

Day 62; The Laws of Moses (Cont'd)

VI. Health and Dietary Laws

In an era before the advance of medical science, regulations are put in the place for the quarantining of diseases deemed to be infectious. In a close-knit community such as Israel, health is important, and although the isolation seems draconian, there are some far-sighted measures taken to preserve the well-being of the nation.

1. Skin Diseases, including Leprosy Lev.13.1- 59; Lev.14.33-57; Deut.24.8,9

The skin diseases covered in this long section of Scripture include, but are not solely about leprosy. The regulations concern diseases in the skin, which need to be checked out. There are detailed investigative processes to be gone through by the priest (acting in his role as judge), to see whether the sores and boils erupting are to be deemed as contagious or not.

Even today, a strong debate goes on concerning whether leprosy is contagious or not. However, there is a credible body of opinion that shows that leprosy is contained or lessened when the sufferers are isolated.

Lev.13. 45-46 Lays down that those with infectious diseases must be isolated, must tear their clothes (a sign of mourning), not care for their appearance, cover their mouth and call out when they approach, *Unclean, unclean*. (Heb. **טָמֵא טָמֵא** *Tam-e', tam-e'*). They are also required to live away from the camp. Subsequently, lepers formed themselves into colonies for mutual help- hence the ten lepers coming together to Jesus to be healed.

Lev.13.47 – 59 deals with mildew in clothing, which could be a health hazard. Lev. 14.33-53 deals with rot in houses, which may need particular remedial attention, even to the extent of demolition in serious cases!

Deut.24.9 A warning reminder is given to the Israelites about the need to deal thoroughly with such infections, remembering how terrible it was that Miriam was temporarily struck with a skin condition in judgment for her rebellion.

2. Discharges Lev. 15.1- 27, 32 &33.

Distinctions are made between secretions and emissions which the body normally gives out in the course of life, and those which may be signs of disease. Thus anyone with such an abnormal discharge was ritually unclean, and needed to separate from the camp until their recovery. Also, items and objects they have been in contact with are also taboo.

Lev.15.16-24. However, in the case of any emission of semen, either during or outwith sexual intercourse, ritual uncleanness lasts only for a day, and a bath must be taken.

Similarly, when a woman has her monthly period, she is ritually unclean for seven days, as are the objects connected with her during that time. But in both these cases, there is no requirement to leave the camp.

3. Isolation

Num.5.1-4, Lev.15.31 As mentioned, the infected are to be quarantined outwith the camp, to preserve the ritual cleanliness of the people. The main concern is that they live in right relation to the unimaginably potent presence of the planet's Creator who is camping with them in the middle of their tented nation.

Day 63 The Laws of Moses (Cont'd)

B. Dietary Regulations

The Jewish way of eating, known today as 'kosher' or 'kashrut' from the Hebrew word *kasher* (Heb קָשָׁר) has become legendary throughout the world. Bagels, gefilte fish, matzah crackers, blinis, all have their links with the Jewish kitchen.

But this is more than a tradition; the kosher cook is following a law laid down in Torah, where Israel is called to make a distinction between clean (Heb טָהוֹר *tahor*) and unclean (Heb טָמֵא *tam-e*) meat, between what may be considered edible and what inedible.

It's widely known that Jews do not eat pork, but other rules are given across the spectrum on what may and may not be eaten. The emphasis is on what may be eaten safely, especially in a situation where food may be hard to find at times.

1. Clean and Unclean Creatures

Lev.11.1- 47; (mirrored in Deut.14.3-20)

There is a basic rule about land animals – animals which chew cud and have a split hoof are edible for the Jews. Cattle, sheep and goats are therefore OK. But the camel is not, nor are rodents. The full list is found in the reading given.

When it comes to fish, anything that doesn't have fins and scales is forbidden; this particularly excludes shellfish and crustaceans such as crab and lobster. Given that many shellfish are easily contaminated, this is a helpful guide to health.

Insects and reptiles are off the menu, except, strangely for us, locusts, crickets and grasshoppers.

