

## DEUTERONOMY

### Lesson 47 - Chapter 32 Conclusion

As we continue in this Song of Moses of Deuteronomy chapter 32 I want to begin as we did last week in summarizing a couple of divine principles that have been a work-in-progress since the book of Genesis. These principles are at the forefront of what is being declared and prophesied in the poetic words of the Song of Moses.

I have spoken before on the glue that binds the Word of God together from Genesis to Revelation and that glue is God's justice system. In Hebrew justice is *mishpat*.

On numerous occasions I have told you that Yeshua satisfied God's justice system for a specific purpose and that it was one of the many steps that form the overall process of mankind's salvation history (a process that is not yet completed). The term "satisfied" does NOT mean "abolished" nor does it mean "brought to an end". If someone robs a bank and is subsequently arrested, given a fair trial, convicted and sent to prison it is said that our American justice system has been satisfied. Obviously the convicted criminal ultimately going to jail did bring about the abolishment of our justice system as a result of the justice system being satisfied upon establishment of his guilt and of declaration of his due penalty. Rather the purpose and goal of our justice system (the satisfaction of the system) was brought about by the justice process producing its intended result.

I tell you this because so many mainstream church doctrines of today loudly proclaim that God's justice system was abolished in favor of universal love and forgiveness due to Christ's passion upon the cross. Thus a Believer can for all practical purposes do no wrong that would demand God's discipline because God no longer dispenses justice, only mercy. In order to cut to the chase in addressing this erroneous doctrine I took us to Revelation 15 whereby we were in the midst of the chapters depicting the pouring out of God's wrath on the world and its people during the final days of (or perhaps immediately following) the Great Tribulation, and in those verses we found that the people who were loyal to God were singing this very Song of Moses that we are studying as a victory song and a remembrance of God's promise of justice for His people, His *ammim*. I submit that a good alternate title for this song would be "The Ode to Yehoveh's Justice" because in it we see both sides of the justice coin being played out: God's kindness and severity, His salvation and destruction, the Lord's blessings and curses, and our reward and punishment.

God's justice system did not end as we turned the page from the Book of Ezra (that ends the OT) to the Book of Matthew (that begins the New). Nor did God's justice system end at Calvary. In fact we are told unequivocally in the New Testament that all men, including Believers, will eventually be judged. Listen to 1<sup>st</sup> Peter:

**<sup>CJB</sup> 1 Peter 4:14 *If you are being insulted because you bear the name of the Messiah, how blessed you are! For the Spirit of the Sh'khinah, that is, the Spirit of God, is resting on you!*<sup>15</sup> *Let none of you suffer for being a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or a meddler in other people's affairs.*<sup>16</sup> *But if anyone suffers for being Messianic, let him not be ashamed; but let him bring glory to God by the way he bears this name.*<sup>17</sup> *For the time has come for the judgment to begin. It begins with the household of God; and if it starts with us, what will the outcome be for those who are disobeying God's Good News?*<sup>18</sup> *"If the righteous is barely delivered, where will the ungodly and sinful end up?"***

Even the household of God (those who accept Christ, the church) will stand before God in judgment. But on what basis will we be judged? By what standard will we have to answer to our lives before our Creator? Well it will NOT be based on whether or not we trust in Yeshua because by definition the family of God that Peter speaks of ARE Believers. Rather Believers will be judged based on God's long-established justice system, the laws and commands of the Torah that He set down at Mt. Sinai. Now the consequences of that judgment will be entirely different for us than for those who are not Believers. All those who do not believe will suffer eternal destruction. No Believer will suffer destruction. Rather we Believers will have our lives opened up to us, our deeds (or lack of deeds) exposed, the fruit of our lives counted by our Lord, and those of us doing the least of the righteous deeds and bearing little fruit will be given the barest of rewards; and those of us who accomplished a bounty of righteous deeds with much fruit will be given the greatest of rewards.

Understand that all fruit that **can** be borne is the result of obedience to God. One does not produce good fruit through disobedience to the commandments of the Lord; so our deeds and our fruit are in some way the measure of obedience and love that will be used by Yehoveh to judge us, His people. The fruit is not measured by the size of our bank accounts or even the size of our families or our congregations. Rather it is that part of our lives that has produced enduring good for the Kingdom of God at the direction of the Holy Spirit.

