

DEUTERONOMY 22 – 34 CONCLUSION OF THE BOOK, DEATH OF MOSES



We will conclude this book about God rehearsing and at times supplementing His laws to this second generation of Israelites as they are about to inherit the Promised Land.

Some people are confused about *which laws* in the OT are still binding today and which are not.

Here is what *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* that is *very similar* to our own standpoint, but sadly, they apply it more in theory than in practice. "As for the relation of NT law to OT law there seems to be only a question of how much of the old is continues in the new. Christian theologians generally agree that *all of the moral* and *none of the ceremonial laws* are continued, the latter having been fulfilled. How much of the civil-political law continues is the issue. According to contemporary theonomists [studiers of God's laws] *all* of it continues in force (Mt. 5:17) as to equity (essence) with appropriate casuistical modifications (railings required around flat roofs in the OT now required around backyard swimming pools). Most Christian ethicists contend only for *some continuation*, excommunication, for example, being the NT discipline for adultery, which was punished by death according to the OT law. The theonomic case *has not* yet received a sound literary *refutation*" ("Law in the NT," Vol. 3, p. 88).

So, let's continue learning more about God's wonderful laws and timeless principles as they were adapted to the Israelite culture and times.

In chapter 23:1-3, God says, "He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter the assembly of the Lord. One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation...An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly even to the tenth generation."

Some have used these scriptures to accuse the Bible of discriminating against a person with handicaps. But this is *not* what is meant. As *The Expositor's Commentary* explains, these are "three categories of persons who are excluded from the assembly of the Lord: *eunuchs, illegitimate children*, and both *Ammonites and Moabites*...the assembly is ...restricted to the *religious* community...The eunuchs excluded from the assembly were those who were *deliberately* made eunuchs either by crushing or surgically removing their private parts."

Regarding illegitimate children, although allowed to be part of Israel, God did not want the practice to be imitated, and thus limited their religious participation. It "was designed as a discouragement to practices that were disgraceful, but too common from intercourse with foreigners" (*JFB Commentary*). Individuals of two nations were also singled out to be excluded from communal worship—Ammon and Moab, because of their harsh treatment of the Israelites, employing Balaam to curse them and inciting them to fornicate. Yet, God would make exceptions with those truly converted to the faith, such as Ruth the Moabite.

God next gives some *hygienic laws* about washing after a possible contagion and also not leaving bodily waste uncovered. "Observance of these rules would reduce the incidence of infectious fevers and diseases such as cholera, spirochetel jaundice, polioencephalitis, and bubonic plague. The legislation was the *first of its kind to recognize that infection could be transmitted by both food and water*. The emphasis upon burying of excrement away from the camp in the wilderness period is a *noteworthy attempt to control the spread of such insect-borne diseases as ophthalmia and poliomyelitis*" (*ISBE*. Vol. 2, p. 644).

Then, in Deut. 23:15-16, God mentions the *humane treatment of fugitive slaves*. "A fugitive slave was not to be handed over to his master but was to be given asylum and the freedom to go anywhere he desired within the domain of Israel. These were slaves who had fled from foreign parts, since they were not to be oppressed as the Israelites themselves had been oppressed in Egypt (Ex. 22:21; Lev 19:33-34)" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*).

What follows has puzzled some. "You shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a *dog* to the house of the Lord your God." What is the "price of a dog"? The term "dog" here means a male prostitute, or a gigolo. "He received his name from the dog-like manner in which he debased himself (see Rev. 22:15, where the unclean are distinctly called "dogs"))" (*K&D Commentary*). Here we see why money, if obtained by perverted means such as prostitution, even as tithes, are not accepted and blessed by God.

Now come the laws about lending money, which the *Expositor's Commentary* says, "When the nation

was first established, the Israelite economy was by no means mercantile and loans were made to help persons who had become too poor to support themselves. Assistance to such persons was to be given without interest--not interest of silver (equals "money")...or anything that might earn interest. But since merchants from other nations might come for business reasons to Israel, or make loans on interest to Israelites, foreigners could be charged interest."

Regarding vows or promises to God, it says, "When you make a vow to the Lord, you shall not delay to pay it, for the Lord will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you. That which has gone from your lips you shall keep." (23:21-22). The same principle is found in Eccl. 5:1-6 and Pr. 20:25. In the NT, Christ mentions simply to say yes when making a promise is sufficient and we no longer need to make a vow (Mt. 5:33-37; Jam. 5:12).

In chap. 24:1-4 we have the OT law about divorce. It was a tragic reality of the times, and as Christ later mentioned, because of the hardness of their unconverted hearts, God allowed it and legislated to avoid abuses of it. He said, "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife...her former husband must not take her back."

Back in those days, as historian Carl Grimberg explains, "it wasn't difficult for a man to divorce his wife. All he had to say in public was, 'You are no longer my wife' and give her some money. But if the woman wanted to divorce her husband and said, 'You are no longer my husband,' she was either tied hand and foot and thrown in a deep river or cast from a high tower to her death" (*Universal History*). So much for equal rights between the sexes in that age!