The carcasses of unclean animals are also deemed unclean and are not to be touched, and anything these creatures touch is to be regarded as impure also.

2. Dead Animals Lev.11.39-40, Deut 14.21a

Dead animal carcasses are unclean, and handling them entails ritual separation and washing for a time. Nothing is to be eaten which is found already dead, though this may be sold to foreigners.

3. Killed Animals Lev.17.15-16; Ex.22.31

Eating the leftovers of animals killed by other animals is forbidden, or eating what is found dead, is taboo. It can be given to the dogs, themselves considered unclean animals in Jewish culture.

4. Blood and Fat

Lev.17.10-14 (mirrored in 7.26-27;19.26a;Deut 12.16 & 23-25)

The eating or drinking of blood is forbidden, for blood is the sign of life, as well as of atonement, of sacrifice, and is God's. Many of the nations around Israel saw the eating and drinking of blood as the acquisition of the powers of the creature whose blood was taken. Thus, Israel is marked out from pagan practices by giving God the blood of their sacrifices, and abstaining from all blood in food. This is one of the laws which was continued for the Christian believers in Acts 15, but only inasmuch as it is implicated in pagan worship. This is also why eating meat offered to idols was such a hot issue in the early church, as in 1 Cor.10.14ff.

Lev.7.22-25 The fat of animals was forbidden to eat, since it all belonged to the Lord. The fat of animals found dead could be used for other purposes, but not eaten. Particularly taboo was to be the fat of meat offerings made to the Lord.

5. Meat and Milk

Ex.23.19b, 34.26b, Deut 14.21b

In Orthodox Jewish households up to today, much is made of keeping milk and meat separate. Most Jews will not served milk and meat products at the same meal, and in the kitchen, there will be two sets of cooking tools, pots and pans, one called *fleissig*, from the Yiddish word for meat, and the other, *milchig*, for the Yiddish word for milk. Jewish restaurants will also offer non-dairy creamer for coffee after a meal containing meat products.

This separation comes from the law on not boiling a young kid in its mother's milk, a law repeated three times in the Torah. It has passed into Jewish tradition as a whole way of keeping house with milk and meat kept apart.

Day 64 The Laws of Moses (Cont'd)

VII General Welfare Laws

A. Requirements for Benevolence

The Lord ensures the poor are cared for in Israel; when they come into the promised land, the Israelites are not clear the harvest to exhaustion, but they are to leave the offcuts of the grain for the needy, so that they can be gleaned. We find this being put into practice, when Ruth goes out into the fields in Bethlehem in Ruth 2.

1. Gleaning Lev.19.9-10 (m.23.22), Deut 24.19-22

As well as grainfields, olive trees and vineyards are included in the agreement God has with Israel to provide for the stranger, the widow and the fatherless (Heb יָתוֹם *yatom*, from a root meaning to be alone, bereft.) They themselves know what it is to be

dependent, enslaved in poverty, and they must show God's heart of compassion to the destitute in their midst.

2. Care for Poor Lev.25.35-38

Again, because they were themselves set free from slavery, the Israelites are to care for fellow Jews who become poor (Heb. וְכִי־יָמוּךְ *ve-khi yamukh*, literally, if (anyone) grows thin, is malnourished.) or who are fallen on hard times. They are not to be charged high interest (Heb. מַרְבִּית *mar-biyt*, meaning increase or excess) on loans (*unlike the poor of the UK who borrow in hard times!*)

B. Duties of Respect and Support

1. Parents

Because God has ordained parents to work with Him in the procreation (i.e. creating on behalf of God) of the human race, through the wonderful process of childbirth, parents are to be honoured as the vehicles of our being. But knowing how the darkness drives us to selfish independence, God commands Israel to honour their parents.

Deut. 5.16 The command is to *honour* (Heb. כָּבֵד *ke-bhed*) father (Heb. אָב *abh* – incidentally the first word in a Hebrew dictionary, being made up of *aleph* and *bet/bhet*, the first letters of the Hebrew alphabet) and mother (Heb. אִם *em*).

