

Old Testament History, Literature, and Theology: Deuteronomy's Tough Laws & Joshua's Conquest

Author: Dr. Ted Hildebrandt

Session 18

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

Deuteronomy, tough laws, warfare, sexual assault, death penalty, value signals, lex talionis, Joshua, Jericho, Rahab

Abstract

This lecture by Dr. Ted Hildebrandt examines the challenging legal codes of Deuteronomy alongside the initial narrative of Joshua's conquest of Canaan. It explores controversial mandates regarding warfare, sexual assault, and the death penalty, framing them as value signals that communicate cultural and theological priorities rather than rigid legal prescriptions. The transition of leadership from Moses to Joshua highlights divine continuity and encouragement, underscoring God as the ever-present hero of Israel's history. Finally, the lecture provides a geographical and archaeological survey of Jericho, focusing on the strategic location of the city, the miracle of crossing the Jordan River, and the redemption of Rahab.

Outline

I. Introduction and Course Logistics

- A. Overview of class schedule and readings (1 Samuel and Psalms)
- B. Virtual trip to Jericho using digital software
- C. Opening prayer for cultural understanding across 3,000 years

II. Hermeneutical Challenge: Irony of Modern Tolerance and Ancient Law

- A. Modern ethical principles: diversity and tolerance
- B. The irony of contemporary intolerance toward Christianity
- C. Historical distance: judging 3,000-year-old law codes by 21st-century standards

III. Difficult Deuteronomy Laws: Warfare and Conscription Exemptions

- A. Conscription exemptions (Deuteronomy 20)
 - 1. New house exemption (focus and dedication)
 - 2. Engagement/marriage exemption (psychological focus in battle)
- B. Offers of peace (Shalom) prior to siege (Deuteronomy 20:10)
- C. The Herem principle (Deuteronomy 20:17)
 - 1. Definition: total devotion to the Lord through complete destruction

2. Historical application: Jericho, Ai, and Hazor
3. Modern parallels and academic arrogance in judging ancient warfare
4. Divine judgment on Canaanite culture after 400 years

IV. Sexual Assault and Death Penalty Mandates

- A. Laws regarding sexual assault (Deuteronomy 22)
 1. Distinction between city (duty to cry out) and field (presumption of innocence)
- B. Death penalty laws in Deuteronomy
 1. Execution of false prophets (Deuteronomy 13:10)
 2. Punishment for idolatry (Deuteronomy 17)
 3. Punishment for the rebellious son (Deuteronomy 21)

V. Laws as Statements of Value Signals

- A. Perspective from legal scholarship (Robert, University of Chicago Law)
- B. Distinguishing legal implementation from cultural value signals
- C. Application to the rebellious son: reinforcing the Fifth Commandment

VI. Lex Talionis (Eye for an Eye) and Ancient Justice

- A. Lex Talionis as a principle of proportional justice (Deuteronomy 19:21)
 1. Preventing overreaction and escalation
- B. Contrast with modern incarceration vs. ancient immediate justice
 1. Lack of prison systems in the ancient Near East
 2. Restitution and immediate accountability

VII. Social Welfare Laws: Polygamy, Slavery, and Animal Rights

- A. Polygamy laws (Deuteronomy 21:15)
 1. Protection and inheritance rights for the unloved wife
- B. Indentured servitude/slavery laws (Deuteronomy 15:12)
 1. Six-year limit and release in the seventh year
 2. Economic relief for insolvency and famine
- C. Humane treatment of animals
 1. Prohibiting unequal yoking of ox and donkey (Deuteronomy 22:10)
 2. Not muzzling the ox while treading grain (Deuteronomy 25:4)
 3. New Testament theological applications (2 Corinthians 6:14, 1 Corinthians 9:9)

VIII. Distinction Between Israel and the Church

- A. Israel as a geopolitical nation vs. Church as a spiritual assembly
- B. Extracting underlying principles for contemporary application
- C. Divine concession vs. divine approval (e.g., divorce due to hard hearts)
- D. Transition from Old Testament Kosher laws to New Testament freedom (Acts 15)

IX. Introduction to the Book of Joshua and Leadership Transition

A. Transition from Moses to Joshua

1. Moses' legacy and big shoes to fill
2. God as the ever-present hero ("As I was with Moses, so I will be with you")

B. God's repeated encouragement to Joshua

1. Command to "be strong and very courageous" (Joshua 1)

C. Parallels between Moses and Joshua

1. Splitting waters (Red Sea / Jordan River)
2. Hardening of enemy hearts (Pharaoh / Canaanites)
3. Raised weapons during battle (Spear / Javelin)
4. Side-by-side record of military victories
5. Encounter with the Angel of the Lord ("Take off your sandals")

D. National unity of the twelve tribes

1. Transjordan tribes (Reuben, Gad, half-Manasseh) crossing to fight alongside others

X. Geography and Conquest of Jericho

A. Strategic location of Jericho

1. Rift Valley, 800 feet below sea level, near the Dead Sea
2. Elisha's spring and water supply in the desert
3. Key east-west trade route connecting the Kings' Highway and Coastal Highway (Via Maris)

B. Archaeological overview of Tell es-Sultan (Jericho)

1. Stratified mound dating to 8000 B.C.
2. Burn layer and excavation trench debates (Kenyon vs. Bryant Wood)

C. The story of Rahab (Joshua 2)

1. Hiding the two spies in Jericho
2. Rahab's confession of faith in Yahweh
3. Deception in warfare and protection of life
4. Preservation via the scarlet cord and inclusion in the lineage of the Messiah

D. Miraculous crossing of the Jordan River (Joshua 3)

1. Crossing during spring flood stage
2. Natural mechanism and divine timing: damming at Adam