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Deuteronomy 19 - 21



Deuteronomy - Steve Gregg

In Deuteronomy 19-21, Steve Gregg explains the guidelines provided by God for cities of refuge, false witnesses, and warfare for Israelites who were at war with pagans. While the just war theory is commonly discussed among modern Christians, Gregg highlights that it is not present in the guidelines provided in this passage. He also explores how the treatment of women during war has changed over time, emphasizing the importance of treating women with respect and dignity.

Transcript

We'll pick it up now at chapter 19 of Deuteronomy. As is often the case in Deuteronomy, there's some repetition of material that's gone on before, and in the first 13 verses of chapter 19, we are introduced again to the cities of refuge concept. What is new here is it's simply mentioning that they need to appoint three cities on the west side of Jordan, as they have already done on the east side of Jordan, to make up the total complement of six cities of refuge.

But in telling it, of course, it goes through again what these are about, as if we didn't already know. But back in chapter 4, verses 41 through 43, there was already the identification of three cities on the east side of Jordan, which, of course, Israel had already conquered and was now already inhabiting. And those three cities now, as of chapter 4, had become officially cities of refuge, but they had not yet gone across the Jordan to the west side, and therefore, they had not yet provided these three on the west side.

There would be three on each side of the Jordan. And so here we have the orders to when they get on the other side of the Jordan to appoint these three cities there, says when Yahweh, your God, has cut off the nations whose land the Lord, your God, is giving you. And you dispossess them and dwell in their cities and their houses, you shall separate three cities for yourself in the midst of your land, which Yahweh, your God, is giving you to possess.

You should prepare roads for yourself and divide into three parts the territory of your

land, which the Lord, your God, is giving you to inherit, that any manslayer may flee there. The idea is you shall not only have these cities available, you should actually have good roads leading to them so that the man who really does not deserve to die because the homicide that he committed was accidental, that he will not have obstructions. He can get there quickly.

Of course, presumably if the roads are good, not only could he travel quickly, but the avenger of blood that's after him could travel quickly to, I guess, a good road could serve either party. But the idea is that the man should have no obstructions to the place of safety if he deserves protection. Verse four, and this is the case of the manslayer who flees there that he may live, whoever kills his neighbor unintentionally, not having hated him in the past.

And it gives an example as when a man goes to the woods with his neighbor to cut timber and his hand swings a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies. He shall flee to one of the cities and live lest the avenger of blood while his anger is hot. Pursue the manslayer and overtake him because the way is long and kill him, though he was not worthy of death since he had not hated the victim in time past.

Therefore, I command you saying you shall separate three cities for yourself. Now, if the Lord, your God enlarges your territory as he swore to your fathers and gives you the land which he promised to give your fathers. And if you keep all these commandments and do them, which I command you today to love Yahweh, your God, and to walk always in his ways, then you shall add three more cities for yourself.

But besides these three, lest innocent blood be shed in the midst of your land, which the Lord, your God is giving you as an inheritance and thus blood guiltiness be upon you. So apparently, potentially there could be as many as nine cities of refuge, three on the east side, Jordan, three on the west side. And apparently, if they if they annex other lands, perhaps further to the north, which were too far from the city's refuge for those who would live there, they were supposed to add up to three more of the same kind of cities.

But if anyone hates his neighbor, lies in wait for him, rises against him and strikes him mortally so that he dies and he flees to one of these cities, then the elders of his city shall send and bring him from there. And deliver him over to the hand of the avenger of blood that he may die. Your eye shall not pity him, but you should put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel that you may go.

It may go well with you. So the elders of his hometown. Would be the ones responsible for the execution of the murderer.

If a man had committed cold blooded murder and ran to the city of refuge, he should find no refuge there because he is he deserves to die. And it's the elders of his own city that

would actually go to the city of refuge and retrieve him, bring him back, probably bound and execute him there in his hometown. The example of an accidental death that is given where a man swinging an axe and the axe head flies off and hits another guy in the head and kills him by accident.

Reflects what must have been a fairly common occurrence, not so much that accident flattened, kill somebody else, because that'd just be bad luck if somebody happens to be his head. Have to be in the trajectory of the flight of the axe head. But axe heads coming off of axes must have happened not irregularly, not infrequently, I should say, because later on in the days of Elisha, the prophet, when Elisha and the sons of the prophets were actually needing to build a bigger house for their ministry operations, they went out to the woods and were cutting down trees to build a house and the axe head flew off the handle of one of their axes.

Now, fortunately, the axe head did not hit anybody, but it actually landed in the river. And the problem with that was it was a borrowed axe and these guys were poor. I mean, they were and they didn't have rich clergymen back then, those not rich prophets, and they were poor and he couldn't replace it.

And so Elisha actually performed a miracle to make the axe head swim, as it says. The axe head came up from the bottom of the water and came in on the surface and they were able to retrieve it. But in any case, an axe head coming off in the course of cutting wood apparently was something that happened very often.

Our modern axes don't do that because they make them so that they're constructed, you put the axe head on from the end of the handle that you hold and the end of where it's positioned is too wide for the axe head to come off. Just a little bit of trivia there for you, you don't have to worry about this happening to you. And then so you won't have to flee to the city of refuge.

It's a good thing, too, because you need a plane ticket to get over there and there's no cities of refuge over there anymore. So don't worry about the axe head problem, but you do have to be careful not to kill people accidentally. It's a real bad thing to do.

It can ruin your whole day. Verse 14, you should not remove your neighbor's landmark, which men of old have set in your inheritance, which you will inherit in the land that the Lord your God has given you to possess. Now, this issue certainly never came up in the wilderness.