It is worth noting here that the word is *honour*; the Hebrew word comes from a root *kabhad* (Heb. כָּבַד) meaning 'to weigh, be heavy'. In fact, it is the very same word translated into English as 'glorify' when spoken of God, and indicates giving a weight to or not treating lightly. So in the same way we give God glory, we are to glorify our parents – in God's eyes, there is no difference, since they participate with Him in the origin of our being.

It may also be of help to note that the word used is 'honour', not 'obey'. The Hebrew translated into English as obey is the word to 'listen to' or 'to hear', and in fact appears for the first time used as listening to a parent in Genesis 27, when Rebekah, mother of Jacob and Esau, urges her younger son to listen to her voice and deceive his father. Not a good example!

In the case of minors, who are in the process of being brought up, obedience is necessary. But when a child becomes an adult, the greatest sign of a parent's success is that the son or daughter can make wise choices for themselves. Unfortunately, the mistranslation of the word *honour* as *obey* here means that many parents have sought to control and govern their adult children long beyond the years of childhood.

However, the command to *glorify* parents applies to our whole lifetime. We are always to look for ways of speaking well of and being grateful to those whose genes we bear, and who gave us life on God's behalf.

Lev 19.3a The call here is to *fear, be in awe of* parents, again, as we are before God.

Lev.20.9, Ex 21.17 The cursing of parents was seen as a capital offence.

Deut 21.18-21 There is provision in the law for parents to take extreme action against a rebellious son – the male child is specified in particular. This is in the case where the son has gone into alcohol and debauchery, and is not ‘listening to’ the voice of his parents. It is hard to imagine a parent taking this harsh action, but if they so decide, the parents can have the son charged with rebellion before the elders, and if he is judged to be guilty, he will be stoned to death.

2. The Elderly Lev 19.32

This command is to stand up before the silver-haired and to favour (Heb. **הָדָר** *hadar*, literally, swell up, be proud of) the old person. They carry a lifetime of experience and are to be honoured.

3. Widows and Orphans Ex.22.22-24

God personally defends widows and orphans; let him who chooses to oppress them beware of God !

4. Foreigners Ex.22.21, 23.9, Lev.19;33-34, Lev.24.22

The word used in all these Scriptures for foreigner or stranger is *ger* (Heb. **גֵּר**) meaning one who turns off the road, a guest or stranger seeking shelter. Because the Jews were originally immigrants into Egypt, the guest and stranger among Israel is to be treated well as a sign of honour to God.

5. Disabled. Lev.19.14

God cares for the disabled, and commands that no one is to obstruct them.

6. Neighbours Lev.19.16 – 18

In this law concerning care for the neighbour is found the second half of the injunction Jesus sees as the summing up of the whole law; love your neighbour as yourself.

Deut.22.1-4 They are to be afforded help to recover stray livestock or lost items.

Deut. 5.21 The commandments forbid lust for possession of someone else’s goods, livestock, servants or spouse.

C. Treatment of Animals

Deut 25.4 There is a humane attitude towards animals working to serve us. The ox is not to be stopped from helping himself while threshing the harvest.

Deut 22.6,7 Mother birds are to be left to produce more young when the young are taken for food.

VIII. Rules of Warfare

A. Preparation for Battle

Deut 20.1 – 4 The priest is to encourage the army before battle.

5 – 9 Only those who will fight with single-mindedness are to be included.

B. Rules of Siege

Deut 20.10-15 In terms of cities attacked where they lie outside the promised land, if they surrender in peace, they may be spared and tribute charged. However, if they resist and are conquered, although the men are to be liquidated, women and children may be spared and taken as spoils of war.

16-18 However, when it comes to the cities of the Canaanites, they are designated as *forfeit* to God (Heb. **כֶּרֶם** *cherem* – meaning completely given to the Lord. – Greek LXX has **ἀνάθεμα** *anathema* here for this word. No one may take them as spoils, they are for destruction.) This is because of their abominable practices.

19-20 In a siege, fruit trees are not to be used for siegeworks, because they may serve as food.

