

Session 7: Deuteronomy 13-15

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This is Dr. Cynthia Parker and her teaching on the book of Deuteronomy. This is session 7, Deuteronomy 13 - 15.

Review and Introduction

In the previous lecture, we talked about Deuteronomy 12. We covered a little bit of the history of scholarship. So, how people have gone through and have studied the Pentateuch, and how many of those innovations came out of studying Deuteronomy 12? But we also moved on and talked about what some of the techniques might be for establishing a chosen place -- one singular place where the people come to worship.

We talked about the importance of building a nationality. The fact that we're trying to build unity across-the-board among all of the Israelites. So, we are going to continue that theme of how do you build a nation? How do you make people cohesive? And we're going to do that as we continue to dive into the law code. So, what is going on with this law code? How are they explaining these laws, and how do they apply to these people in this very real land? So, a couple of concepts we need to be thinking about as we start to engage Deuteronomy 13 - 15. And actually, we will pull these over into some of the other chapters as well.

Building a National Identity: "You" Singular / "You" Collective

So, first of all, we want to look at the moral and ethical responsibility of individuals as well as the community. So, Deuteronomy, as we've mentioned, even in the language that Deuteronomy uses, there is the "you" singular person,

and then there's the "you" collective body person, and people community. So, the community is cohesive as one, just as you as an individual are one. And so in Deuteronomy, talking about the ethical responsibilities of people, it is both the individual and also the community. And so, we'll see how those tend to play on each other.

From Journeying to Arrival – Receiving the Land as a Gift

We're also looking at when the people entered the land for the first time. They won't anymore be journeying towards something. So previously, as we've been reading the Pentateuch coming up to Deuteronomy and we've seen it even in the first few chapters of Deuteronomy. There has been a looking forward to a journeying towards, a making movement towards this land that God said that he was going to give to his people. But now, as we engage the law code, we're seeing that these are the actions for when they have arrived. And when they've arrived, the task is no longer can we successfully journey there, but can we successfully take care of this gift that has been given to us? So, the shift becomes the responsibility of receiving a gift. So, yes, it is a gift that is freely given, but it requires and demands that individuals and the community make an investment in it.

Brothers and Belonging

So, one of the other things that we're going to see is how the book of Deuteronomy calls the Israelites brothers. This is all going back to trying to create cohesiveness among the people. And we will see this idea that will come up in, especially, chapter 15 when we get to Deuteronomy 15. But this idea of brotherhood is used more often than any of the names of the tribes or even identifying these tribal identities. It's a more cohesive brotherhood, regardless of which tribe you are from.

We are also going to find that Deuteronomy talks quite a bit about belonging. So they do receive this land as a gift. But there's something about becoming rooted in place, and that takes a certain amount of investment and purposeful behavior. And then the people belong not only to each other as a community, but then they belong to the land.

Possessing and Dwelling in the Land

So, this concept of belonging, and we can even say the land belongs to the Israelites. This is going to pull up two different verbs for us, two different Hebrew verbs. The first one is *yerash*, "to possess." Now this would be like the legal right of someone to own something. It often has something to do with a father who passes down an inheritance for his son to possess. So, it's the legal right of ownership.

And in Deuteronomy, it talks about how God is giving the Israelites the right to possess the land. But it also talks about how the Israelites are required to dwell, *yeshav*, and to dwell in the land of the different type of possession or belonging. So, when you dwell, there's a proactive sense that they are working towards residing in this land. It is the continuation of living well to establish a fulfilled human existence. It's looking far into the distance in the future. So this type of dwelling well. So, we're to possess legal ownership, but you can possess a place and not dwell well in it.

Deuteronomy is very concerned that when the Israelites go in to possess the land, the flip concept of that is dispossessing another people group, that Israelites go in they possess the land. That's not enough. They need to also dwell and dwell in such a way that it develops a very human, beautiful, fulfilled community life.

