



MONDAY 28 AUGUST 2017

SERIES: DEUTERONOMY – CHOOSE LIFE

Read: Deuteronomy 19:1-14 & Proverbs 17:15

Plug In...

Someone 'accused' of a death crime can flee to these cities. The place is not just a refuge, but a place which allows justice to occur. They provide a barrier to raw vengeance from someone hurt by the death of a person.

While a murderer will be brought to justice, innocent blood will defile the Land. The community together must set up their system of justice so as they do not condemn an innocent person.

Defiling the Land interrupts the relationship God has with His people. Stealing land from a person does the same. In the Land, a person relishes God and His blessing. To kill an innocent person, or fudge a fence line, strips a person of their freedom to experience God and His benefits.

Chew It Over...

We have a law in Australia called *Presumption of Innocence*. Known popularly as 'innocent until proven guilty'. In an Australian court of law, the burden of proof always rests on the accuser, not the accused. A jury will not convict the person unless the proof is clear.

As you reflect on God's values for Israel's judiciary system, do you think this Australian law is just?

Prayer Suggestion

Ask Jesus how you can have a heart where justice is not inverted. Ask that we do this in interpersonal relationships, not just rely on criminal law.



TUESDAY 29 AUGUST 2017

SERIES: DEUTERONOMY – CHOOSE LIFE

Read: Deuteronomy 19:15-21 & I Kings 3:1-9

Plug In...

This is fierce punishment. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. This proportional retribution is for two purposes:

- (1) Verse 20 – As a deterrent. That others hear of it and avoid these evils.
- (2) Verse 21 – To safeguard against some being too lenient in their punishment. They are to “show no pity”.

This punishment is known as the *lex talionis*. Here the case concerns someone deliberately misleading the court. If guilty, then *lex talionis*. And, there is to be no commuting of the sentence. Only three crimes within Israel have punishments that cannot be softened: deliberate murder ([Numbers 35:31](#)), idolatry ([Deuteronomy 13:8](#)), and false testimony in court ([Deuteronomy 19:19-21](#)).

Some crimes within Israel have to be publicised as extremely serious, and punished in a manner that promotes deterrence.

Chew It Over...

You may be aware there is hot debate over Australia’s justice system. Should it be retributive or rehabilitative. Retributive means someone gets their just desserts. Rehabilitative has the goal of reforming a criminal so they can re-enter society as a well-behaved citizen.

[NB: This issue is not just at the criminal level, we discuss this all the time in parenting methodology, or discipline within the school system.]

While secular government is not called to model their system on Israel, we as democratic citizens do want to bring good, wise principles to bear in so far as we have a say (indirectly through a vote) or more directly should we become legislators.

In which direction do the goals of the *lex talionis* lean: retributive or rehabilitation?

With the *lex talionis*, what is being affirmed about the victim?

Do you think there is warrant for creating punishments that aim to achieve both retribution and rehabilitation? Does this passage provide you with any principle on what is the more important goal in such a mix, or how to order priorities?

One last question. The *lex talionis* assumes clarity in a case. How does our law of “beyond reasonable doubt” mesh with such a punishment?

Prayer Suggestion

Given we are all required to make these judgement calls in some sphere of life where we find ourselves as leader, pray the prayer of Solomon today for like him we know we don't have the clarity to get these calls absolutely right. [[1 Kings 3:1-9.](#)]



WEDNESDAY 30 AUGUST 2017

SERIES: DEUTERONOMY – CHOOSE LIFE

Read: Deuteronomy 20:1-20 & Matthew 10

Plug In...

There are two focuses here regarding when Israel is involved in war. First, the battles protect and expand the Promised Land. [NB: the battles result from Israel having enemies. Israel can't just roll out the military and expand. They expand only as a result of enemies trying to attack them. Any battle must have God's sanction. Something Israel is reminded of as the priests address the military – vv.1-4.] The Promised Land is a land of freedom and prosperity, so to go off to war without having a successful vineyard to come back to defeats the point of the battle. Likewise, having a house uncompleted, or to get married and never start a family.

Second, the rules of engagement for battles are to avoid innocent blood being shed. This theme runs through chapters 19-21. Innocent bloodshed, murder, defiles the Land. Any expansion of the Promised Land still must protect the integrity of what this Land is about – the location where a holy people dwell with a Holy God in freedom and life.

Our modern ears recoil at statements like 'taking women and children as plunder'. Yet, in this scenario we see God concerned for women and children. If the elders of the city do not accept the terms of peace (v.10), they leave their women and children vulnerable, for the LORD will hand the city over to Israel (v.13). Essentially, the elders of that city abdicate responsibility to protect the women and children. The women and children are at high-risk of unnecessary death. However, God's people will not leave them to perish, but will ask them to join their family.

Chew It Over...

During the church age we are not engaging in military battles like Israel, but it is none-the-less a battle. We offer terms of peace by sharing the gospel. We pray and hope they accept. But should they not, we metaphorically kick the dust off our feet ([Mathew 10:14](#)). We are leaving them to the consequences of their own decision.

Jesus said His message and call for allegiance will split up families ([Matthew 10:34-39](#)). Often there will be vulnerable people caught because one member of the family's decision affects them negatively. Think of a spouse or parent refusing another member of the family to associate with a Christian, or go to church, etc. There is much pain and angst for these people, who want to join the Christian family, but their immediate family hang them out for it.