C. Camp Regulations

Deut 23.9 The battle-camp of the Israelites is to be ritually pure , even when they are on a war footing.

Deut 23.10,11 However, those men unclean from emissions only have to stay out during daylight so that they are safe from enemy attack which could happen when they are isolated.

12 – 14 Latrines are to be dug and covered hygienically.

Day 65 The Laws of Moses (Conc'd)

IX. Responsibilities Under the Laws

A. Obedience enjoined Lev.22.31-33

Because they are a holy, a wedded people to the Lord, the law is how such a people live. They are not to profane (Heb. **חָלַל** *Chalal*, literally to wound) His name, but to keep it holy – that is, unalloyed, unique among them.

Deut.12.32 The law is not to be changed.

B. Duty to Pass On

Num 15.37-41 (m Deut 22.12) On the edge of the Jewish prayer shawl which is worn by observant Jews, known as the *Tallit*, is a fringe of tassels of remembrance, the tallit itself being woven with blue. This is a reminder of the law for them.

Deut. 31.9-13 Every Sabbath year, the seventh, at the time of the feast of *Sukkot*, at harvest time, the whole community is to come together and read the whole Law at one sitting. Reading of Law required at Tabernacles.

C. Blessings of Obedience

Lev.26.3-13 Blessings enumerated

This is such a picture of wellbeing, expressing God's heart to be with His people, that they should be the sign-people of His presence. Just as He has provided for them in the desert, so they will be fruitful in the land. There is a hope in God's heart as He

anticipates camping, having His Tent among them, walking again with them – He will love with them, as He did with man at the beginning.

Lev. 26.14- 39 Punishments enumerated

If they will not follow the Lord, the consequences will be terrible, and they will experience the *Vengeance of the covenant* (Heb. נִקְמַת-בְּרִית *naqam-berit*), (v.25) the penalties for breaking the solemn promise made with God.

v.29 The most terrible of consequences, the cannibalizing of children will attend the disobedience of Israel. It is hard to imagine a more fearsome set of circumstances than those spelled out here to Israel.

v.33,34 Exile will be the end result, in order to set the land free from the unholiness of the people upon it.

40 – 42 Effects of Repentance

But there will always be a place for coming back, on confession and turning away, because of the Lord's nature to forgive, and because of His unbreakable promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (v42.)

43-45 Concern in captivity

The promise is that, evening when they are in exile, God will not forget his covenant to them, for He cannot turn His back on His own promise.

E. Conclusion

Lev. 26.46 It's important to remember that this is not a one-way street, and that God is as bound to the covenant as are His (ultimately wayward) people.

Day 66 Conquering the Land (ca 1400-1100BC)

A generation has passed since the children of Israel first came to Kadesh-Barnea and gave up on God's plan for them. The desert behind them is marked with the graves of what could have been, buried in the mud. All but Joshua and Caleb have died, and Moses is about to die having led them to this moment.

God's purpose in this adventure is the same as it ever was; to overcome the darkness which has been admitted into His good creation, and to restore mankind to close relationship with Himself. The settling of the Promised Land will be the clearing of a space for the sign-nation, the sacramental people, to become a demonstration of a human society living by the light of the Lord's presence and provision. Even so, the dark shards deposited in men and women will lead to heartbreak and judgment again and again, for Israel is like an unruly child resisting the advances of the King of Heaven.

The Renewal of Covenant Dt 26.16-19

Like a bride and groom making vows to each other, the people of Israel and the Lord God are wedded in mutual commitment and relationship to each other. Because of this, the Lord will honour Israel before the whole world, and she will be a people sealed by God.