But the word "judgment" needs to be examined in order for us to grasp what it actually means. Judgment has come to mean (in our day) something invariably negative; judgment is seen (at least within Judeo-Christianity) as synonymous with wrath or punishment and this is not so. Thus when we hear that the world is going to be judged, we usually assume it means the world will automatically bear God's wrath. Further we cringe when we hear that Believers will be judged (or we come up with some kind of allegorical apology to say that this isn't what the Bible actually says) because we can get some strange mental pictures of what is occurring

when we run across the word “judgment” in our Bibles.

Interestingly the Hebrew word for justice (*mishpat*) can also be translated as judgment. Justice and judgment are basically the same things. And the Biblical idea is that a person is placed before the lawgiver to be scrutinized and then the verdict is pronounced. There is NO assumption of guilt in the word *mishpat*. Therefore when a Believer stands before God in judgment we already know part of the verdict: we who trust Him shall be declared innocent (due to the work of Yeshua on the cross). The remainder of the verdict for a Believer is then only what level (or perhaps absence) of reward is his or hers beyond eternal life; but that verdict will perhaps be accompanied with a tinge of sadness as we all will also see our failings (to be obedient and faithful) displayed before us (and the awful results it caused).

So as we continue studying the Song of Moses I hope that as we come across the words judgment and justice that we can take them in a more neutral way, which is the way they were intended. Because as we will soon see the proper definition of judgment also greatly affects Biblical passages that employ another commonly used English word, “vengeance”.

Let’s read yet again the remaining words to the Song of Moses. Open your Bibles to Deuteronomy 32.

### **RE-READ DEUTERONOMY 32:30 – 43**

Earlier in this theological poem the topic was the past (Israel’s past). Beginning with verse 30 the time reference begins a move towards the future. And the Lord puts forth the rhetorical question of how it is that one warrior can put to flight 1000 of the opposition, and 10 warriors defeat 10,000 opponents? In other words how can a smaller enemy force defeat the stronger and more numerous Israelites (with their great God) UNLESS the Israelite’s own god has given them up to that enemy? Of course the expected answer is that it can’t happen any other way, therefore this is something that not only should Israel understand but that Israel’s conquerors should recognize so that they don’t pat themselves on their collective backs, or credit their inferior gods, for their military success against Israel.

Yet even though the Lord will use Israel’s enemies to crush His people as a divine punishment, so the Lord will also use it all for salvation. And because the enemy will boast and brag and treat Israel harshly the Lord will turn His wrath away from Israel and towards the enemy. The grapes of the Promised Land that once produced such wonderful wine and joy for Israel will be as poison and bitterness for the enemy as they try to enjoy what had been set-aside exclusively for God’s people. We’re told in verse 34 that the Lord has stored away this poison wine destined for the enemy, and that it has been sealed up in the Father’s own

storehouse. Naturally the poison wine is figurative and a metaphor for the punishment that will be inflicted upon Israel's oppressors.

These verses are explaining that a) this scenario WILL happen and b) the outcome WILL occur as prophesied. Further c) the Lord has put His seal on it meaning that it is certain, and that only He has access to the agent of His wrath (the metaphor of the poison grapes) that will be deployed upon the enemy.

The imagery of a storehouse being sealed up by its owner was a familiar one to people of this era. It was the practice of a landowner or a king to seal the latches to his storage facilities with clay or wax stamped with his signet ring. Obviously such a seal acts as a notice to someone who might want to go inside that the contents belong to a particular powerful person so it is a warning for the unauthorized to stay away. But the seal is also a mark of ownership that identifies just WHO the powerful person is that has the sole right to the stored contents.

We have numerous places in both the Old and New Testaments that speak of something being "sealed up" by the Lord. So the idea is that something that has been pronounced as a future event is a done deal and nothing can change it, and that ONLY the Lord can decide the time and circumstance of its unveiling. Therefore in verse 35 the thought continues that at the moment of the Lord's choosing He will open up His personal storehouse that is full of stored-up wrath and empty it out upon those who deserve it; and this is because all vengeance and recompense are His and His alone.