They didn't have landmarks. They didn't have land. They just moved around.

But now they were going to have inheritance. And, you know, if you have a defined boundary around your property, you have to mark it somehow so that you can identify it. And, you know, if you've got the money to build a fence or something, that's great.

But if you don't, you have to identify your boundaries somehow. So they would set up stones at the corners of their property and just like modern surveyors would shoot a line between two marks to decide where a boundary is, that's how they would determine the boundaries of your land. Now, of course, if you wish to be dishonest, you could sneak out in the middle of the night while your neighbors asleep and move the boundary over so that you annex some of his property.

And he might never find out about it. I mean, after all, there's not that many objective things to measure it by. This stone was all they had.

And unless he paces it off and figures out, hey, I'm about a hundred yards less land than I used to have, he might never know it or at least not be able to prove it. You know, you move the landmark, you've just stolen real estate from your neighbor. And so that's forbidden.

That's theft, land theft. And so moving landmarks was forbidden. Then we have the law about people witnessing in court, and essentially we've already encountered the rule several times previously in Deuteronomy that it takes two witnesses or more to really condemn somebody to a death sentence.

But this goes on. This repeats that. And it also goes on to point out that there's going to be severe penalties for a false witness.

It says one witness shall not rise up against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits. By the mouth of two or three witnesses, the matter shall be established. Now, this statement is a principle that is quoted in the New Testament.

Multiple times, Jesus quotes it in Matthew 18, when he's talking about church discipline, he says, if your brother sins against you in Matthew 18, 15, go to him privately. And if you win your brother, that's great. If he hears you, you win your brother.

It's the case closed. But if he won't hear you, he says, then you take one or more others with you and confront him again. Jesus said so that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word will be established.

He's quoting this line in Deuteronomy, this principle. And of course, if they won't hear them, then it goes to the church. So the person actually gets even more chances in the church than he did in Israel, because two witnesses against him in Israel would be enough to condemn them.

But in the body of Christ, you give me one more chance than that. You got two witnesses against you. And you still don't hear it.

Well, you get one more chance. You get to be confirmed by the whole church. And if you don't hear the church, then you're out.

That's what Jesus said. And there's a number of other places in the New Testament where this principle is quoted or alluded to. As John 8, 17.

Second Corinthians 13, 1. First Timothy 5, 19. Hebrews 10, 28. As you can see, this law, though it's an Old Testament law, it informs ethics in the New Testament quite thoroughly.

The idea is you cannot accept a testimony against somebody unless there's two or three witnesses. Paul applies it in First Timothy to accusations against elders of the church. In First Timothy, chapter five and verse 19, he says, don't receive an accusation against an elder except by the mouth of two or three witnesses.

You know, when you hear bad things about a pastor or whatever, you need to be careful not to just accept them just because it's a juicy bit of gossip or something. You better find out if there's if that's confirmed, because that's just fair. That's just that's just justice.

And that's why God establishes this principle in the Old Testament, which Jesus apparently thinks is valid in the new. And Paul does, too. Verse 16, if a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, then both men in the controversy shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days.

And the judges shall make diligent inquiry. And indeed, if the witness is false, a false witness who has testified falsely against his brother. Now, that is, of course, a violation of the ninth commandment, you shall not bear false witness against your brother.

This is one of the Ten Commandments. If it turns out that a man has borne a false witness against his brother, it says, then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother. So you should put away the evil person from among you and those who remain shall hear and fear.

And hereafter, they shall not again commit such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity, but life shall be for life. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

It's not likely that, you know, the penalty for our crime would literally be to take a guy's foot off or pluck his eye out. But the idea is the justice should be even and proportionate. If a man bears a false witness against his neighbor, the fact is being false witness means he intends evil against an innocent man.

And whatever punishment that man would suffer if found guilty. Once the witness is found to be guilty, he gets that punishment. Now, there were false witnesses that rose up against Jesus before the Sanhedrin.

The Bible says they hired false witnesses to come in against Jesus. Also, they brought false witnesses against Stephen on his trial. Both of these men were on trial for their

lives and both died.

If justice had been done, those witnesses would have been killed instead, because, of course, by bearing witness against somebody when they're really innocent. Well, that's attempted murder on your part. You're trying to get him in a case like that, get an innocent killed.

Whether you do it by falsely accusing him in court or you just go up and stab him in the back, it's all the same. You're killing an innocent man and you are there for guilty of murder. Or if the penalty was something less and it was a false accusation, then whatever the penalty would have been, the false witness has to pay it.

Chapter 20. This is an interesting chapter. It has to do with warfare, but not the wars that the Israelites were about to engage in in Canaan.

The wars in Canaan were to be wars of extermination. They were wars of conquest, they were wars of judgment, they were God's judgment upon the Canaanites who had to be exterminated. But once the land was conquered, God assumes that Israel will engage in other wars, including wars of aggression by Israel.

To take territory from other people. Now, that seems strange. It certainly is not according to what we call the just war theory.

And it's interesting, too, because Christians do have a variety of opinions about the ethics of war. There's from the earliest days, from the apostles on for about three centuries, the church was fairly unanimous in its testimony that Christians should not fight in wars at all. It was the position of Irenaeus and Tertullian and Justin and all the early church fathers that Christians should not fight in wars.

That changed at the time when the Roman Empire became Christian, when the Emperor Constantine became a Christian. Suddenly, Rome was now a Christian, not a pagan empire. And the reason that changed things is because in the first three centuries of the church, the arguments that the Christians made against war is that the wars of Rome were the wars that had to do with this world.

We are fighting a spiritual warfare. We are citizens of another kingdom. We're citizens of the kingdom of God.