Blessings and Curses Deut 28.1- 68

- There are terms and conditions to the covenant, as with any commitment. Here the blessings and the curses, the gains and penalties of the relationship are enumerated.
- v.2 There is a promise that of Israel lives in God's provision, the blessing will come and grab them (Heb. נָסַג *nasag*) or overtake them, as the King James has. In other words, with God's closeness comes His touch, His bending down to embrace. There will be fruitfulness (to verse 4) and great prosperity (to verse 14.) They will be the head not the tail (v.13)
- v.15 But then follows the penalties of disobedience and waywardness. We humans have a strange enchantment with darkness, and even as we read this heavy and punitive list of curses, we feel a sense of rebellion rising up within us. 'How could God do this to these poor people? How could He be prepared to crush them?' This just reveals the darkness in our own hearts, that we still favour our way over God's way. The question we perhaps need to ask is, 'with such promises of blessing coming to get them, why would anyone choose the stupid path of disobedience?' There is no answer to that question that justifies the choice to rebel.

The Law, we know, is a schoolmaster to rule us and bring us to Christ. But the best way to find blessing is listen to the Lord's voice.

The curses include unfruitfulness (to v.19) plagues (to v.24), oppression (to v.35), ruin (to v.46) loss of liberty and wholesale captivity (to v.57) and eventual dispersion and loss of national identity.(to v.68.) The picture painted is of utter desolation and dehumanization if man chooses evil again.

How God has kept covenant Dt 29.2-9

God rehearses to them the ways in which He has shown His good faith to keep the covenant to them; their clothes and shoes have not worn out, and they have had divine provision every day. Interestingly, they have not had alcohol during that time, *that you might know that I am the Lord your God* – God has kept them safe from harm and oblivion.

Covenant is perpetual Dt. 29.10-15

The covenant is made not only with the people who stand with Moses on that day, but for the generations to come. No one is left out.

Warning against Forsaking 16-29

The warnings against faithfulness are as graphic as possible. When people ask why such destruction has come about upon a people wedded to the Lord, the answer will come that it is because they have forsaken the covenant, (v.25) which is the only reason they are where they are.

Forgiveness for Repentance 30.1-10

Because the Lord is a God of compassion and favour, forgiving sin, if they acknowledge Him and turn away from their evil, He will restore what they have lost, because He is not a covenant-breaker. He will always find a way back. He can change the heart (v.6) and restore the blessings lost through rebellion.

Covenant not too Difficult 30.11-14

It is all too easy for us to say, 'this is impossible.' But God encourages the people, saying that this is reality, it's not 'pie in the sky'; it comes out of relationship with Him, essentially, because the word of blessing is so near, it is in their mouth and their heart, (v.14) it's not an external thing. (Unfortunately it later became an external conformity without heartfelt commitment.)

Life and Death in Covenant 15-20

God gives Israel the same choice He gave Adam and Eve at the beginning – life or death.(v.15) Not a difficult choice?

God urges them, saying, 'therefore choose life' (v.19). What could be simpler?

Summary of Covenant Dt 29.1

Covenant confirmed

Deut 27.1-10 In the ceremony sealing this renewal of the covenant, after they have crossed the Jordan an altar is to be built on Mount Ebal, one of a pair of mountains overlooking the Jordan Valley, along with great stones, plastered over and engraved with the law as a constant memorial of the covenant in the land. They are to hold a feast there.

11-26 The nation is then to divide into two, with Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali tribes standing on Mount Ebal, speaking blessings over the nation, and with Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin climbing the mountain on the opposite side of the valley, Mount Gerizim, and there they are to speak out various curses based on the law, and the people are to speak 'Amen', (Heb. אָמֵן) the Hebrew word for 'so be it.'

Day 67 Transfer of Leadership to Joshua

Moses urges courage Deut 31.1-8

Moses knows his time is at an end, but he is also aware of what happened the last time Israel was on the verge of entering Canaan ; thus in v.6 he tells them to be strong and alert (Heb אָמַץ *amatz*) and not to be in awe of the Canaanites, because God is going before them and will not forsake them.

In v 7,8 Moses encourages Joshua, who will now take on the leadership. Joshua has been prepared, not just in terms of leadership skills, but even more important is the fact that he has shared the intimacy with God which Moses has also pursued with all his heart.

Deut. 31.14,15,23 God Himself commissions Joshua at the Tabernacle, appearing in the cloud and fire which had become so familiar. Moses then repeats the commission to Joshua of v.8.