Look out for how you can give even a cup of water to the one that is caught in the midst of this spiritual battle ([Matthew 10:42](#)).

Prayer Suggestion

Ask the Lord to make you sensitive to what costs and needs come for some people as they begin to follow Christ. Ask Jesus to motivate you to be a genuine arm around the shoulder as they take these steps.



THURSDAY 31 AUGUST 2017

SERIES: DEUTERONOMY – CHOOSE LIFE

Read: Deuteronomy 21:1-9

Plug In...

The Land in Israel is the place where the relationship with God is experienced and enjoyed. There is a graphic picture of a man dead on the ground in a field. The soil of the land should be ready for producing fruit, crops, life! Here, it's stained with blood. It illustrates the defilement. Notice the phrase describing the field where the murder victim lies: "In the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess". This is serious. There is the corpse of a *murdered* man in the land in which the LORD dwells.

Chew It Over...

Did you notice that the priests prayed after the bizarre ritual (a ritual which shows that murder must be punished, but that the priests – and the city – are not personally guilty). They pray not just for their city, but all of Israel. They pray to God for forgiveness, not on the basis of Israel deserving it, but on the fact that God redeemed them (v.8).

How might this inform praying for one another? We may only think that the one who needs forgiveness is the one that should request God to forgive. Do you intercede and ask God to forgive others? You too can initiate the appeal for God to forgive.

Prayer Suggestion

Ask that God will forgive those upon your heart today. Appeal to God, on the grounds of who He is and what He promises, to initiate forgiveness. Intercede.



FRIDAY 1 SEPTEMBER 2017

SERIES: DEUTERONOMY – CHOOSE LIFE

Read: Deuteronomy 21:10-17 & Matthew 19:1-12

Plug In...

The situation again is in the context of an enemy striking against Israel and they have to go to war. The LORD will hand Israel victory. Those remaining will be prisoners to Israel. This doesn't necessarily mean they are slaves or imprisoned, only that they are subject to Israel's rule. This rule allows marriage to a foreigner. The compressed language makes it sound as though the woman has no say in this marriage. On the contrary, the women choose to respond to the man's request. They do that by changing their clothes and style. The clothes symbolise relinquishment of pagan practices and also the mourning of their family. The woman chooses if they want to marry or not. The marriage doesn't take place unless the woman is willing to do that. This is reinforced by v.14. Should a divorce take place, then the woman has rights, particularly the phrase "let her go where she *desires*". This is the word that had been used of the man earlier (v.11 "if you see a woman you *desire*"). The woman is not property, cannot be raped or exploited. She must willingly enter into the marriage. And in the event of divorce, it is recognised that the whole marriage-divorce has affected her life drastically (v.14).

[NB: Regarding polygamy issues in verses 15-17. First, it implicitly shows it is fraught with messiness. Second, we should always watch to see if laws are initiating practices, or imposing a limit upon a practice already occurring. The limit does not equate with wholesale approval.]

Chew It Over...

It is easy to get the impression that some laws in the Old Testament are there to show the best and ideal behaviour. Rather, many laws speak into existing situations and say

behaviour cannot drop below this standard. There is often a gap between the law and the higher ideal. God delivers laws for Israel within the context of war. The context shows women and children are regularly the ones left high-and-dry. The war is not ideal. But in this context, behaviour should not drop below the said standard.

Think of the commandment “do not murder”. Behaviour should not drop below this, but there is a gap between the law and the ideal which is doing whatever to preserve and enhance the life of another.

Reflect on Jesus’ thinking on what law allows and what is the ideal to shoot for:

[Matthew 19:1-12.](#)

Prayer Suggestion

Pray that Jesus will use His Spirit in your life to throw everything at being like Jesus. Ask that He will expose where we have to settle for a low-level righteousness. May we be more generous, more loving of our neighbour than we ever have been.



The Lakes

WEEKEND 2-3 SEPTEMBER 2017

SERIES: DEUTERONOMY – CHOOSE LIFE

Read: Deuteronomy 21:18-22 & Galatians 3:10-14

Plug In...

Some sin-crimes in Israel were punishable by death. Crimes that grossly threatened the relationship Israel had with God. So, the 'purging' was to be done to allow the relationship with God to continue.

Notice the body is hung on a tree or wooden pole after the death. This is not a hanging, or even the method of crucifixion, but a public display that the person is now dead for all to see. Stringing up the body so everybody knows this is the result for such sin. The person is not under a curse because the body got hung on a tree, but was hung on a tree because they are under the curse of God.

Chew It Over...

The worst kind of death in Israel was one where you were formally charged with having disrupted your relationship with God and posed a massive liability to the community. Therefore, you were separated – permanently – from the community.

Some sins in Israel had to be dealt with drastically through capital punishment which publicised the curse of God. However, the law also states that outside of those sins, even if not subject to capital punishment, "Cursed is anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out" ([Deuteronomy 27:26](#)).

Paul came to understand this and explains that is why Jesus deliberately placed Himself on a road to capital punishment. To be formally tried and prosecuted, cut off from His community, cut off from the Land. The curse we all deserved, Christ sucked all of it up into Himself and died. Vivid for all to see is Jesus dead on a wooden pole – cursed by God! Now, we are brought in and included into God's people.

Prayer Suggestion

Consider your sin and deserved punishment and then rejoice that Jesus has redeemed you from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.