Remember, Jesus said, my kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would have fought. But my kingdom is not from here.

And so the early Christians said the wars of the Romans and the early Christians were in the Roman Empire. So all the wars that would affect them were the wars of the Romans. They're not our wars.

We have another king. We have another kingdom. Let Rome fight its own wars.

We'll fight our wars, which is spiritual warfare for a spiritual kingdom. And that was the way they argued. But when in the fourth century, the Roman world became Christian, suddenly it got confusing.

Like, is Rome like the kingdom of God? Is the Roman Empire the kingdom of God? It's we are Christian emperor. We are Christian magistrates. Christianity is the official religion.

The citizenry are all professing Christians. And then it began to look like the defense of the Roman Empire was the same thing as the defense of the kingdom of God. Because the church and the state were so hard to separate from each other in the centuries before that, it was easy to see the difference between the church and the Roman government, because the church was the ones being fed to the lions.

The church were the ones who were being burned at the stake. They were the ones hiding underground because the state was persecuting them. It was easy to see the difference between the interests of the church and the interests of the state because the state was satanic.

It was a beast, as Revelation depicted it. The church was like innocent lamb being led to the slaughter by this beast. But then the beast became Christian, became a lamb or maybe just a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Hard to say. But it appeared to be a sheep. Suddenly, it was not obvious what the difference was between the interests of the church and the interests of the Christian state.

And then they began to rethink the ethics of Christians fighting in war because the interests of Rome still required a national military. There had to be a military to defend Rome against barbarians and so forth. And if Rome was Christian, then was it not so that the military, the soldiers of Rome were fighting God's battles, that this was now the warfare of the Christian? And so Christian philosophers had to come up with a new ethic, different from the early church fathers had, because if you see, the early church fathers said it's OK for the pagans to fight in military because that's their thing.

That's their kingdom they're defending. They're fighting physical wars for a physical kingdom. We're part of a spiritual kingdom.

We're a marginalized people, a disenfranchised people. Our kingdom is not of this world. We are of a spiritual empire and our battle is spiritual.

But suddenly you can't make the distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian and allow the Christian to fight in no war and the non-Christian to fight in war because suddenly all the Romans are Christian, supposedly. They're all baptized. They're all

members of the church.

You either have no army at all, in which case you seem vulnerable to the invaders because you no longer have a military or you have a military that has Christians in it. And so that raises issues of ethics that had not had to be raised previously, and it was Augustine around the year 400, more than any other, that created for the church the Christian version of what's called the just war ethic. Now, Augustine didn't come up with these ideas himself.

He was a Neoplatonist himself. Augustine was sort of a mixture of a Greek philosopher and a Christian theologian, which is why many of the things he introduced are things that I personally think are not biblical, because even many of the ideas about about sovereignty and election and things like that, which became part of the reformed theology later on, they were introduced by Augustine into the church. But he got them from Plato, a pagan philosopher who existed before the time of Christ.

And Neoplatonism came into the church wedded with certain Christian ideas in Augustine, and Augustine was the most influential theologian of all time. There are more people who believe Augustine than who believe Paul. They don't know it's that way.

They think that when they believe Augustine, they are believing Paul, but they interpret Paul through Augustine's grid and he's the most influential theologian in history. But as it became necessary for Christians to decide how they're to cope with the new situation where technically the whole Roman Empire is Christian and there are still physical wars to fight, and yet Christians historically have not been permitted to fight in wars. Now, what do we do? Augustine borrowed from Plato what was called the just war ethic, and the idea behind it was this, that there are many wars that are not just and good men will not approve of them or fight in them.

But there are there are wars that are just and a good man would have no reason not to fight in them for justice. It would be, for example, when a war was essentially equivalent to capital punishment. A good man, even a Christian, could approve of capital punishment in principle because certain people do things worthy of death and they deserve to die.

And even Paul made that clear that he believed that, but generally that ethic does not apply to most wars because in most wars, people die who aren't worthy of death. People who've done no crime, civilians, noncombatants, women and children and so forth. And therefore, most wars involve injustice where capital punishment properly exercised is an exact act of justice.

But most wars are a mixture of people dying who deserve to die and people dying who don't deserve to die. And so that's an unjust war. And Augustine said that Christians cannot approve of unjust war nor participate in it.

But following Plato, he said there are wars that are just. There are wars that ethically are more or less equivalent to capital punishment, where the war is only conducted against parties that really deserve to die. And therefore, the killing of them becomes essentially the moral equivalent of capital punishment.

And there were a number of guidelines, quite a long list of guidelines that Augustine identified as the guidelines for a just war. And the idea was if your country is engaged justly in a just war, then you as a Christian can, without objection, participate and fight in it. If your country is engaged in an unjust war, then as a Christian, you should not fight in it.

Now, some of the guidelines for a just war include the following. It cannot be a war of aggression. It must be 100 percent defensive.

According to Augustine, a just war is not an aggressive war where you go out and invade someone else. It is where you are under attack and therefore the people who are fighting it are trying to kill you. That makes them murderers and themselves worthy of death.

It cannot even be a war of retaliation or a war to recover ground that was lost in a previous war. That is, if in a previous war against your enemies they took some property from you, you can't even aggressively go and take the property back. You cannot be the aggressor in a war.

You can't retaliate against wrongs done previously. A just war is 100 percent defensive, Augustine said. Furthermore, it is conducted with proportional force only enough to repel the aggressors.

The assumption is you are under attack in a just war. That is, you are just, the enemy is not just, but your cause is just. And you can only use such force as is necessary to repel the attack.

For example, an atomic bomb would not qualify as something in a just war. If someone is coming against you with guns and tanks, then you use guns and tanks to stop them. Hopefully a larger number of guns and tanks than they have so you can stop them.

