week the early church (early meaning the first 200 years or so after Christ's death) certainly did not agree with our more modern concept of a New Testament that supersedes the Old (even rendering it as obsolete). In fact the earliest Christian Bible (used for almost 2 centuries) was strictly what we call the Old Testament (the Tanakh), and the first books to be added to the so-called Christian Bible were not the letters of Paul or any of the 4 Gospels but rather the 15 books of the Apocrypha that had been so important to Judaism for several centuries. Only after that did even ONE book of what now appears as a separated Biblical section that we call the New Testament become canonized and declared as Holy Scripture; and even then there was no church-wide agreed-to list of the specific books and letters that might form a gentile Christian Bible until 367 A.D. at the Tridentine Council.

Further, by that time the church had grown into two primary branches (the Eastern Church and the Western Church) that had different religious centers, different religious governments and leaders, and different religious practices and doctrines. One branch was based in Rome, the other in Byzantium (modern day Istanbul) and they remain separated to this day and still don't agree on much. Even the Bibles that the Eastern and Western Churches use are constructed differently. Out of the Western Church grew the Catholic and (much, much later) the Protestant sub-branches. The Catholic Church to this day still recognizes 7 books of the Apocrypha as Holy Scripture; Protestants abolished those books from their Bibles at the decree of Martin Luther in the 1500's. The Eastern Church accepts anywhere from 7 to all 15 of the Apocryphal books as Holy Scripture depending on the sub-branch. Even the New Testament sections of the Bibles used by the two branches are slightly different, as one accepts the book of Hebrews and other doesn't.

The focus of our discussion last week was to demonstrate that (in addition to Christ's own words from Matthew 5) in no way was the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible) abolished; and therefore it is self-evident that the New Testament must be taken in light of the Old. Just as in Deuteronomy 30 whereby the Torah was ceremonially laid **beside** the Ark of the Covenant with the most precious artifact in it being the 10 Commandments (showing that the Torah was indeed connected to, but also subservient to, those 10 Words of God as given to Moses) so it is that the New Testament's position is that it must be laid beside the Torah and the Older Testament. The New Testament is fully connected to the Torah and the Tanakh but at the same time it is built upon its foundation. The foundation of the Old Testament is the 10 Commandments, and the foundation of the New Testament in the Old. And I showed that indeed the connection and pattern of Biblical authority and hierarchy is even demonstrated in the person of Yeshua as He constantly stressed that He did everything in the Father's will (not

His own) and that the Father was the supreme authority even though that authority was also given to Him to wield. Who can ever forget those dramatic moments in the Garden of Gethsemane, knowing that in only hours He would be tortured mercilessly and crucified, when Jesus asked the Father “to take this cup from me, but may Your will be done...”

What we’re going to study today in Deuteronomy 32 was (upon its completion) laid beside the Ark of the Covenant, symbolizing that it was under the authority of the 10 Commandments. Chapter 32 is called in English “The Song of Moses”. In Hebrew it is called ***Shirat Ha’azinu***, which is the first two words of the Song of Moses: “Give ear....”. This song is really a Psalm; it is also prophetic and it is a poem set to music. It is considered so important in the history of the Jewish people and to Judaism that it is set apart and recited at times of worship and celebration. This idea of pulling a section of Scripture out of its context and using it as a kind of stand-alone part of religious liturgy is also done in Christianity as (for example) with the Lords Prayer.

Let’s read this long song written by Moses only a few days before he died. Turn your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 32.

READ DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 32 all

The tone of this Song is interesting; nowhere in it are the covenants of Mt. Sinai or of Abraham mentioned. Many Bible critics say that this Song of Moses is patterned after the terms of a peace treaty as commonly used between a vassal state and the king of an empire that has conquered them. But the usual treaty legal jargon and context is lacking and so with no mention of any covenant this shoots holes in the Suzerain Treaty theory. Rather the tone of Moses’ song is more like that of a relationship between a father and his rebellious son. The premise is that Yehoveh has created Israel and treated them with great favor above all His other creations; Israel is His precious firstborn son thus Israel has a moral obligation to respond with obedience reflecting their loyalty (itself born from their gratitude).

Verse 1 says that the heavens and the earth are to be witnesses to the facts of the case and to the charges to be leveled against Israel by Yehoveh. The term “heavens” is referring to the sky and the objects that hang in it, not to God’s spiritual dwelling place, Heaven. As created things the heavens and the earth are not asked to do anything but listen to the indictment; they have no role in carrying out punishment upon Israel. We find prophets from later times (like Isaiah and Jeremiah) who invoke similar imagery of heavens and the earth as witnesses to Israel’s unfaithfulness to Yehoveh.

