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Deuteronomy 13 - 15



Deuteronomy - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg explores the warnings against idolatry in Deuteronomy 13-15, emphasizing the importance of following God's commandments and not bowing down to false gods. He acknowledges the prevalence of addiction problems and recovery movements in modern society, cautioning that making idolatry a lifestyle sets one on the path of destruction. Gregg also delves into the consequences of false prophets and deceptive signs, urging listeners to test the spirits and hold fast to God. This chapter also includes regulations on forbidden foods and the importance of giving tithes and offerings.

Transcript

Alright, we're turning to the 13th chapter of Deuteronomy. We are still in the midst of a lengthy discourse, the second discourse of Moses in this book. It began in chapter five, where he reminded them of the Ten Commandments that had been first given way back at Mount Sinai in Exodus chapter 20.

Then he began to give them additional instructions interlaced with reminders of their past and warnings not to make the same mistakes again that they had made in the past. By chapter 12, he began to give again statutes and judgments, as he calls it, laws, we would call them, about, in the case of chapter 12, about worship, about the location of worship, how they had to, if they were to offer any sacrifices, they had to bring them to the place that the Lord would choose to place his name there. And that eventually would be Jerusalem, but not initially.

In the days of Joshua, that place was Shiloh. In a later time, that was Nob. And then Jerusalem in the days of David.

And there's strong warnings throughout this entire discourse about the danger of lapsing into idolatry. It might seem strange that people have to be warned again and again not to bow down to pieces of wood and pieces of stone. It seems so primitive.

It seems so foolish to bow down to a rock or to a tree. But the reason it seems that way to us is because we have been nurtured in a culture that has forsaken idolatry and that forsaking of idolatry has been due to the influence, frankly, of Deuteronomy and books

like it in the Bible, which also became the foundation for the teachings of Jesus, which became the foundations for the ethics and worldview of Western civilization. And so to us, it seems so strange that people would bow down to a rock or to a tree.

And yet, without the influence of the kingdom of God, without the word of God having leavened the culture that we have all been a part of and our ancestors have for so many generations, it wouldn't seem strange at all. In fact, apparently there'd be a strong urge in each of us that we'd have to resist to bow down to idols. Again, we take for granted so often the degree to which Christianity and the word of God has freed us from such foolish superstitions.

But the fact that not only did Moses feel compelled to warn them again and again against idolatry and not only that, but they even despite the warnings, they continually fell into it should speak to us of the addiction of human nature to idols. And addiction is really the right word for it, because in our day we talk about addicts. We don't want, you know, drug addicts.

And they even talk now about sex addicts, gambling addictions. Of course, alcoholism is considered an addiction also. And this word has become so commonplace in our society, largely due to the recovery movement, which just in the past few decades has come to include about I don't know what the percentages are, but it seems like in any group this size in a normal sampling of the church, you'd probably find half a dozen people who were one way or another involved in recovery because of the widespread addiction problem, as they call it.

But what we call addiction simply means bondage to sin. And really what it means is idolatry. Because a person who cannot stop drinking or using drugs.

Now, let's face it. People who can't stop drinking or using drugs might have a physical dependency that they develop. That's a slightly different thing.

But when we talk about someone with a gambling addiction or a sex addiction or codependency or things like that, what we're really referring to is simply behavior. We're not talking about a condition that's physiological. We're not talking about a gene in their brain or in their in their that is a gene in their makeup that makes them have to do those things.

There is no such gene. It's just putting certain behaviors ahead of God. And when a person is a Christian or even if they're not a Christian, but if they are a Christian, it's all the worse.

And they find themselves always falling back into drinking, always falling back into whatever their so-called addiction is. Really, what it means is that that's an object or a thing that they're putting ahead of God because they know that God doesn't want them

to do it. So they make a choice.

And when doing that thing becomes their lifestyle. Rather than obeying God becomes their lifestyle, then they have an idol in their life. And so really, our society has its own idolatry.

We just give them therapeutic sounding names like addictive behavior and addictive personality and so forth. Well, we find more warnings in chapter 13 about idolatry and severe penalties. That is very strong emphasis on the death penalty for idolatry.

And remember, if this sounds severe, that what God is making clear is the only reason that God is keeping Israel around at all is because they are his own special people. Just like a man supports his wife and children because they are his wife and children. He might not dislike them if they're not his wife and children.

He might not hate them, but he would hardly devote his life to them in the same manner if they are simply, you know, a woman and children that he knows of another family. If they're his own, he takes responsibility for them. He cares for them.

They become his and he will lay down his life for them. And so God was with Israel. He kept them around and supported them and protected them and owned them only because they were in a covenant relationship.

And just as a man will not very often continue to maintain the same kind of relationship with his wife, if she's out continually sleeping with other men or has ongoing affairs that she doesn't repent of. So God would not continue his relationship with Israel if they cheated on him, if they worshipped other deities besides him, and if he would cease to keep them around, that means their nation be destroyed. So the person who leads the nation into idolatry is leading the nation to its own destruction.