But you use only what is necessary to repel their aggression, not to overwhelm and destroy their cities unnecessarily and so forth. Another just war guideline was that a just war had to guarantee, as much as possible, the immunity of civilians and noncombatants. So that only soldiers who are actually fighting against you would be killed.

And there are other guidelines like this. But just those three in themselves would make it clear that many of the wars that were fought by Christian Rome or, for that matter, by America in modern times have not qualified as what Augustine called a just war. Now, most Christians today support the just war theory as they understand it.

Many of them don't understand it very well. Many of them just mean that if your side is the side of justice, then you can fight. Many Christian ethicists and philosophers say we believe in the just war theory as laid down by Augustine.

Augustine was addressing a situation that had changed from the days of the apostles, where there actually were Christian interests in the state to defend and where a significant number of the population are Christians so that there would not be enough non-Christians, as it were, to man the military. So almost all American Christians, with the exception of the Anabaptists and the Quakers and a few, you know, radical types, believe in what's called the just war theory, and you'll usually find it defended by Christian preachers. The problem is none of the wars we've fought in were exactly just wars.

Possibly the Revolutionary War might have been. And that's because the enemy came here. And obviously, if you're shooting British soldiers, they were there to shoot at you.

You didn't we didn't go over and drop bombs on Great Britain and we you know, we didn't use disproportional force. Arguably, one could suggest that the American Revolutionary War was fought along the guidelines of a just war, though I'm not sure whether our troops and our leaders were thinking in terms of the just war. They're just defending themselves.

The question of whether there should have been a war at all might be raised, but that's that's another issue. Almost all the wars that have been fought in modern times, especially since the rise of technology, have been fought in such a way. That I'm thinking especially World War One and World War Two and the wars since then, the Korean War, the Vietnamese War, the you know, the wars in Iraq and so forth, have been fought not always with proportional force.

Certainly, the firebombing of Dresden, Germany in World War Two, the the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima, these things would not conform to what we call just war guidelines. But most Christians still feel that we had a just cause. And for many Christians, that's enough just that we were the good guys and they were the bad guys is enough to justify going to war in the mind of many modern Christians.

So we can see there's been a deterioration even of Augustine's theory. Augustine at least allowed Christians to fight in some wars, but he had very strict guidelines for what constitutes the just war. Nowadays, the average Christian who's most Christians are not thinkers, as you probably have discovered if you've met any.

Christians who don't think simply say, well, it's a just war because it's our war, because we're the good guys. Certainly, our leaders are only doing good things. They would only conduct themselves in a good way.

And therefore, if our leaders tell us to go, we go for God and country. Well, maybe for country, but it's not always really for God. Certainly, the early Christians wouldn't think so in many in most of our wars.

Now, what I would the reason I bring this up is because almost all Christian ethicists, I've read books by R.C. Sproul about Christian ethics and other reformed writers. They're always in favor of what they say is the just war. Concept, they have not been able to identify any modern war that qualifies, but they believe that just war concept is a good concept of philosophy of ethics for Christians.

But they always say this, the just war guidelines are based upon Deuteronomy, Chapter 20 and the guidelines God gave Israel for fighting in wars. And I say, really, is that so? Let's read what God said. See how many of the just war guidelines apply here.

When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them. For the Lord, your God, is with you who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. So it shall be when you are on the verge of battle that the priest shall approach and speak to the people and he shall say to them, hero, Israel, today you are on the verge of battle with your enemies.

Do not let your heart faint. Do not be afraid and do not tremble or be terrified because of them. For the Lord, your God, is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to save you.

Then the officers shall speak to the people saying, what man is there who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house lest he die in the battle and another man dedicated. And what man is there who has planted a vineyard and has not yet eaten of it? Let him also go and return to his house lest he die in the battle and another man eat it. And what man is there who is betrothed to a woman and has not yet married her? Let him go and return to his house lest he die in the battle and another man marry her.

Then the officers shall speak further to the people and say, what man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest his heart, the heart of his brethren, faint like his heart. And so it shall be when the officers have finished speaking to the people that they shall make captains of their armies to lead the people. And then we get we get the battle plan in verse 10 and on.

But let's start out here. There are four conditions for eliminating soldiers from the army. And the whole idea behind it is you want people who are wholly committed to this war.

You don't want people who are fearful because they may infect others with their fearfulness by their negativity and so forth. You want people who are trusting that God's going to give the victory here. So the idea here, first of all, is that God is behind this war.

God is on your side. And you even have the priests out there affirming this. I don't know of any war that's ever been fought like that in modern times.

I don't know of any priests of our country that or prophets that were able to tell our troops this war is God's war. He's on your side. And and to allow people to opt out if they have anything that's distracting them.

I just built the house. I've never moved into it. Well, then go home and live in it.

I just planted a vineyard and I haven't even got my first vintage yet. Well, go home and eat your vintage. I'm this lady.

I want to marry her and we haven't married yet. Well, go marry her then. Don't go to battle if you've got other things on your mind.

You need to be focused on this battle. Are you afraid? Go home. We don't need you.

We'll win this war. God will win this war with people who are totally focused, totally confident in him. That's the idea here.

It was obviously a volunteer army. There wasn't a draft, apparently, but the the patriots of Israel, you know, who trusted God would show up to fight the battle because the battle was the Lord's and they were the Lord's people. Now, right here we have a situation which is not paralleled in any modern nation state because there is no nation today that is God's people.

God's nation is the church, and it's not associated with any one geographical area or one particular political entity. There are Christians, I presume, in North Korea as well as in South Korea. There are some Christians in Iraq and Iran, not many, but there are some.