So here we encounter the word "vengeance" that I mentioned was associated with justice and judgment. But let me also tell you that vengeance is a poor choice of words to translate the original Hebrew word used, ***nakah***. It is from this passage that we get the famous Christian phrase "vengeance is mine saith the Lord". Vengeance of course means to exact revenge upon someone with great fury; you have offended me so now I will exact a punishment upon you.

The context of this passage is therefore usually presented that under God's justice system the wicked enemy who has harmed His people Israel will be subjected to a God who is going to exact payback for their evil ways (a kind of eye for an eye retribution), and that it is His sole province to do so; but this misses the point.

***Nakah*** carries with it a different sense than revenge. Revenge was the usual method that an ancient Middle Eastern family dealt with someone who dishonored or harmed a family member. The concept of revenge was based in tribalism and paganism and is the natural result of a blood feud. A family was REQUIRED by ancient custom to go after someone who dishonored them or they would lose even more honor. In the story of Jacob's sons Simeon

and Levi who led a murderous raid on the helpless city of Shechem, the raid was for the purpose of reaping revenge for the King of Shechem's son having dishonored Jacob's family by raping Dinah. Jacob not only immediately denounced his sons for exacting this unjust revenge but also on his deathbed (decades later) he cursed Simeon and Levi rather than bless them. This demonstrated that God's character does not approve of revenge. The establishment of the cities of refuge in the Promised Land even provided a safe haven for those who might otherwise be the victims of revenge.

The never-ending cycle of violence that we see in the Middle East today is all about revenge and blood feuds among families, tribes, and religious sects. Our Arab brother in Christ, Tass, fled from the West Bank to the USA many years ago (when he was still a Muslim) due to a blood feud that would for sure have eventually claimed his life. So rather than *nakah* meaning vengeance Mendenhall says that it means, "The executive exercise of power by the highest legitimate authority for the protection of his own subjects". In other words the action taken is for the purpose of DEFENSE not offense. God will pour out these calamities (the storehouse full of poison wine) upon Israel's conquerors so that they will stop harming Israel and release them; and thus Israel will survive and not be eradicated. The sense is of taking action against a wicked person to keep them from doing further harm to one of the king's citizens. The issue is protection and self-defense from an aggressor, not revenge on a perpetrator. The larger purpose is to benefit the citizen as opposed to punishing the enemy (although punishment certainly plays a role).

So perhaps we need to rethink our use of that phrase that we like to use as a club, "vengeance is mine saith the Lord". Because in fact the Lord is NOT saying that He takes revenge. Rather it is His prerogative to take whatever action He deems necessary to protect His own from people who are not His.

Let's also apply this same concept to God's justice system. God's justice is that He will do whatever it takes to protect His own from the wicked. He gets no joy from destroying the wicked. The justice system that He established is based on protecting those who trust in the Lord even if it means harming or ultimately destroying others who He may well love (all people are His creations) but they have chosen NOT to be part of His people, and are therefore can be a threat to His people.

Just as the Lord will do justice on the enemy, He will do justice upon His people; but the verdict and consequences will be quite different. Here is where our earlier talk on *mishpat*, justice and judgment, again comes into play. In verse 36 we're introduced to a new term that is part of the process of God's justice system: *din*. And it means, "To judge" or it can mean, "To plead a case". It does NOT mean to judge in the sense of God pouring out punishment (the typical but wrong meaning for judgment). It means to make a decision, to decide a case whether the verdict is for or against.

It is applied here concerning Israel, but it is the same term used for “judging” the enemy. When an accused person stands before a judge he can be declared guilty or innocent depending on the evidence. So when God’s enemy is judged according to God’s justice system and found guilty, then there is punishment. When God’s people are judged according to God’s justice system and found innocent, then there is protection. Thus the CJB has excellent wording to best describe what is happening here: “God will judge His people, taking pity on His servants”. God will consider the case against His people and will judge (that is He will determine) that He shall show them compassion. God will consider the case against Israel’s enemy and will judge (He will determine) that He will harm them in order to protect His people.

Let’s back up and re-establish our context; God says that Israel will abandon Him, so He will punish them by means of an enemy who will conquer Israel and exile them from the Promised Land. But at some point the Lord will see that the punishment has achieved the hoped-for result and soon His people will be ready to repent and return to Him and reclaim their redemption. So He stops punishing His people and instead turns that wrath towards the enemy as a means of putting an end to Israel’s divinely ordered punishment.