Deuteronomy 13 – Dealing with False Prophets

So, let's get into Deuteronomy 13. So, this is a little bit of a problematic chapter. When you read it, it sounds quite uncomfortable. So, we have the chapter, which is divided into three different segments of people. So first, we're going to find this addressing prophets, false prophets in particular. And then it will address brothers and friends, so intimate people you are intimately acquainted with. And then it is going to address people who go into cities and persuade whole cities. So, let's take a look at this and start thinking about what this chapter might mean.

So, Deuteronomy 13. I'll start reading in verse 1. "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true concerning which he spoke to you saying, 'Let us go after other gods whom you have not known, and let us serve them.' You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or the dreamer of dreams. For the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul. You shall follow the Lord your God and fear him; you shall keep his commandments, listen to his voice, serve him, and cling to him."

And so far, this sounds okay, right? We don't want false prophets. And we hear the very strong warning we've been hearing. It has now been repeated quite a bit. Do not follow other gods; there is only one God that you follow.

When we get to verse 5, though, this is "When you find a false prophet among you, this is what you should do." Verse five. "But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death because he has counseled rebellion against the Lord your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery to seduce you from the way in which

the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So, you shall purge the evil from among you."

And that's when we kind of cringe a little bit and say O death. Okay. Well, maybe, a false prophet among you, hold on just a little bit, and let's see if there's another pattern that starts to develop throughout this chapter.

Dealing with A Family Member/Intimate Friend Entice Away from the Lord

So now we move on, and we get to verse six, "If your brother or your mother son, or the son or daughter or wife you cherish, or your friend who is as your own soul." So basically, listing people you would be intimately acquainted with, your best friend, a family member. What happens if one of those people entices you away from the Lord? So, if any of those people you're intimately connected to "entice you secretly saying, 'let us go and serve other gods who neither you, nor your fathers have known, of the gods of the people who are around you, near you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other, you shall not yield to him, or listen to him. And your eye shall not pity him, nor shall you spare or conceal him, but you shall surely kill him. Your hand shall be first against him, to put him to death, and afterward the hand of the people. You shall stone him to death because he has sought to seduce you from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of slavery. And then all of Israel will hear and be afraid and will never again do such a wicked thing among you.

Okay, this one's a little harder than the false prophet to swallow because these are intimately connected people to your household. And it says those people who come to you and in secret are trying to steer you away. It is just as bad. It demands just the same punishment that a false prophet demands. So, you kill that person from among you.

City Inhabitants Leading Others After Other Gods

And we go on, and we amplify this just a little bit more in the last section of chapter 13. "If you hear in one of your cities which the Lord your God is giving you to live in anyone saying that some worthless men have gone out from among you and have seduced the inhabitants of the city saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods whom you have not known.' Then you shall investigate and search out and inquire thoroughly. If it is true and the matter established that this abomination has been done among you, you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it and all that is in it and its cattle with the edge of the sword."

Putting Punishment in its Context

Oh, so now we have entire cities that are being destroyed, along with all the goods of the city and the animals of the city. So, all of this may seem really quite harsh, but let's put this within the context of what Deuteronomy is doing. Because when we look at the historical record, and when we look at archaeological finds, and when we look around, we see, we don't actually think the Israelites ever implemented these kinds of laws where they actually were killing their own kids because we know God is against the killing of children, and we don't think that they killed the inhabitants of their own cities. So what is going on here in Deuteronomy?

What if Deuteronomy is trying to establish a nation, a people group, where you can go and they can belong together. They dwell together. And if Deuteronomy is projecting forward, this idea that the place where they are going has the opportunity to be like Eden, to be as good as Eden was, to follow the design that God set up even in the beginning of creation. If that is the goal, then anything, be it a false prophet, be it someone intimately connected to you, or

someone who has turned the minds of an entire city that needs to be eradicated from among your midst.

So, using very strong language, the point becomes very clear that in all things, God wants his people to love him and him only. So, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, where the Lord is the only one and only Lord.

