

DEUTERONOMY 16-34

The Story of Redemption

Thoughts and Comments

**"Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the Lord your God is giving you."
(Deut. 16:20)**

favorite verse

DEUTERONOMY 17 & 19

Justice

God is a God of love and grace. But He is also a God of justice. And we should not forget that part of who he is.

He has put the desire for justice in our hearts. We want to know that good is rewarded and evil has consequences.

It is also good news that God's justice is controlled and not impulsive.

17:4-6 shows that God requires that they investigate claims "with diligence" and "if it is true and certain" then the judgment is enacted. He also requires more than one witness. This is a good pattern for a justice system.

Proverbs 18:17 confirms that justice can only be served when truth is sought and all people have a voice.

As we read Scripture we should look to see the ways that God puts safeguards in place to protect people from injustice.

DEUTERONOMY 16

Evil Trees

God forbids the planting of any tree "as an Asherah" by the altar. An asherah tree or pole was a Canaanite religious symbol to honor the goddess, Asherah.

We know the Israelites do not obey this order because there are several instances where Asherah poles were instructed to be cut down. As with King Josiah in 2 Kings.



DEUTERONOMY 17

A Good King

I was surprised to read here that God told them that if they get to the promised land and decide they want to have a king like all the nations around them, they can, as long as he chooses the king.

The Israelites indeed demand a king in 1 Samuel 8 when they are unhappy with Samuel and his sons. It almost feels like God was teasing them up for that in Deuteronomy. Or perhaps, he just knew the sinful thoughts of man.

In Samuel, Samuel warns the people of all the things the king will take from them.

The voice of the Deuteronomy passage is instead a warning to whoever becomes king. He warns future kings of being tempted by acquiring wealth and women. (ahem, King Solomon.)

Instead future kings are commanded to keep a copy of the law with them. A copy written by his own hand. A copy for him to read diligently. If we keep God's law and Word close to our heart, we are less likely to be tempted away to do evil. How does one manage power appropriately? By dousing himself in the word of God. By making reading the Bible a priority. By being engaged with the Word with our own hands.



DEUTERONOMY 19

Death Penalty

The end of chapter 19 talks about "purging the evil from your midst."

It says *"the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you."* It is logical that a punishment for a crime is meant to deter future crimes from happening. Recent studies have shown that for each murderer executed, as many as 14-18 additional murders are deterred. There is a clear inverse relationship between the execution of murderers and the number of murders in the US.

Verse 21 should not be confused with Matthew 5:38-39 which is in the context of individuals not in the context of the authority of a government to pursue justice. (Rm 13)

These verses seem like support for the death penalty. (Also see Gen 9:6; 1 Pt 2:13-14)

DEUTERONOMY 20

Heading to War

Chapter 20 talks about when they go up to a city to fight that they should have the priests ask the people a series of questions that may result in people returning home for fears and concerns.

At first I thought this was a way for God to winnow down their army so that they had fewer numbers and their victories would be all the more known to be given in their hands by the power of the Lord fighting for them.

But in doing a little more research, I think it was primarily to produce the right army-- a people who did not stand in fear but in confidence.

It was a kindness to those who were too afraid to go to battle, but also a benefit to the rest of the army not to be influenced by their fear or to have to worry about unpredictability of soldiers who didn't want to be there.

Then there is more instruction in how to handle the inhabitants of the cities far from their dwelling and those within the cities where they will dwell. Again, we don't like to read about the killing of everything that breathes. I can't imagine what that would have been like as a soldier, but it reiterates how important righteousness is and how evil idolatry is. For the purpose was to keep idolatry from infiltrating their people.

Let it also be noted that they were first to try to make peace with the people. God gives people ample time to repent and be reconciled with him and if they refuse, the punishment is even more justified.



DEUTERONOMY 22

Cross-Dressing

22:5 is a pretty straightforward verse on God's design and distinction of men and women. Cross-dressing is not supported here. However, this is a hot-topic these days so I will say a few other things that I've read about this verse.

Old Testament professor, Jason DeRouchie, says that even (*cont'd*)

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though, this law is part of the Mosaic Law, of which we are no longer under, we don't just throw the law away; it still provides theological significant information.