How will God decide when it is time to turn off His disciplinary action against Israel and redirect it instead towards the enemy? Verse 36 continues, “....when He (God) sees that their (Israel’s) strength is gone, and no one is left slave or free”. Obviously the phrase “and no one is left” of Israel cannot literally mean that every last Israelite is gone or Israel would be extinct and there would be no one left to save. Instead the term is yet another Hebrew idiom that more or less means that whatever remnant of Israel remains they have reached the end of themselves; they have arrived at the point of total helplessness and of total dependence on God. In fact the usual translation of “no one is left **slave or free**” has been challenged and several Hebrew language scholars now say the phrase should read, “And no one is left **ruler and helper**”. Thus the intent is that Israel is so disheveled as to be without leadership; its rulers and their employees who led Israel into this predicament are now dead and gone and so Israel is sailing as a rudderless ship in stormy seas. Thus they are finally ready to accept a new and holy rudder: the leadership of Yehoveh their God.

But understand that Israel (God’s redeemed) were all sent into exile away from God, BY God, because they had effectively abandoned Him by means of their disobedience and idolatry. Those Hebrews who died in that foreign place (while in exile) with their redemption canceled, remain separated from God for all eternity. The fortunate ones who lived through the long ordeal and saw the error of their ways returned to God’s waiting arms to renew their redemption. On one hand this is a good illustration of people we all know who have not accepted God and die in that condition versus those who were fortunate enough to live just long enough to finally see their hopeless situation and accept His salvation perhaps only days or hours before their opportunity ended in death.

On the other hand this is also like the situation we talked about in James 5 last week where a brother in Christ (a Believer) wandered away from the truth (of his own salvation) and James urged other Believers to go after him because if that wandering brother died in that state, his fate of eternal separation from God was sealed.

In verse 37 it has God saying (rather sarcastically), so what good did those other gods you worshipped do you? Since they meant so much to you, and since you had such little regard for Me that you reckoned they would be more beneficial for you, what happened and where are those gods now? Who was it that ate the fat of your offerings and drank the libation offerings? In other words, when Israel started sacrificing to those pseudo-gods the sacrifices that should have been for Yehoveh, did those gods show up to bail you out when the enemy approached? They were supposed to be your shield, and they failed.

Therefore, says the Lord, can you now see that there is no god beside Me? I am the one who rescued you from Egypt, gave you new life, brought you into to the Promised Land, and then turned you over to your enemies when you became unfaithful to Me. No other gods have either the authority or the power to do such things for you, or against you, as does Yehoveh. And no other gods can ever STOP Me from proceeding to take out My wrath on whomever I choose.

Please take note: obviously these statements by God are figurative. God does not think in a serial fashion like men; He doesn't find His moods swinging nor do His emotions vacillate. God does not have a literal glittering sword or a physical hand to carry it, as He is spirit and does not have a fleshly body. But no truer words could be spoken about the relationship between the Lord, Israel, and the pseudo-gods than what we just read.

Let's move down to verse 43. What you read in the CJB represents the vast majority of Bible translations. However the discovery and reconstruction of the Dead Sea Scrolls has added great intrigue to this final invocation of the Song of Moses that calls upon the nations (remember, by definition we have to mentally add the word "gentile" to nations) to rejoice in what God has done. The CJB like so many others uses the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Scriptures as its OT document source. The Masoretic Text was created around 900 A.D.

The Septuagint (the very first Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) was created over 2 centuries before Christ, and some Bible translations use it as their source document. Of course who is to say which source was more correct between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint (although the differences are generally quite minor). The question for us is which source document had the proper wording starting at verse 43? Well, fortunately the Dead Sea Scrolls broke the tie. The Dead Sea Scrolls are almost exactly as is the Septuagint.