As I read this beautiful, powerful poem I am reminded of the many talks I had (as have most fathers) with my sons when, at an early age, they had trouble choosing what was right. Invariably I would begin our talk in similar fashion as Moses says it in verse 2 (and I paraphrase): I hope you can hear me and see that my purpose is only good for you; that what I offer is wisdom that is as rain and it can meet either with welcoming soil that drinks it in and produces good things, or as stony soil that resists the moisture and it rolls off, lost and unwanted. This Song is an expression of hope; hope that Israel will listen to the words of Moses and heed those words before the inevitable happens. It is a hope that Israel will listen and remember all that the Lord has done for them, and thus not subject themselves to a wrath that His justice demands but His mercy does NOT want to bring upon them.

And in verse 3 Moses makes it clear that this song is in the name of God; it is NOT in Moses' name, it is NOT even his idea even though later people will give it a title that bears his name. What the song presents is not Moses' thoughts but rather the will of Yehoveh. To proclaim God's name is to proclaim God's attributes and character. The Hebrew word for name is **shem**; and how I wish we could reclaim the real meaning of the word "name" in our society. For us a name has no meaning beyond simple identification; one name is as good as another. Some names today aren't real words at all; it is just a group of letters that can be sounded out. A name means so little in Western Culture that when we apply for credit, or a title check is run on our home, our Social Security number is more proof of who we are than our name. But the real meaning of the word "name" goes beyond identification; it is meant to tell the world of our qualities and who we are as a person. One of my earliest childhood recollections is of my paternal Grandmother saying to me, "you're a Bradford, behave like it". She was a proud woman who had worked hard for our family, in very difficult circumstances; she had gained a good reputation in the community and she wanted us, individually, to live up to that reputation; she wanted us to live up to our name.

And Moses says that God's qualities and reputation are that He is a Rock; His deeds are absolute perfection and that everything He does and ordains is just. He is faithful without fail; He is the truth. In Hebrew the word for rock is **tsur**. Immediately most of you are thinking, I'm sure, that one of the wonderful names (attributes) of Yeshua is our Rock. Yes the Lord being our Rock was a Torah principle; it was not invented in New Testament times. Calling Yeshua our Rock connected Him to God the Father in every Jewish mind for Rock was a common epithet for Yehoveh in that era. Referring to Jesus as the Rock identified Him AS the Lord in the flesh, walking among us, and of course that didn't set well with the majority of the Jewish population. **Tsur** is an interesting word; it doesn't mean a rock like we might kick as we walk along a path. It doesn't even mean a boulder that might lie to the side of the path or jut from a hillside. Rather it more correctly means cliff or mountain. It is a high place, rooted firmly in the earth but reaching towards the heavens. A **tsur** is solid, immovable and majestically overlooks the plains and valleys and rivers of water that flow through them.

Referring to the Lord as a **tsur** also fits well with the first name (attribute) of God divulged to men in the Bible: El Shaddai. Shaddai, as it turns out, is a language cognate of an Akkadian

word that means “mountain”. El Shaddai means God of the Mountain; this is the name of God that Jacob first knew. So we see the close relationship between those two names for God: *tsur* (rocky mountain or cliff) and Shaddai (mountain).

I hope you understand what these attributes of God as listed in verse 4 actually are: they are the definition of divine love. From God’s viewpoint His love as directed towards us is defined as perfection, justice, faithfulness, and truth. Therefore as we are the objects of His love; as we are His special creations created in this image He expects us to demonstrate these same attributes right back to Him in obedience: perfection, justice, faithfulness, and truth. To do otherwise is NOT loving God; it is loving our own ways and desires. Loving God is not having a warm feeling towards Him. Loving God is not our doing nice things that makes us feel good about ourselves. Loving God is not showing up for a worship service and singing a couple of songs and placing a few dollars in the plate. When we mouth the words and tell one another that “God is love” we need to visualize that what that MEANS in God’s economy is that God is perfection, justice, faithfulness, and truth. These are the qualities that, when taken together, equals God’s love towards us because these are the foundational qualities of God.

Let me also mention that each of those 4 qualities is based on Yehoveh’s ordained systems of perfection, justice, faithfulness, and truth. It is His perfection, His justice, His faithfulness, and His truth that is being talked about. We can’t make it up as we go; we can’t substitute our own modern definitions for the Scriptural definitions nor do the definitions change as societies evolve. If we think and behave otherwise this is called disobedience and the result is what follows in verse 5. There Moses says that God’s children have not demonstrated these qualities back towards Yehoveh so they are not worthy of Him. In other words the problem doesn’t lie with God it lies with Israel; it is not the Lord who is corrupt but rather the nation of the Hebrews.