So chapter 13, although making us squirm a little in our seats, it says, whether it is one person trying to entice the city, whether it is someone in the intimacy of your household, whether it is someone who has persuaded an entire city to walk away, as soon as you walk away from God and you start following other gods, you need to eradicate that from among your midst because that is something that is detestable in the sight of God.

Now you could say, and many people talk about why the punishment is so severe. Well, we may not have an exact answer for that, although some people have supposed that this may go or partner with the idea that the Israelites are called the sons of God. So, if Israel is the Son of God, if Israel turns away from God, that punishment is death. And so chapter 13, even talking about the son in your own household, why do you have to kill the son in your own household? Well, the son in your own household represents you as the nation in your relationship with God. So that may be part of the answer.

What we're getting after in chapter 13 is that the Israelites are trying to maintain a community that is unified by a shared narrative. They are motivated to act based on the same identity as God's people.

Deuteronomy 14: Establishing an Identity as God's People

So, building on that, how do you try to establish your identity and remember your identity as God's people? We move on to chapter 14.

So, in chapter 14, we have, in the very beginning, the setting up of what their identity is. In fact, we get two different types of sentences or phrases to explain their identity. So, in Deuteronomy 14:1, it says, "You are the sons of the Lord your God." So again, you are the son of the Lord and so based on that identity and also the phrase in verse 2, "You are a holy people to the Lord, your God. And the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his own possession out of all the people who are on the face of the earth." So, you are God's son, and you have been chosen. So, that's the identity that is established at the beginning of chapter 14, which creates, then, the motivation for the laws of chapter 14.

Food Laws and Identity

Now, we enter into a whole list of "therefore eat in such a way." So, the list is not exactly the same as the list of clean and unclean foods that are given to us in Leviticus. Not all the same animals are listed in either list, but we get the same basic groupings of animals. So, animals that fly in the air, animals that live on the earth, and animals or fish that are in the sea.

So, we see the same type of groupings here in Deuteronomy 14. Interestingly, this chapter is framed, first of all, by this idea that you are not to eat in verse 3, "You shall not eat any detestable thing." Well, this word is the exact same Hebrew word that was found in 13:14 when it tells them to get rid of every abominable or detestable thing that has been done among you. So, we're seeing a continuity of ideas. So, where in chapter 13, it was people and behavior; in chapter 14, choose even the food you eat based on what is detestable or not detestable.

Kosher Food as Unifying Identity

So, food is really quite a powerful symbol. So, the way that you eat can separate you. As you go through the act of choosing, purposely choosing, what

to eat and what to reject, you are solidifying your identity as part of a people group. And you put yourself within a whole group of people who are making the same type of decisions. And especially if you're doing this purity, what is pure, and what is an impure type of designation? It is affirming for you over and over again you are a pure people because God has chosen you. You have been set apart for him, and that shows up even in the way that you choose to eat as an individual in your household but also as a community. So, no matter which Israelite city you're going into, people are eating according to the kosher laws.

Non-Israelite Food

Now, one of the things that I find really interesting is as we go after the list of all the animals, we're still working within this idea of what is kosher and what is not Kosher and what do you do with non-kosher food.

We have this further explanation in verse 21, "You shall not eat anything which dies of itself. You may give it to the alien who is in your town so that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner, for you are a holy people to the Lord your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk."

Okay, so if we leave off the very last part of that verse and say, this is a strange law, if you go out and if there is an animal that has died of its own, you didn't go out and hunt it or kill it or slaughter it. What do you do with that meat? So, again reminding ourselves that this is a people group that is doing subsistence living. So, they're living off of the land. So, any meat available to eat is a valuable commodity. Do you just throw that away? Let it rot in the field? What do you do with this meat?

The Resident Alien (*Ger*) and the Foreigner

And then to allow the Israelites to give it away to the aliens but not to the foreigners. This seems to be a random law. What does that mean? This is when it's helpful for us to do a little bit of a word study. So, we have, in the first part of the verse, the idea is you can give that meat to the *ger*. So a *ger* is sometimes translated as "alien," sometimes "foreigner." These are people who are not necessarily Israelites by ethnicity, but they are foreigners except that they live permanently among you.