And here is what the Dead Sea Scrolls say in those last verses of the Song of Moses, and I

ask you to pay close attention:

**O heavens, rejoice with Him,**

**Bow to Him all sons of the divine.**

**O nations, rejoice with His people,**

**And let all angels of the divine strengthen themselves in Him.**

**Requite those who reject Him,**

**And He will cleanse His people's land.**

So as you can see there is quite a bit more information in the texts written 1000 years earlier (the Dead Sea Scrolls) than in the Masoretic Text. Why are these verses deleted in the Masoretic document? We talked about this a couple of weeks ago. Although it is speculation, it was likely due to the very problematic Hebrew phrase that appears in the original, but the Masorets removed: **Bow to Him all *benei elohim* (Bow to Him all sons of the divine).**

I find it so interesting that immediately following the verses in the Song of Moses where the Lord God is terribly sarcastic in asking Israel what good those other gods had done them (gods that they preferred over Yehoveh), that we should find this rhetoric that says that the ***benei elohim*** (sons of the divine, divine beings) should bow down to Yehoveh. In a nutshell many believe that the Jewish scholars who penned the Masoretic Texts were but following a tradition that had developed by removing all mention of ***benei elohim*** in Holy Scripture because to consider that there were other beings that could be worshipped as gods (even though they were obviously NOT gods and they were under the control of Yehoveh), was the basis for Israel constantly falling into idolatry.

My opinion (and I underline OPINION) is that the ***benei elohim*** (divine beings) that are spoken of in Genesis, divine beings that the Holy Scriptures tell us that God assigned over each nation on earth, were and remain real and quite influential over each nation. Recall that we looked at the book of Daniel whereby one of these ***benei elohim*** that is also called the Prince of Persia had blocked an angel of God from coming to Daniel in Babylon, and it was only the chief angelic prince, Michael, who came and fought this spiritual Prince of Persia that enabled Daniel's angel to get free from him. Another spirit being that had authority over Greece is also mentioned in the same passages.

I think it is likely that over the centuries at least some these spiritual princes who have authority over the gentile nations (***benei elohim***) allowed and enjoyed being worshipped as "gods".



They were NOT gods, but they had such awesome power and appearance that it is easy to imagine the people of the nation over which they have charge bowing down to them and thinking of them as gods. After all we have numerous incidents in the Bible where an angel of God makes an appearance and the instinctive thing a witness does is to bow down before the angel and begin to worship it (the angel quickly tells that person to stop it).

Therefore here in the invocation that ends the Song of Moses in both the Septuagint and in the Dead Sea Scroll of Deuteronomy, we find the instruction that the Heavens, and the **benei elohim**, and the angels, and the gentiles (nations) should all bow down to Yehoveh. In other words, NOT only Israel but everyone should submit to the Lord. To me these final words of the Song of Moses are very likely a short summation of ALL the types of intelligent beings that the Lord has created, and in a sort of victory celebration the Lord is telling all of His created beings, spirit and physical, that the proper response to what has just happened (His rescuing Israel yet again) is for these spiritual and human beings to remember their place in the celestial pecking order and therefore to bow down to their Creator, Yehoveh, who is above everyone and everything.

Beginning in verse 44 we have a subscript to the poem. The custom of that era dictated that when a king made a pronouncement it was written down, and then the historical records would confirm that the recorder of the pronouncement carried through and presented the pronouncement to the people as he had been instructed.

Since Joshua was in the process of taking over leadership of Israel he appeared together with Moses to recite all the words (all the **dabar** given to him from God) to the people of Israel. Moses warns the people to take seriously “all these words” that he has spoken to them on Yehoveh’s behalf. “All these words” refer to the entire teaching (all of what we call Deuteronomy) not just the Song of Moses. Israel’s survival as a nation depends on God’s people accepting these instructions and commands as truth and then obeying them.

What a sober warning for we latter day Believers; a warning for those who now comprise Spiritual Israel is embedded in the last couple of verses of Deuteronomy 32. Moses tells the people that what he has spoken to them is not trivial or empty. These **dabar** (these words) are synonymous with the word “commands”; the **dabar**, commands, are to be followed and not relegated to suggestions or niceties or options. And the warning is that to trust the Lord and to follow His commands is life itself. Remember that life and blessing are the positive purposes for the Law while death and curses are the negatives.

Church, we have trivialized the commandments of God for century after century and never more so than in the last 100 years. We have come to the point that it is often taught that to be obedient to God’s laws actually is essentially a bad thing, and we have given it the negative connotation of “legalism”. Imagine: we have become so enamored with our own doctrines and

ideals, so in love with our individuality and so convinced of the goodness of our hearts, that to obey the Lord's written commands is considered as being in opposition to Christ! Here the Lord through His mediator, Moses, says that His laws, His Torah, **is life** for His people and any other way is (by default) death for His people. I say to you my brothers and sisters in Messiah; you, who are also His people, choose life! Choose to heed this warning. Choose to be obedient to the Lord. In fact Moses is about to find out that even as the 2<sup>nd</sup> greatest Mediator ever to exist (2<sup>nd</sup> only to Yeshua), he is also subject to this warning.