There are Palestinian Christians and there are Israeli Christians. There are American Christians and Russian Christians and a lot of Chinese Christians. These countries, if they would fight against each other, would not be God's people against the devil's people.

It would be mixed groups. Some of God's people on both sides fighting against each other. It's not the same thing.

Neither side could say we are God's people because even America in war, if you as a Christian go to war for one of our wars, you're in the trenches with another guy who's not a Christian. You can't say we are God's people. No, you say I am.

But this guy isn't. And he's on my side. He's one of the devil's people.

He's right here in the foxhole with me. Me and the devil's guy are fighting against that people. And the guy might be a Christian for all I know, because there's Christians in that country over there, too.

It may be I, a Christian, killing my brother Christian when my commandment that my Lord gave me is to love my brother and lay down my life for him. And that the unity between me and my brother is supposed to be the evidence that God sent Jesus. Jesus said, God, I pray they may be one, that the world may know that you have sent me.

So my unity with that guy is it's my orders to love him and be in unity with him. So the world will know the gospel is true. But instead of out here fighting some nation's battles against another brother who's fighting another nation's battles, something is wrong with that picture.

It's not parallel. Israel was God's nation. Their enemies were the devil's nations.

They were all worshippers of idols and demons, all the other nations in the world. Therefore, it was always a clear cut difference. There's no parallel there between today's idea about just war or any other kind of war, because there is no nation today that always can say God is on their side.

In fact, even Israel at times, God was not on their side. There were times because they were in rebellion against God that their prophets had to tell them God is not with you in this. Jeremiah, in the time when Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, Jeremiah said, people don't fight the Babylonians.

God is bringing them to judge you. You surrender to them and it'll go well with you. You fight them, you'll die.

In other words, even Israel was not supposed to fight in wars against pagans when God's prophets told them not to, because you couldn't count on the fact that even Israel was God's people at a given time. Are there God's on their side? And so when any nation today goes to battle, how do they know which side God's on? Everyone thinks he's on their side. When we went against the Nazis, we thought for sure.

God is on our side against the Nazis. How could anyone think differently? Well, the German people thought differently. There were Christian Germans fighting in Hitler's armies.

I know I've met some of them since then. I stayed in the home of a Baptist man in Germany who during World War Two was he wasn't a part of the Nazi Party, but he was fighting in Germans in the German armies. I'm sure he didn't kill any Jews.

I hope he didn't. But the point of the matter is he somehow the German Christians were convinced that God's on their side, too. If you can be convinced that God is on your side because you assume that your nation.

Is somehow right and that you're supposed to be loyal to what your nation does, then your nation would be Muslim or atheist like our nation is. I mean, our nation is run by

non-Christians. You think you think Congress or Christians? You think the president's a Christian? We have a pagan nation.

The majority of the people in this nation are pagans, including the majority of people ruling it. So how could we insist that God is on our side? How do we know that in any given word God doesn't intend to judge us at the hands of somebody else? We can't know. It's not the same.

But when God was on Israel's side, the priest could go and say, listen, God's going to win this. We don't need any people who are half hearted. We don't need people who are afraid.

We don't need anyone who's distracted by things at home. Go home. God can win this without the large numbers.

We see that particularly in the story of Gideon, how that thousands of people came and responded to Gideon's call to battle. And then he sent them out in just this way, sent home the ones who are afraid, sent home the ones who weren't the best guys. And he ended up fighting the Midianites with an army of only 300 men.

The Midianites had over 30,000. Gideon had 300 and he won. So the idea here is the battle is the Lord's.

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we don't. We trust in God. And it says in Psalm 33 that a horse is a vain thing in battle, neither is any king saved by its great strength.

Safety is from the Lord. In Proverbs, it says the horse is prepared against the day of battle, but safety is from the Lord. Even the Old Testament makes it clear that the safety of a nation is not due to its great armies, but its great God and its relationship with God.

If God's on your side, the power of your military is, you know, a low secondary importance. So there's no parallel here. Then we have verse 10.

When you go near a city to fight against it, then proclaim an offer of peace to it. But wait a minute, you're the aggressor here. That right there is a violation of just war guidelines, just war has to be entirely defensive.

This is Israel going against a city. Now, this is not the Canaanite cities. This is made clear in verse 15.

These instructions in this chapter are what you shall do to all the cities which are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations. That is not the Canaanites. The Canaanites is a different story.

That's extermination. That certainly isn't just war guidelines, nor are the others. When

you're going against other nations far from you that you don't need to, you don't need to conquer them because you already own your land.

These are people in foreign countries, but you're going against them to conquer them to bring them under tribute. This is aggressive war. This is not defensive war.

You offer, you know, peace to them on the terms that they surrender. But a lot of people may not want to surrender. They might like being an independent nation.

They might like freedom. They might not want to pay tribute to a foreign nation like Israel. And so they want to fight and defend themselves.

Certainly we would. That is, our nation would. If any aggressor comes against us and says, listen, we're going to take you over.

We're offering you terms of peace. Just surrender. Well, we'd say, yeah, right.

We're going to do that when hell freezes over. You and what armies? You know, well, that's what these nations would do when Israel comes against them with the same kind of aggression. And so, of course, they're going to fight and it shall be that if they accept your offer of peace and open to you, then all the people who are found in it shall be placed under tribute to you and serve you.

So if they don't mind, if they surrender without a fight, then they can be your slaves, your servants and pay tribute to you. Now, if the city will not make peace with you, but would make war against you, which we would assume probably would be the case most of the time, then you shall besiege it. And when Yahweh, your God, delivers it into your hands, you shall strike every male in it with the edge of the sword.