You might as well have somebody setting bombs around the country to destroy all the capitals and all the all the places of all the infrastructure of the country and destroy the country that way. That's that be just as much the kind of destructive behavior toward the nation as leading Israel into idolatry would be. And so those who are caught doing so were truly traitors against their own people and against the nation, as well as against God, because to make God angry at the nation is to doom the nation.

And that has been made clear many times in the speeches that Moses has made, and he's not finished making that clear. In Chapter 13, he says, If there arises among you a dreamer that is a prophet or a dreamer of dreams and he gives you a sign or a wonder and a sign or the wonder comes to pass of which he spoke to you saying, Let us go after other gods which you have not known and let us serve them. You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams for Yahweh, your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord, your God with all your heart with all your soul.

Now, the word prophet is used here and obviously to description of what we would call a false prophet. And we find that expression in the New Testament false prophets. Jesus said there shall arise false Christ and false prophets.

John said in first John for many false prophets have gone out into the world. In the book of Revelation, there's a character called a false prophet. But in the Old Testament, you never find the expression false prophet.

You just find the word prophet. Then you have to decide whether he's a true or false one. Anyone who claims to be a prophet is a prophet.

They're either a true one or a false one. You see, I'm not a false prophet, because I don't claim to be a prophet. I could be a false teacher because I do claim to be a teacher.

And therefore, if I'm wrong and right, he said I could be called a false teacher. But no one can call me a false prophet because I'm not any kind of a prophet. I don't make any claims that.

But if I claimed to be a prophet. Either I am one or if I'm not one, I'm a false prophet. I'm making a false claim.

So everybody who claims to speak for God is a prophet. And the Old Testament just uses that word for anyone who makes that claim. However, it is important for the people of God to recognize that not everybody who makes that claim is making a legitimate claim.

They're not always truly a prophet of God. And if they are not, then they are what we would call a false prophet. So John says in First John, for one beloved, do not believe every spirit.

He means every prophetic utterance that is given as if it is from God. He says, but test the spirits, whether they are of God. For many false prophets have gone out into the world.

So Christians are supposed to test the claims of prophets. And Deuteronomy mentions if there arises a prophet, somebody who claims to be speaking for God. He also mentions or dreamer of dreams.

Of course, you're not talking about all dreaming. Everyone dreams, but it's talking about people who claim to have prophetic dreams. Remember back in the book of Numbers and Chapter 12, when Aaron and Aaron and Miriam complained about Moses that God rebuked them and said, if I, the Lord, raise up a prophet, I will speak him in a vision or in a dream.

And so dreams and visions were the common ways that people did receive and claimed to receive revelation from God. So here there is a scenario set up of a person who claims

to be a prophet, claims to have had a dream and is therefore expecting people to see him as one who has some spiritual authority of some kind to lead the congregation through these prophecies and dreams. And this prophet or this dreamer of dreams actually does give a sign or a wonder which comes to pass.

Now, there's two passages in Deuteronomy where Moses warns about false prophets. Again, he doesn't use the term false prophet, but he uses the word prophets, and he gives two different standards for judging a false claimant to be a true prophet. The other place is, by the way, in Deuteronomy 18.

In Deuteronomy 18 verse 15, it says that God's going to raise up another prophet like Moses. But then, of course, it says in verse 19, and it shall be that whoever will not hear my words, which he speaks in my name, I will require of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.

And if you say in your heart, how shall we know the word which Yahweh has not spoken? In other words, how will we recognize the prophet is a false prophet? The answer is when a prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which Yahweh has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously and shall not. You should not be afraid of him.

So here we're told that a false prophet can be recognized in many cases because he makes a prediction and it doesn't happen. If God's true prophets make predictions, they will happen. God does not predict something and then fail to bring it to pass.

Except, of course, in cases where the prophecy is conditional. As when Jonah said in 40 days, Nineveh will perish and then they repented and they didn't perish in 40 days. Obviously, God's prophecies always admit an element of conditionality, and he says so.

In Jeremiah Chapter 18, he mentions that that is the case. Whenever he makes a prophecy of judgment, he will reverse it if they repent. Whenever he makes a prophecy of blessing, he will reverse it if they turn and rebel against him.

There is that element of conditionality, and sometimes a true prophet will predict something and it won't come to pass because it brought about the desired change in the people. But if in cases that are other than that, when there's just a prediction that something will happen and it doesn't happen and there's no good reason that didn't happen, then you know that that's not a true prophet. But then in Chapter 13, we have this other situation.

A prophet does. He gives a sign or wonder, and it does happen. So here we have a different scenario.

In one case, if a prophet predicts that something will happen and it doesn't, that proves

he's a false prophet. But if he predicts that something will happen and it does happen, that doesn't necessarily prove he's a true prophet. He may still be a false prophet.