A Song of Unfaithfulness Deut 31.16- 32.47

There follows one of the most tragic pieces of poetry in the Scripture, Moses' Song of Unfaithfulness – to be transmitted to the coming generations as a witness against them when they go astray from the Lord.

God tells Moses that after he is dead, the people will turn away from the Lord and practice idolatry. God will not allow this to go without consequences, and Moses is to write the song as a permanent witness to them.

Just before he sings the song, Moses has the whole scroll of the law put in the ark of the covenant, then he gathers the elders of Israel to sing the terrible song.

The Song of Unfaithfulness of Deut 32 is a beautiful piece of Hebrew poetry. It does not use rhyme, but rather a symmetry of thought, each concept being balanced by a second in the verse.

Some of the language in this chapter is very tender – God is their father (v6) and like an eagle teaches her young to fly, so God has taken them forward in a loving way (v11,12)

But Israel grows complacent and fat; in v.15 Israel is referred to as Jeshurun (Heb יֵשׁוּרִין *Yeshurun*), the Upright, the Straight one – this upright one has become obese, God says. They have offered sacrifices to devils (Heb שְׂדֵימִים *shedim*, literally, to shades, malignant spirits) and not to God (v.17) . This is noteworthy, because it introduces to us the concept of idols being linked to demonic activity.

v.22. Terrible judgment awaits the nation because of her spiritual adultery. Here is a reference to the underworld, to *Sheol* (Heb שְׂאֵל) the first time in Scripture. Sheol is the place of the dead in Hebrew cosmology. It is presented as a low place, compared to the upper places of the earth and the high places of the mountains.

v.27 The reason God will not totally destroy them is so that their enemies cannot say we are greater than the God whom they serve.

The song continues in like vein, the Lord promising that He will triumph over evil ultimately, and there will be vengeance.(v.43)

The defence against this unfaithfulness is found in v.46 at the end of Moses' speaking. They are to set their hearts on what God has spoken, and keep themselves pure from the idolatry which has been spoken of in this song at the end of Moses' rehearsal of the law to the new generation.

Day 68 Moses Blesses the Tribes

Deut 32.48-52 (mirrored in Num 27.12-14)

The Lord calls Moses to go up Mount Nebo (see Day 46, the view from Pisgah, which gives an idea of what Moses saw.)

Here he will die, because of his failure to keep God's name unique, taking on himself an action which God had not sanctioned. Before his death, Moses blesses the tribes who are being readied to enter the land.

Deut.33.1 – 29

v.5 The Lord is acknowledged as King over Israel (here called Jeshurun, the upright one.)

Moses goes on to bless each of the tribes by name.

v.8 The Urim and Thummim were the objects used to cast lots to discern the divine will, which are a symbol of Levi's priesthood.

v.9 refers to the tribe of Levi's zeal in destroying those who would not listen to the Lord at Meribah; the covenant was more important to them than the lives of their relatives.

v.13 Because Levi is included in this list of blessing, the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph's sons are included under one blessing as the tribe of Joseph.

Overall, this is a wonderful poetic praise of the Lord ; consider v.26 – the image of the Lord riding the skies as his chariot, and in v.27 the comforting image of God's arms being underneath His people to carry them – the everlasting arms.

Moses death and burial and eulogy (c1406BC)

Deut 34.1- 12

Moses dies alone, up on Mount Nebo, having seen the land from north to south, the land which was promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It has been an incredible journey, which finishes on the threshold of Canaan for Moses.

v.6 There is no tomb of Moses to be found anywhere; we are told that he died in Moab, east of Jordan, and that God Himself buried him near Beth-Peor at the age of one hundred and twenty, still clear of eye and full of strength.

v.8 As the people weep over Moses, they are weeping over the whole generation that has been left in the desert, such a sad remnant.

v.9 But Joshua has been trained and is ready to lead Israel into their great inheritance and their most awesome test as a nation.

v.10ff The chapter ends with a eulogy to Moses, of whom it is said that he is without peer among the prophets, having communed with God face to face, in a way no other had before.