Now the tenor of the poem starts to heat up; after the gentle fatherly urging to pay attention and profit from the advice the question is raised, “is this how you repay God” for all that He is and all He has done for you? After all, as says verse 6, He is your Father who has created you. It is difficult to express just what a shocking allegation has been leveled. Moses says Israel must be dull and witless otherwise it makes no sense that on the one hand they can fully know and recognize that Yehoveh has both created them (as human beings) and brought them into existence (as His set-apart people), unique in all the world; but on the other hand treat the Lord as though He were not their Father Creator in every sense of the word.

Beginning in verse 7 the history of God’s blessings upon Israel is presented. These first few words are not asking Israel to think back several hundred hazy years to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but merely back 1 generation to Egypt. Ask your fathers, Moses says, if you doubt me. Ask those who actually experienced God redeeming Israel from Pharaoh and leading them to freedom and presenting them with the Covenant of Mt. Sinai. In fact, says Moses, the foundation for that relatively recent event (the Exodus) goes back to antiquity when the Most

High assigned the nations their places (their territorial boundaries) on earth; and the Elders (who are the story-tellers, tradition keepers and leaders of Israel) are to be consulted on matters of the distant past. According to the book of Genesis it was after the Great Flood that the Lord divided the single race that was mankind (a single race that spoke a single common language) into many nations and scattered them over the face of the globe (the aftermath of the Tower of Babel).

This brings us to verse 8, an interesting place to take a mini-detour and camp for a few minutes. Here are some words that have been debated and massaged and changed over time and reconstructing them to their original sense exposes some fascinating results. Depending on your Bible version you could have some radically different words for this verse as compared to other translations. And the variant has to do with the **source** of the particular translation your Bible is based on. This is because the Masoretic Text (Hebrew Bible texts from the 10th century A.D.), the Septuagint (Greek OT Bible texts from the 1st or 2nd century A.D.), and the Dead Sea Scrolls (from about 100 B.C.) all treat verse 8 (and another verse that comes later) differently.

Here's the crux of the matter: verse 8 in most versions (including the CJB) says that God divided the human race and assigned them the boundaries of their nations "according to the sons of Israel" or "according to Israel's population" or something like that. The verse implies that God created the same number of nations (by definition these are gentile nations), as there were Israelites. And since tradition was that 70 Israelites went down to Egypt with Jacob, 70 is the number of nations that God created. Now obviously the account of Yehoveh creating the nations by dividing the human population into people groups in Genesis chapters 10 and 11 happened hundreds of years before Abraham (the first Hebrew) was born. So how can it be that God used the number of the sons of Israel to create the nations of the earth hundreds of years before Israel ever existed? It is this translation about the nations being created according to the number of Israelites that we find in the Masoretic Hebrew Texts. But in the Septuagint and in the Dead Sea Scrolls we find different explanations; in both of these translations it says ***le-mispar benei elohim***, which means, "equal to the number of divine beings".

So in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Septuagint we have God allotting the nations and setting the boundaries of man according to the number of divine beings, not the population of Israel. And while Yehoveh assigned those nations to the divine beings He also set Israel apart for Himself. Some Rabbis will say that a better translation is "equal to the number of the sons of God". Most Jewish and Christian scholars currently acknowledge that at least during the era of Christ THIS indeed was the reading of Deuteronomy 32:8 as found in the Torah. And since the original Septuagint was written even 200 years before that, the mention of the nations being divided according to the number of divine beings was almost certainly the original wording.

So what does this imply? If you're paying close attention it is difficult to get around the concept that the Bible tells us that there **are** other divine beings that rule over each nation of the world (from a spiritual but real point of view). What divine beings are we talking about here? Angels?

Other gods? Demons? What? To complicate matters is that the Hebrew word **elohim** is BOTH a legitimate Biblical title used to denote the God of Israel and it ALSO legitimately means “gods”; little “g” gods...in the plural.....many gods. And we also find THIS meaning used in the Bible in other contexts.