That means even the kids. Even the noncombatants, although probably all the adults would get engaged in combat when their cities under attack. But the women, the little ones, the livestock and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall plunder for yourself and you shall eat the enemy's plunder, which the Lord, your God, gives you.

Now, by the way, I need to correct myself. I said even the little boys would probably be killed. That's not necessarily true.

And so strike every male in it. It probably means adult males. And I say that because when the Midianite war was fought in Numbers chapter thirty one, it says they struck every male.

But then they brought the women and the little ones and Moses said, why have you spared them? And the little ones included little boys. So when it says they struck every male, it doesn't mean the little boys. And in this case, probably the little boys and little girls and the women were spared, who were all, of course, presumed to be

noncombatants.

But they can't be sure that every male in the city who was not a little boy was a combatant. What about the cripples? What about the blind? You know, there were others there who were probably not fighting them, but all the adult males had to be put to death. But basically, you keep the women and children for servants.

Now, they would have become your servants anyway if they had surrendered. So it's just a given if Israel goes up against a nation other than the Canaanites, that nation, those women and children end up being servants of Israel. If they put up a fight, the men are going to get killed.

If they don't put up a fight, then the men can live and they'll be servants, too. Now, there's a certain degree of civility in this compared to ancient wars in general. Pagans, often like the Assyrians or the Babylonians, I mean, they would attack people and they'd torture them.

They'd impale them. They'd put hooks through their lips and noses and drag them off to foreign lands and so forth. I mean, they're pretty barbarous wars in those days.

Compared to those, these are pretty humane conditions. Sure, you kill off all the men, but that's probably because the assumption is they were fighting against you. But of course they would fight against you.

You're invading them. But the idea here is that, of course, Israel is God's people and all lands are God's land. The pagans have the right to acknowledge this if they wish or fight against it if they wish.

If they fight against it, they will find out that they were wrong, that God does give the victory to Israel and so forth. It's possible, no doubt, that some cities terrified of Israel would surrender without a fight, in which case no one would have to die. There is humaneness here, but it's not just war.

It's not the just war guidelines. This is an aggressive war from the start. And therefore, I think it's a strange thing that people who support the just war ethics say they get it from this chapter.

I don't see anything in this chapter that resembles the so-called just war theory. It's not necessary for this to be following those theories, because when God sends Israel against a nation, it is because that nation deserves to die. God is the one who decides that.

And therefore, to wipe out a whole society as God did with the flood or he did in Sodom and Gomorrah or as he did with the Canaanites, that's God's prerogative. God is not unjust. He only does just things.

And so for him to wipe out a whole civilization, if he does it, it's just. He is the very definition of justice, and therefore we trust his judgment in the matter. But in modern wars, we can't really assume that we're doing God's war, fighting God's wars, just because we're fighting a war that our nation happens to be favoring.

So in verse 15, it says, that's what you do to the nation, to the cities that are far away, not the ones in your land. Not the cities of these nations, meaning the Canaanites, but of the cities of these peoples, which the Lord, your God gives you as an inheritance. You shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them.

The Hittite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, the Jebusite, just as the Lord, your God has commanded you, lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations, which they have done for their gods. And you sin against Yahweh, your God, if you choose between your God and their gods. If you do what their gods require, you'll be doing what's contrary to what Yahweh requires and you'll sin against him.

You need to pick your battles. You either have to fight the false gods or you're going to fight Yahweh and you want Yahweh on your side, not against you. When you besiege a city for a long time.

While making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them. Now, this would be a common means by which warfare was conducted. You cut down all the local trees to build siege works and ladders and so forth to climb the walls and invade the city.

This is what Rome did when they destroyed Jerusalem. Josephus says all the region around Jerusalem, as far as I could see, was treeless. He said it had looked like a garden.

It had looked beautiful and lush and green. But after the Romans cut down all the trees, it was just a barren wasteland. And by the way, it remained that way, because once you denude a region of trees, it's hard to restore it because it becomes desert like.

And so the land of Israel, after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, became for a very long time just a barren desert. But at one time it had been much more lush. If the Romans had followed these laws that God gave Israel, it wouldn't have ended up that way.

Israel was told not to cut down all the trees and especially not any fruit trees. Nothing that has food on it should be cut down. He said, if you can eat of them, do not cut them down to use in the siege for the tree of the field is man's food.

Only the trees which, you know, are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down to build siege works against the city that makes war with you until it is subdued. So there's an ecological concern here that food not be destroyed just because you happen to be at war with people, you don't destroy their food supply. You don't destroy their fruit trees and and denude their their land defoliated.

OK, so that's that's how that ends. Now, we started late, so we still have a few minutes left. Let's go into the next chapter.

If anyone is found slain, lying in a field in the land which the Lord your God has given you to possess and it is not known who killed him, then your elders and your judges shall go out and they shall measure the distance from the slain man to the surrounding cities. And it shall be that the elders of the city nearest to the slain man will take a heifer. Which has not been worked and which is not pulled with a yoke and the elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with flowing water, which is neither plowed nor sown, and they shall break the heifer's neck there in the valley.

Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near for the Lord your God has chosen them to minister to him and to bless in the name of the Lord. By their word, every controversy and every assault shall be settled and all the elders of the city nearest the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley. Then they shall answer and say, our hands have not shed this blood, nor have our eyes seen it.

Provided atonement, O Lord, for your people, Israel, whom you have redeemed and do not lay innocent blood to the charge of your people, Israel. And atonement shall be provided on their behalf for the blood. So you should put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you.