Grudem quotes DeRouchie in his book Christian Ethics and says *"blurring the distinctions between men and women in society undermines the ability of men and women to rightly reflect the nature of God."*

Both the Old and New Testaments use the analogy of God and his bride (the church) which requires a male and female component for both similarity and diversity.

"Gender identity and gender expression is about God's glory and about maintaining the God-created distinctions on earth that in turn point to the ultimate distinction between God and his bride."

What is also notable is that this verse is not meant to dictate in specifics what type of dress/clothing males and females wear. Clothing and hair styles change over time but the idea and meaning of this verse is still clear.

Gender confusion mars our ability to reflect God's nature properly and he has instructed gender difference for this purpose.

DEUTERONOMY 24

Divorce

This is the only Old Testament law concerning divorce.

In Wayne Grudem's Christian Ethics book he points out that several Old Testament passages assume divorces were going to occur *"indicating that, even if God did not command divorce in any specific circumstances, he tolerated it and to some degree regulated it."*

This is law that was also part of the Mosaic covenant that no longer applies to us. To know what we are to think about divorce now we need to look at the New Testament.

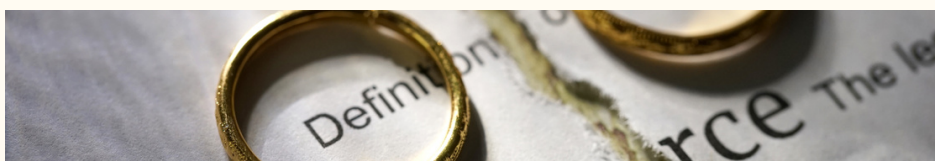
The two reasons given in the New Testament for divorce are adultery (Mt 19:3-9; 5:32; Mk 10:11-12) and desertion (1 Cor 7:10-15).

There are differences in how churches decide to handle divorce in situations of abuse and disagreements on what these Bible passages allow.

It would appear that Grudem sympathizes and understands that measures should be taken to protect the person and separate them from harm, however, he would be hesitant to conclude that Scripture condones divorce for this purpose.

He proposes that physical abuse in marriage would have been happening during that time and neither Paul nor Jesus addresses it in terms of marriage. If abuse 'breaks the marriage covenant' Scripture does not indicate this being a valid reason for divorce either. It would raise the question about what other actions would 'break the covenant' and thus be grounds for divorce.

I struggle with how to think about all of this. I think it's hard to agree with the strictness of Grudem, but at the same time I recognize that the sacredness of marriage is consistently being downplayed and eliminated in today's culture and I, no doubt, have been influenced by that. God holds marriage in such high regard and especially in America it is not treated with the weightiness and seriousness it deserves. (cont'd)



(cont'd) I want to uphold the holiness of the marriage institution but I also believe God would provide means for people in abusive situations to escape and to be able to make a new life.

Perhaps if we treated marriage with more seriousness when we first enter into the covenant, knowing we are making a lifelong commitment, it may solve some of the problems of divorce.

Of course, there are many unforeseen circumstances that arise and for those we must look at God's Word, pray fervently, and handle them the way we feel God intends. I don't think any two scenarios are the same.

DEUTERONOMY 28-30

Blessings and Curses

The curses here foreshadow the ways the Israelites will disobey in the rest of the Old Testament and we see their punishments when they are defeated in battle and end up exiled from their land.

We see over and over again, sin has consequences. Not all suffering we experience can be traced back to our own sin, as we see in Job, but sometimes it does. And we can't see we weren't warned or that we did not know. The law helps us know what pleases the Lord and what angers him.

When we strive to obey him, we will inevitably experience many blessings.

We should heed these words in 30:19-20: *"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days..."*

DEUTERONOMY 31-32

We Need a Savior

Israel, God's chosen people, rescued by God from Egypt, witness to many miracles and wonders, given personally the law of God, warned of the consequences of sin and the temptation and severity of idolatry, still disobeyed. Still sinned. They needed a Savior. We can see from their tragic and cyclically sinful history that no one is immune to the effects and pull of sin.

Moses gave his people an instruction and a song as a witness to them. God commanded this of Moses because the Israelites *"will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them."* It would be an awkward song to learn, but is a good reminder to us to keep God's Word in the forefront of our minds! We should strive to read his Word regularly lest we stray from him.