When we realize that the Masoretic Hebrew Text was the preferred Hebrew Bible in use in the Middle Ages it's fairly easy to understand the concern that the Jewish religious leaders would have had over the temptation to interpret **benei elohim** as “divine beings”, of Deuteronomy 32:8 as other gods. To acknowledge even the possibility of other gods would lead to serious theological problems within Judaism, especially since it was a foundational Scriptural understanding that it was the worship of “other gods” that was always getting Israel in trouble and sent into exile. Yet in many places in Scripture, in addition to Yehoveh calling the other gods “false gods”, He also called them “non-gods”.... non-existent. Were these non-gods and false-gods the same things as the “sons of elohim”, the sons of God, also translated “divine beings”? I hope you see the repercussions here for all of us. This is a very thorny issue; therefore we can't just dodge this matter as has been customary for about 1000 years. The question then is: are there actually other divine beings (sons of God) that God has assigned to oversee the other nations on earth, except for Israel (who He keeps for Himself)? And if there are WHAT are they?

Well we do indeed find this same phrase (**benei elohim**, sons of God) in use in other places in the Hebrew Bible. In Job 1 and 2 we see the “sons of God” as a group who must time-to-time present themselves before the Lord to give an account of what they've been assigned to do on earth. One of those **benei elohim**, sons of God, mentioned in Job is even given a name: Satan. It is explained in Job that it is this divine being's job to roam around the earth, see what kind of evil people are up to and then report it to Yehoveh and try to convince God to take some kind of destructive action against them; Satan was the official accuser of humanity.

Oh but that's not all; we find that same phrase in Psalms 29 and 97. In Exodus 15:11 we are asked the rhetorical question, “Who is like you, O Yehoveh, among the sons of God?” (among the **benei elohim**). The Book of Daniel also lends credence to the existence of these divine beings that God assigned over the various nations. Turn your Bibles to Daniel chapter 10.

READ DANIEL 10:4-14

Here we have what is described as a prince (we know it is a **spiritual** prince from the context) that comes to Daniel; but another spiritual prince that was in charge of Persia held him up. The only way the divine being that was talking to Daniel got free was when the **chief** prince named Michael came and helped him out in his battle against the prince of Persia.

Oh but it goes further. Return to Daniel 10.

READ DANIEL 10:19 – end

Oh boy. Now we have yet another divine being, one in charge over the nation of Greece, who is going to come when this other **benei elohim** leaves Daniel. And the reason Daniel's divine being is going to hurry and leave is because he has to go back and continue his fight with the divine being of Persia (which, I guess, is his current assignment). Further the only help he's going to get (he says) will come from this one chief **benei elohim** named Michael.

There is little escaping the fact that the Bible says rather straightforwardly that there are other divine beings (sons of God), some who are in opposition and some who are on God's team; and that God has paired these **benei elohim** up with each of the nations that He has created and established on earth.

Let me be blunt: the reason you see most of this covered over and avoided (especially this section about the **benei elohim** in Deuteronomy) is because Jewish and Gentile theologians aren't quite sure what to do with this. There is a genuine fear that the masses of followers of the God of Israel will misunderstand and see these sons of God as either self-created or completely autonomous beings, or as actual real gods that are usually referred to in Scripture as "false gods".

Further, taken to an extreme, it could bring a false credibility to the notion that every nation had its own god (or set of gods). We've talked about this quite a bit in Torah Class; I've told you how it was thought among the ancients that each nation had its own unique pantheon of gods and that the gods were territorial; their power ended at the borders of that nation. The god of Canaan had power there but generally nowhere else for example.

Here's what we can take from this with some confidence: there are other divine beings and they have some kind of spiritual power and control over the nations of the earth. These are NOT self-created divine beings; they are Yehoveh-created and Yehoveh-controlled. They serve some kind of purpose in His plan of the history of redemption. Satan, the Great Adversary, is one of those divine beings. They were paired with the various nations created by God as a result of the Tower of Babel and there is no reason to think they are not still exercising their power today (albeit at the will of God). They are not actually gods, but at times they have probably been worshipped as (and mistaken for) gods all throughout history.

Why do I bring this up? Because if these sons of God, **benei elohim**, (these princes as Daniel

calls them) do indeed exist and are assigned to the nations of this planet, as Believers we had BETTER know about it. Maybe it will help us to get a better handle on just what is going on in this world of ours that inexplicably seems to be tumbling out of control; where common sense seems to have vanished in our leadership, and a small part of the world is moving closer to God and to Israel but the vast bulk is moving away from Him and His people.

I told you a few weeks ago that we would encounter major mysteries in these last few chapters of Deuteronomy; mysteries that have held Bible scholars spellbound for centuries. Mysteries that have also caused many translators to simply gloss over sections of the Torah and other parts of God's Word where these mysteries appear and in their place insert things that were never there but do fit better with long held manmade speculations and doctrines that don't bother us.