When you do what is right in the sight of the Lord, you can see there's a strong emphasis throughout the law that the shedding of innocent blood brings guilt on a land and that something has to be done to atone for it. In most cases, the assumption is you can find the murderer. There should be witnesses.

And and then and then you can atone for it by killing the murderer. In a case like this, you don't know who the murderer is. So the nearest city to the corpse has to pretty much take responsibility, whether they're really guilty or not.

No one knows. He may have been killed in a different city. But since cities were not really very near each other.

It's not that likely that the man was killed. You know, further from his own city than from another city, probably because slain close to home, and therefore the city nearest it is presumed to take responsibility and that they break the neck of the heifer. They do it in a valley where there's running water.

I'm not sure what all that is for. I mean, obviously, there's an animal that that makes an atonement, though it's not said to be slaughtered, though it is possible that they did drain the blood out of it, which was the normal way of doing things. We're not told that it was burned or whatever.

It's not real clear what is done with the heifer after it's killed. The Levites are brought in. The priests are brought in in verse five, but it's not told of what they do.

Presumably they do something. They do some ceremony or something with the bull. The more important thing is that the elders of the city who are taking nominal responsibility for the death, they wash their hands over the heifer and then they and they make a vow that they're not responsible.

They have not seen. They did not commit the crime. They don't know who did and they ask God to make atonement and he will.

And so that's the law concerning an unsolved murder. How you cleanse the land from that. Verse 10, when you go out to war against your enemies.

Now, this is sort of an addendum to what we read at the end of chapter seven, 20, at the end of chapter 20. And the Lord, your God delivers them into your hand and you take them captive and you see among the captives a beautiful woman and desire her and would take her for your wife. Then you should bring her home to your house and she shall shave her head and trim her nails, which would be part of her mourning for her people who have died.

In the war, she should put off the clothes of her captivity, remain in your house and mourn her father and her mother a full month after that, you may go into her and be her husband and she should be your wife and it should be if you have no delight in her, then you shall set her free. But you certainly shall not sell her for money. You shall not treat her brutally because you've humbled her.

Now, this whole legislation seems unacceptable to Western civilization for a number of reasons. One is we don't approve of slavery. Another is, you know, a woman who's a slave being made to marry her master and not really having any say in the matter.

It certainly goes against our sympathies where marriage is conducted because you're in love. You know, arranged marriages we wouldn't like. You know, forced marriage of a slave girl to her master.

I mean, these things are quite unacceptable to our modern culture. We don't we don't have sympathy for any of these institutions. But again, when you compare these laws with the practices of other nations at the time, this is a very lofty situation.

Usually, a man could do what he wanted with his slaves. In most cultures, they could kill their slaves if they wanted to. In this case, a man is not forbidden to marry one of the slave girls.

I mean, this is not saying go in and find all the girls you find attractive and just take them home and have them for a harem or whatever. And some people have represented

that way. You know, you just go capture, you know, pretty women from other countries and and sleep with them.

Now, it's not talking about sexually using these women as sex slaves. It's not being their husband and them being your wife. It actually uses those terms.

It's talking about making an honorable marriage out of the deal. Sure, the woman might not be expected to be really wholeheartedly into this marriage. After all, you represent the people who killed her folks and her people.

And in a situation where there's been a war and prisoners of war are taken captive, that's kind of hard to avoid. You're going to have dead people who are the relatives of some of the people who've been survived as prisoners of war. We have had the luxury of having no such wars on our land.

And therefore, we have not experienced this. But it's a common experience of warring nations throughout history that people were killed and other people were taken captive. Obviously, the people taken captive would be the surviving relatives of some people who got killed and no doubt would have some resentment.

But they also would just have to deal with it. They have realized, OK, we were defeated. Some of my brothers, my father, perhaps, were killed in the war.

I wasn't killed. I was taken captive. I'm a prisoner of war.

That's just the way war goes. OK, now deal with it. Now, in most cultures, a man could just take those women and sleep with them, do what they wanted and discard them.

They went to and even beat them or whatever they want to be brutal to them because they were slaves. What God's talking about here is you see a slave girl that you're interested in marrying. The assumption is that she's beautiful, since that's what usually would attract a man to a woman initially.

Obviously, that's all she has to attract him to her in some cases, because it may be later that he has no delight in her. You know, she may be beautiful, but there's other things that he doesn't like about her. He finds that out too late, I guess, after he's already married her.

He decides he wants that woman to be his wife. He has to elevate her. He has to.

She can't be treated like a pagan would treat a slave. She has to be, even if you let her go, you can't sell her and make money off her. You can't be brutal to her.

You have to be kind to her. Sure, divorcing her isn't exactly the nicest thing to do, but divorce was permitted throughout the land. And and it would be just like any other divorce.

A man doesn't take delight in his wife. He divorces her, in this case, a slave girl. But he can't treat her forever after as a slave.

He's humbled her. He has basically taken her virginity is presumably what is meant by that. And he has to, in other words, treat her the way a man treats a wife, not the way a person treats a slave, generally speaking.

He even has to be sensitive to the fact that she's going to have to mourn the death of her family. So instead of just taking her and saying, hey, you're cute and go sleep with her. He has to give her a month to go through some closure about her past family life.

She has to mourn her family. I mean, there's there's sensitivity shown here, not as much sensitivity as we would expect in a in a Christianized culture, but in a culture where slave slavery is just taken for granted as a reality. War and prisoners of war and women being taken as captives and the ability for a man to marry a captive woman if he wished to.

Those things were all just taken for granted. And those things are less than ideal. By Christian standards, but the fact that those institutions existed, it means they had to be regulated in order to make it not brutal to the slave.

The slave was not allowed to be abused. Marrying her is not abusing her. Raping her would be.