Now they may live among you, but most likely, they don't own land, and if you don't own land, then you're not going to rise up to the upper echelon of society. You're not going to have your own farmland that you can use. If you are a *ger*, if you are a foreigner living among the Israelites, most likely you are poor and alienated. So, you are among part of the vulnerable of that society.

This is different than the other word that is used in the same verse. So, *nahreh*, this word means "foreigner, sojourner." It can have lots of different English translations. This is someone who lives permanently in a different country. So, an Egyptian who may have a caravan and is passing through because all of the trade routes go through your land. So, that person probably has their own societal network back at home. They may, because they are traveling and passing through, have a little bit more of an economic advantage, or they may have resources available to them.

So, Deuteronomy, in recognizing you have a *ger* among you, you have a foreigner who most likely is going to be like, the orphan and the widow of the vulnerable in society. So, if you find an animal that has died, just give it to the foreigner, and allow them to eat. Allow them to benefit off of that meat. Or you

can sell it, and you can sell it to someone who is passing through and passing by.

God Feasting with His People

So, the giving away or the selling has more to do with the economic status of the person that is receiving the benefit of that gift.

The very end of chapter 14 provides this really great, "If you are going to the place God has chosen and you live a long way off." It is quite difficult and unpractical, basically, to bring a small animal to bring some doves or goats with you. So, Deuteronomy says, just put that money in your pocket and then go stand before the place that God has chosen, purchase whatever it is that you want to sacrifice, "and then eat there before the Lord your God and celebrate with him." It's one of these great verses, or collection of verses, that shows us how much God wants to feast with his people. There are allowances, yes, so there are certain types of sacrifices you're supposed to bring for different reasons, but the allowance of you may be going from far away. Just coins in your pocket, get there, purchase the thing that will make you happy, and then feast with God in your midst.

So, again, a collection of verses in chapter 14 that are helping the Israelites think about their identity as God's people and how to remind themselves and think of themselves as God's people.

Deuteronomy 15 Brotherhood, Generosity, and Righteousness

When we move into chapter 15, we start to get more and more of the vocabulary that is evoking this brotherhood among the people. So chapter 15, we have a repetition of brother, and we have the idea throughout all of chapter 15. It's a call for, how do you act? How do you dwell? How do you belong well

together in this land God is giving you? And part of the call to action is to be generous. And why should you be generous? Chapter 15 repeats over and over and over. You should be generous because God is generous to you.

Because as you look at your past, God is the one who has been being generous to you, so therefore act, mimic who God is, mimic God's character.

So, we also get, in chapter 15, this call that righteousness is more than just not sinning, which is easy for us to start to think that all I have to do is not do all these terrible things. Chapter 15 of Deuteronomy says it's not that. Its righteousness is mimicking God's character, which means also doing all these other beautiful things that God has also done.

Remission of Debts Every 7 Years

So, let's look at chapter 15 because it is quite interesting in the call to action to the Israelites. So, it starts off by saying, "At the end of every seven years, you shall grant a remission of debts. This is the manner of remission. Every creditor shall release what he has loaned to his neighbor. He shall not exact it as his neighbor and his brother because the Lord's remission has been proclaimed."

However, "there will be no poor among you since the Lord will surely bless you and the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess. If only you would listen and be obedient to the voice of the Lord your God to observe carefully all the commandments which I am commanding you today. For the Lord your God will bless you as he has promised you, and you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow. And you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you."

Okay, so far so good. It's this call for making sure that you're not implementing a system of injustice that keeps the poor poor. So again, for people that are doing subsistence living owning land, being able to hold on to your inheritance through the generations is the way that your family can survive. So, if you have a system that puts people into slavery, if they are forced to sell their land to you, and now they're indentured servants to you. It has fractured the idea that God has given equally to his people. And so there is a warning do not establish monetary systems that will force people forever and ever into indentured servanthood.