Thus, God is regulating the abuses in a divorce by requiring a written legal certificate be given to her for her protection and ability to later remarry. The term, "uncleanness," in Hebrew *erwat dabar*, means "sexual immorality." Christ would later use the term, *porneia*, or sexual immorality, to limit it as grounds for divorce (Mt. 19:3-9).

What follows are some humanitarian laws we have already covered in previous sections, such as a recently married man not going to war or start a

business in the first year to enjoy the first year with his wife (24:5). Millstones are not to be taken as punishment, for they were used to make bread for the family and earn a living (24:6). Kidnappers are to suffer the death penalty (24:7). Health issues such as skin diseases like leprosy should be seen and treated by the priests (24:8). You shall not oppress the laborer and pay his wages on time (24:14-15). The principle that parents shall not pay for the sins of their children nor vice-versa (24:16). The remnants of the harvests shall be left to the poor (24:19-21). Judges are to administer justice with fairness and wisdom, limiting severe punishment to 40 stripes (25:1-3). The brother of a dead brother should marry his widow to sustain her and keep his family name alive, and if he refuses, it will be a great insult (25:3-10). You shall not cheat by debasing the currency with false weights and measures (25:14-16). Firstfruits of the harvest should be brought to the priests as an offering (26:1-11). The third tithe is again mentioned and the blessings of it (26:12-15).

In this way, God ends the rehearsing of His laws before the second generation of Israel enters the Promised Land. Moses tells them the reason, "Also today the Lord has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments...and set you high above all nations...and that you may be a holy people" (26:18).

In order for them to continue remembering these laws once they entered the Promised Land, they were to make a huge stone monument on Mt. Ebal that was to be covered with plaster and all these laws were to be written on them. They were also to build an altar of whole stones to God there.

Amazingly, in 1982, archaeologist Adam Zertal found the remnants of such an altar of "whole stones." There was a ramp instead of steps leading to the altar, just as God had commanded in Ex. 20:25-26. There were no surrounding dwellings, indicating it was a sacred spot where sacrifices to God were offered. Over 4,000 animal bones were uncovered, not one of an unclean animal! Adam Zertal said, "We have on Mt. Ebal not only the complete prototype of an Israelite altar, but moreover, a site that might prove to be directly related to the biblical traditions concerning Joshua's building of an altar on Mt. Ebal" ("Has Joshua's Altar Been Found on Mt. Ebal?" *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Jan. 1985).

Future blessings and cursings on top of two mountains are given, Mt. Ebal for the cursing of breaking God's laws, and Mt. Gerizim for the blessings of keeping the laws (27:11-28:67). It is a sobering experience to read these chapters and know much of this was fulfilled in ancient Israel and how much still prophetically applies to the modern nations of Israel, especially as the end time nears.

God then renews the covenant with this second generation of Israelites in the plains of Moab. Moses recognizes they are not converted when he says, "Yet the Lord has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to his very day" (29:4). He predicts one day, with true conversion, the physical circumcision will become a spiritual one: "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live" (30:6). He says these commandments are not impossible to understand or to keep. "For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven [too high]...but the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it" (30:11-14).

God gives us a choice about how to live and nothing is predetermined about how we will choose. It's up to us. "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (30:19).

Moses says, "Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you" (31:6). Moses then says the same words to Joshua and wrote "this law and delivered it to the priests" (31:9), so we see who wrote these books.

In order to avoid forgetting the laws of God, the Israelites were commanded every seven years, "at the year of release, *at the Feast of Tabernacles*, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing...that they may learn to fear [or deeply respect] the Lord your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the Lord as long as you live" (31:10-13). We thus see the Feast of Tabernacles is a time of intense teaching and learning about God's word and why it is so important to keep this Feast!

At the end of the reading of this covenant, God has Moses write down *a song* [a mnemonic device] to remind them of their ancestor's past unfaithfulness and a prophecy against them. God says, "Behold, you will rest with your fathers; and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land...Then my anger will be aroused against them...and will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured...Now therefore, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel. When I have brought them to the land flowing with milk and honey, of which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and filled themselves and grown fat, then they will turn to other gods and serve them; and they will provoke Me and break My covenant...I know the inclinations of their behavior today, even before I have brought them to the land of which I swore to give them" (31:19-21).

Moses then inaugurates Joshua as the leader, laying his hand on him and says, "Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant...that it may be a witness against you, for I know your rebellion and your stiff neck" (31:26-28). God then inspires "the song of Moses" in chap. 32, a wonderful and instructive narrative of God's tender dealing with Israel, but of their unfaithfulness.

Chapter 33 describes Moses' blessings one each of the tribes of Israel, very similar to Jacob's blessings in Gen. 49. Then, chap. 34 describes the death of Moses at the age of 120 on Mt. Nebo and how God had him buried by angels. This section was probably added by Joshua himself or a designated scribe. In Jude 9 we read of Michael contending with Satan over the body of Moses. Satan would have loved to have a pilgrimage shrine on the burial spot which would have eventually turned to idolatry and the worship of a man, so God had him secretly buried and "no one knows his grave to this day" (34:6).