But making her your wife is not. And for a woman like that to have to marry her master wouldn't be very much different than any free girl having to marry the person her parents arranged for her to marry. Assuming, you know, she was not in love with him.

It'd be the same kind of thing. Anyway, she is to be treated sensitively and given consideration that she's going to have to mourn for a while the death of her family. She's not you don't just take her and use her.

You treat it like a human being. You validate her feelings of mourning over lost loved ones. And if you eventually choose to divorce her again, this is no different than if you may want to divorce any other wife.

He can put her away. But what he can't do is return her to the status of a slave. By marrying her, he removed her from the class of a slave.

He can't sell her like property or she has become a wife to him. She will become a divorced ex-wife, but she won't become a slave again. You can't sell her again.

You have to let her go free because you have changed her status by marrying her. And so this is this is basically, in a sense, a protection of the rights of a female prisoner of war. Any pretty woman who's taken as a captive certainly was in danger of being used by men who had been her captors.

But this suggested, well, if you want to have this woman, you have to marry her the same as any other woman. You have to treat her like a human being. And if you decide not to stay married to her, you've got to release her as a free woman.

Although she came in as a captive, she's now free because you have changed her status. She's no longer a virgin, but she's also no longer a slave. And so things it's a tradeoff for her.

It's not the most ideal situation, but it's a great improvement over what commonly would be done among pagans in similar circumstances. Verse 15, if a man has two wives like Jacob did, one loved and the other unloved like Jacob had in Rachel and Leah, and they have born him children. Both the loved and the unloved.

And if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved, then it shall be on the day he bequeathed his possessions to his sons that he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, who is truly the firstborn. But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has. That's the firstborn privilege, for he is the beginning of his strength.

The right of the firstborn is his. That is, a firstborn son has the right supremogeniture, even if his mother was not the favorite wife of his dad. And the son cannot be penalized for that.

This practice was somewhat followed by Jacob because Leah was the unloved wife. Reuben, Simon and Levi were rejected for their own sins, but Judah was also a son of Leah, and he ended up being the firstborn in one sense, although Jacob did give the double portion to the firstborn son of his loved wife, Rachel, which was Joseph. And that was that would have been a violation of this verse 18.

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother and who, when they have chastised him, chastened him, will not heed them, not responsive to discipline. Then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of the city, to the gate of his city, and they shall say to the elders of his city, this son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey our voice.

He's a glutton and a drunkard. Clearly, this is an adult son. If he's a drunkard, if he is a little boy, they could easily keep the alcohol away from him, I would think.

Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones so that you shall put away the evil person from among you and all Israel shall hear and fear. In fact, I dare say that this very law probably made most sons here in fear enough that the situation may never have arisen or seldom have arisen. A law like this would tend to make sons be

more respectful to their parents, which is what it was calculated to do.

If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he's put to death and you hang him on a tree. His body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day so that you do not defile the land which the Lord your God has given you as an inheritance for he who is hanged is cursed. Of God.

Now, it's not entirely clear what the rationale is. The hanging of a man on a tree was generally not the means of execution. The Jews usually executed a person by stoning.

In most cases, the person is stoned would be buried in some way, perhaps under the pile of stones or if he had relatives that cared about him enough to give him a decent burial, perhaps he'd be buried that way. But when you really wanted to subject the man to indignity as well as death, you would hang his corpse, his carcass up on a tree for display. He was not hung as in the Old West as a means of execution or as by the Romans through crucifixion.

He was hung after he was dead. He was killed usually by stoning and his body was hung up on display as a further indignity to him. This was practiced sometimes in Jewish history.

We've read of some cases like this and some of the kings, for example, of Canaan, once Joshua captured and killed him, they hung up their bodies for display. Now, it says that a person is hung up like that is cursed of God. Now, I don't think he's cursed because he's hung up there.

I think the idea is he is hung up there because he's a person who's done something so heinous that he is under God's curse because of his crime. And the hanging of his body on the tree is simply a way of acknowledging that this man is a man who is under a particular curse of God because he's done something particularly heinous and offensive. But the statement that he that is hanged on a tree is cursed of God.

Of course, we know Paul quoted that in Galatians chapter three, where he was saying that this is how Jesus became a curse and took on the curse of the law for us by him being hanged on a tree. Not exactly in the same scenario envisaged here, but in Galatians 3, 13, Paul is trying to show how Jesus took on the curse of the law for us. But how could he do so without sinning? Well, here's something in the law that could do it.

If he gets hanged on a tree, that is not a sin on his part, but it is something that that declares him cursed by God under the law. And therefore, Paul says that this is how Jesus became a curse for us by having hanged on a tree. The idea in verse 23, that his body shall not be remaining on the tree overnight, we see that was actually observed in Jesus case.

They didn't want to leave Jesus body up on the cross overnight, but that's it said to be

because the next day was the Sabbath. But it may mean that since they would have to, in any case, bury the body before the next day and they couldn't leave it overnight, they wanted to quickly get the body down and buried before sundown, because that began the Sabbath. And they would have to violate the Sabbath if they're going to do something like bury a body on it.

So anyway, these laws about hanging someone on a tree, we find them actually anticipating Christ. In fact, there's no obvious reason why this law would be given unless it was in order to anticipate Christ. That is to say, it's not clear why it would say that a person hanged on a tree is cursed.

Unless it was in order that God's Holy Spirit intended that Paul could later use this verse to apply it to Christ's situation, because as a standalone law, it doesn't make an awful lot of sense that I can say. But as something that anticipates Christ becoming a curse for us by hanging on a tree, it becomes very prescient and provide something for Paul to use theologically to make the point later on. And thus we come to the end of our time today.