Why do you do that? Why would you be motivated to do that? Because God is the one who is blessing you, remember? Remember, in chapter 11, God is the one whose eyes are on this land, and he is the one who gives the early and the latter rains. So, try to stay humble and to be aware of the fact that this already is God's gift, and as it is God's gift to his people, they are the ones that are managing that gift and managing it well.

Caring for the Poor Brother

So, we have this idea that has been given, "There will be no poor among you," ideally. Because God will give you everything you need, and no one will be poor. And then Deuteronomy says, except there will be poor, and so when there are poor, this is how you shall act.

So, in verse 7, "if there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers." So, again, it's a brotherhood idea. "In any of your towns in your land, which the Lord your God is giving to you, you shall not harden your heart nor close your hand from your poor brother."

This is actually going to go in and talk about our attitudes or the attitudes the Israelites should have toward the poor. What I want you to listen for are the

body parts that are mentioned. These body parts mean something really quite particular. So, pay attention.

Body Parts

So, I'll reread verse 7, "If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers in any of your towns in your land, which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, or your hand from your poor brother, but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks. Beware that there is no base thought in your heart saying the seventh year, the year for remission, is near, and your eye is hostile toward your poor brother, and you give him nothing. Then he may cry to the Lord against you, and it will be a sin in you. You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall be grieved when you give to him because, for this thing, the Lord, the Lord your God will bless you in all of the work and all of your undertakings. For the poor will never cease to be in your land. Therefore, I command you saying you shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land."

So, what body parts did you hear repeated over and over? One of the most commonly repeated one is hand. Open your hand, right? And we talked about the idea of marking liminal places, and we talked about how important it is to mark these words on your hand because your hand is your interaction with others who are around. So, Deuteronomy says to the poor, do not close up your hand.

And then we also have heart, so heart to as in your perception, your intellectual evaluation of people, so heart although we think of the heart is being the seat of emotions, the heart is the seat of the intellect and the way that you are looking at in perceiving other people.

So, these verses say, heart, hand, hand, heart, and then eye. Remember that eye, again, is your evaluation of the other people who are around you. So being careful not to close that up or to shut your eye, or to be blind to or too harshly evaluate. But instead, to open, and to give freely, to make sure that your heart is open, that your eyes open, and that your hand extends. And why do you do that? It's your brother. It's one of you in your land, and because God is the one who redeemed you out of slavery. And so if God's actions have done one thing, you should then mimic God's actions and do the same.

We also have this idea that in verse 12. "If your kinsmen a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you, then he shall serve you six years, but in the seventh year, you shall set him free. When you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed." In other words, give them a really good severance pay. They've been working for free all of these years, paying off a debt to you, but when they go off, make sure that they go off in such a way that allows them not to be a slave to someone else but gives them the opportunity to invest and to be able to either buy back their own homeland or to get the grinding mill stone that they need so that they can then make a valuable living.

A Forever Servant

In verse 14, "You shall furnish him liberally from your flock, and from your threshing floor, and from your wine vat. You shall give to him as the Lord your God has blessed you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and that the Lord your God redeemed you. Therefore, I command you this day. It shall come about if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you' because he loves you and your household since he fares well with you. Then you shall take an awl, pierce it through his ear into the door, and he shall be a servant forever. Also, you should do likewise to your maidservant." So, the idea is the option to

leave it up to the servant, not up to you as the master, to control them or not control them.

Social Ethics in Israel

So, we find in these verses and chapter 15 we're getting a glimpse at the social ethics that are being required of the Israelite people. And again, we're hearing Deuteronomy's drumbeat of God giving his people statutes and commandments. They include commandments that have to do with how to interact with him and how to worship him at the one chosen place. But they are also commandments that because God is the God that he is, interact in this way with your fellow human beings. Their righteousness is also dependent on the actions that they choose to do so that they are like God.

So where does this motivation for all of this generosity come from? Where's the motivation to act like God, to give freely to forgive debts? Where does that motivation come from? It comes from God himself because those people have been the recipients of a very loving, caring, and gracious God, and they should, in return, do as God does.

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