Let's move on.

Now that we understand that God gave authority over the other nations of the earth to subordinate spiritual beings, perhaps we can better understand the great privilege He bestowed on Israel by saving it for Himself. This decision automatically made Israel different. This decision distinguishes Israel apart from all others. And to think that some anti-Jewish, anti-Scripture church leaders later declared that God has reversed His decision and made the gentile church for the purpose of replacing Israel boggles the mind.

So when we see the words that "Israel was the Lord's share (or portion)", we now know the answer to the question, "His share of what?" It is His share of the nations the rest of whom were given over to divine (but under the authority of God) beings. Here, incidentally, we see Moses call Israel "Jacob". Remember that the Patriarch Jacob had his name changed by God to Israel and so Jacob's sons (Israel's sons) formed the nation named for their father, Israel. All throughout the Bible we'll see the names Jacob and Israel alternate.

Verse 10 reminds Israel that God found them in the wilderness; or more literally, desert regions. It was in the baroness of the Sinai and Arabian Peninsulas that the Israelites wandered and it was there that they received the covenant with God that made them His people and He their God. The usual translation that God "found" Israel in the desert, though, misses the mark. The verb more means to provide or to maintain. The idea is that Yehoveh sustained Israel out in the Wilderness and watched carefully over them, ensuring their security and survival. This is consistent with the earlier statements of God being Israel's father, and in the next several verses with the various illustrations and metaphors used to characterize the loving care Yehoveh bestowed upon His people.

In the last words of verse 10 it says that the Lord guarded over Israel as though it was the pupil

of His eye. While the translation about the pupil of His eye is not wrong, it doesn't carry with it the depth that it could if it were translated more literally. I want you to do something for me. Turn to the person next to you and look very closely into the pupil of that person's eye; now tell me what you see. Look into the round section at the center of the eye. What you will see if you look very carefully is a small image of yourself reflecting back at you as though you were looking into a curved mirror. What this verse literally says is that God protected Israel like the "little man" in His eye. The little man is the reflection of the man God is looking at. Notice how close you had to get to the person next to you to see that "little man", who is you, in his or her eye. This statement to end verse 10 is VERY intimate. Have you ever sat and just stared adoringly at your spouse or your young child or grandchild (especially when they weren't aware of it); just reveling in their image and thinking how you'd do anything, you'd GIVE anything, to protect them? You see this verse is NOT about God protecting the very sensitive pupil of His own eye; rather it is about God protecting the IMAGE that is IN His eye, and that IMAGE, that "little man" of His eye, is His people Israel.

In verse 11 another vivid metaphor is used to describe how God cares for His people. The metaphor is of an eagle training it's young to fly. It speaks of the eagle bearing the young on his back and taking them to the high places along with him. This didn't impact me until I ran across something that helped me to understand how it is that eagles train their eaglets. I never realized before that what is described here in Deuteronomy 32:11 is actually quite literal and real in nature. Perhaps the godfather of North American Ornithology (bird watching) is Arthur Cleveland Bent. A.C. Bent in the early 1900's wrote this about his observation of an eagle teaching it's young to fly. I'd ask you to become quiet for a moment, even close your eyes if you like, and just see if you can visualize what I am about to quote to you:

The mother started from the nest in the crags and, roughly handling the youngster, she allowed him to drop, I should say, about ninety feet; then she would swoop down under him, wings spread, and he would alight on her back. She would soar to the top of the range with him and repeat the process. Once perhaps she waited fifteen minutes between flights. I should say the farthest she let him fall was about a hundred and fifty feet. My father and I watched him, spellbound, do this for over an hour.

Wow. What an image. The Lord takes Israel and teaches her in the same manner than an eagle teaches his young to fly on their own. But the only way for Israel to learn is to take her to the high places and release her. Early on, whether it is from lack of self-confidence, or lack of trust in God, or not yet having learned the intricacies of winged flight, Israel would simply plummet straight towards the hard earth in a death spiral. But suddenly, down the Lord would swoop and in a nick of time catch her on His own back. Back to the summit the Lord takes Israel, only to repeat the process. Sometimes Israel would be given time to rest and catch it's breathe. But when the Lord decided it was time, flight training started again. What great patience the Lord exhibits; it doesn't matter how many times is needed or how long it takes. Israel may feel terrified and (momentarily) alone and out of control; but the Lord is there, always, to catch her on His own back as an Eagle catches her young. And the purpose of it all

is to teach Israel the ways of the Lord; to teach Israel how, one day, to soar above the high places. Make it so in our lives, O God, amen.