And the proof of this is found in verse 48 when Yehoveh instructs Moses to ascend Mount Nebo and there he will breathe his last. Just as Aaron died 6 months earlier to the day atop Mt. Hor, so shall Moses die on Mt. Nebo. There is much significance in dying upon a high place. The high places, mountain peaks and such, were thought by the ancients to be the habitation of the gods. As I have shown you that the earliest title of God that is given to us in the Bible is El Shaddai, which means God of the Mountain. Even the epithet for God that we all find so endearing, the Rock, *tsur* in Hebrew, doesn't mean rock like a boulder; it means a rocky cliff that overlooks valleys and plains that spread out below it. Altars to the gods were always placed on top of the highest possible geography of the area where a people lived. To die and be buried on a high place is to die and be buried near God. The Lord Himself called Moses to come to the high place of Mt. Nebo because it was the highest peak in the area of Moab where Israel was now camping. It not only afforded Moses a panoramic view of the Promised Land that he would never enter, but it was a great honor to be called up to the mountaintop by God to come and be near Him.

Both died before entering the Promised Land, a consequence of "breaking faith" with the Lord according to verse 51. Jewish scholars and Rabbis have debated the exact nature of Moses' offense against God for 3000 years. Recall that it stems from the time out in the Wilderness when the Israelites needed water and the Lord told Aaron and Moses to speak to a rock, commanding it to produce water. Instead Moses SPOKE to the people and STRUCK the rock. This wrongful act failed to confirm God's sanctity and the consequence was severe enough that even God's first Mediator, Moses, and first High Priest, Aaron, would never get to enter the land of their rest, Canaan.

I wonder: could it be that the point of the terrible penalty against Moses and his brother was that the ONLY human Mediator that could lead God's people into God's Promised Land had to be perfect Mediator. Perhaps we are meant to see that the exact nature of the infraction is entirely unimportant; rather it is that there WAS an infraction. That in fact while to the average Israelite, or to us today, or even to the finest theological minds ever produced the infractions that Moses and Aaron committed were comparatively minor, so for the Lord to ordain such a harsh punishment to such great men doesn't seem to be proportional. It doesn't seem to match the act to the consequence.

Moses was a very special man. Even though the High Priest is often referred to as a mediator,

and even Joshua was seen by some as Israel's replacement mediator (replacing Moses), in fact Moses was well above both of these. Neither Aaron nor Joshua had a position that approached Moses' position. Neither ever received the privilege of speaking to God face-to-face. Joshua was NEVER permitted into the Holy of Holies as were the High Priest and Moses; and even then the High Priest could only go in once per year on Yom Kippur while Moses went before the Ark of the Covenant with regularity.

Yet God's requirement for Moses was perfection; and as Moses was a son of human parents, carrying with him an evil inclination and sinful nature that came with the Fall of Adam, he could not meet the standard. The infraction of striking the rock was sin. Even if we want to call it the tiniest sin, sin it was. Even the tiniest sin disqualified Moses from being Israel's Savior. So instead a 1300- year wait ensued until a man was born who did not have a human father; a man who was divinely conceived and who could meet the standard for Yehoveh's perfect Mediator. That man was Yeshua. He COULD be Israel's Savior because He did something Moses could not do; Jesus didn't commit even the tiniest infraction, not the smallest sin. He was perfect. He followed the Law perfectly, in exactly the spirit it was meant to be followed.

Moses is an example and an ideal that if any man alive today could attain even that same degree of perfection he would be looked upon with awe. But even that isn't sufficient to satisfy God's justice system.

That any man would think that our hearts are so pure that we can ignore the tiniest of God's laws without consequence, even though we are redeemed; or that we are so good and righteous that we don't need Jesus to atone for our imperfection and our sin; that man walks a sure path to confrontation with the Creator.

Next week we'll start chapter 33, Moses' farewell blessing to Israel.