That is, a prophet who is false might make a prediction that will not happen or might make a prediction that will happen in the second instance. The way you know he's a false prophet is by what he says you should do if he tells you to depart from God, if he tells you to worship other gods, or we might simply say if he teaches you to disobey God in general or to rebel against God. If he teaches contrary to the teachings of Scripture.

Then that person is a false prophet. Now, it says if a guy comes along and does that, you shall not listen to the words of that prophet. Verse three says.

Now, here's an interesting thing. The prophet in question has worked a sign or a wonder. Now, he could be a fake.

That is, he could be a trickster or he might even have some kind of supernatural power, but not from God. We would say we would say he has supernatural power from the devil, because we do believe that such things exist. It says about the man of lawlessness and second Thessalonians chapter two.

It says that he works all lying signs and wonders by the power of Satan. So it is possible for there be lying or deceptive signs and wonders that are done by the power of Satan, according to second Thessalonians chapter two. And so we might say, well, this man in the picture here is a false prophet.

He has done a sign or wonder it came to pass, but he's a false prophet, leading people away from God. He is empowered by Satan, and that may indeed be true, but that's not what Moses says. He does not deny that it is safe, but he does not say that it is either.

He gives a different reason for that prophet being able to do that. It is the Lord. Your God is testing you now.

It may be, in fact, that he is testing you by allowing Satan to work wonders. To test your loyalty to God, or it might even be that God is working the wonder through the prophet, even though he's a false prophet, because we know that God can work through persons who aren't real believers. He spoke prophetically in a true prophecy from Balaam, who is not a true believer.

And he prophesied through Caiaphas. The Bible says he prophesied through King Saul when he was in rebellion against God. It is possible for God to work through somebody who is not one of his people.

If God has some reason to want to do so, and if it is his desire to test his people, it's conceivable that God might even. Make the sign or the wonder come true that the false

prophet predicted so that the test would be convincing. But I'm I'm of the opinion, probably that it's the devil that works these signs and wonders through these false prophets, but God permits it.

The point that Moses brings up is that he's not talking about the role of the devil. We always focus on the role of the devil. But here, no doubt the devil is involved, but the Bible just ignores him.

The real issue is knowing why God is allowing this to happen. Why does God let this sign or this wonder occur, which would lead you astray? Because God has an intention in it. It's his desire that his people be tested.

We saw this in the Garden of Eden. He allowed there to be a false prophet there called the serpent. Who lied to them and told them things they should have known better about because God had told them otherwise, but they listened to the serpent and they failed that test.

Israel would also have occasions when the serpent, it may be, would inspire a prophet to lie to them and to give convincing reasons why they should believe, but not convincing enough. And what this passage tells us is that we have to recognize in many circumstances of life, God's underlying purpose to test our loyalty, to see if you love the Lord, your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Some of the people who I think failed such tests were people like Joseph Smith, who may indeed have received a revelation of some kind, but not from the true God.

That revelation led him away from the true God and away from the gospel. And he started the Mormon religion. He was tested and he failed the test.

And there have been many others besides who have gone off after other religions and cults and so forth. So anyway, Israel was warned about this. They didn't heed the warning very consistently, and so they often did go after other gods and did follow false prophets.

And in some cases, the kings of Israel and Judah actually had false prophets on their staff. Because the kings of Israel at a later date actually had prophet advisors because they were supposed to be following God and they didn't know God's will for their prophets on their staff. But in some areas, their prophets were prophets of Baal or otherwise false prophets.

And so Israel succumbed, unfortunately, to these deceptions, even though they're strongly and clearly warned against it. Now, verse four, you should walk after the Lord, your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice and you shall serve him and hold fast to him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death because he has spoken in order to turn you away from Yahweh, your God, who

brought you out of the land of Egypt and who redeemed you from the house of bondage to entice you from the way in which the Lord, your God, commanded you to walk.

So you should put away the evil from your midst. This business of putting away the evil from your midst is a phrase that is used also in some later passages in Deuteronomy. Paul quoted it in First Corinthians five thirteen when he was talking about a man who was living in blatant immorality, yet still remained a member of the church and therefore was trying to live a double double life, claiming to be part of the body of Christ and also claiming by his life to be, you know, a rebel against Christ.

And so Paul recommends church discipline in First Corinthians five against this man, and that discipline is described in verse four, which is in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. When you're gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. So this disciplinary action is intended to redeem him, to bring him back to repentance.

But in the meantime, they must turn him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh. And at the end of this chapter, at the end of verse thirteen, he says, therefore, put away from yourselves that wicked person. That statement put away from yourselves that wicked person is an echo of Deuteronomy thirteen five and several other places in Deuteronomy that use the same expression.

Deuteronomy seventeen verse seven and verse twelve and also Deuteronomy nineteen nineteen. And there are several other places in Deuteronomy that say, put away from yourself that wicked person. Paul quotes it.

It's interesting that in Deuteronomy it's time about killing the person. Paul does not advocate killing the person, but rather turning that person over to Satan. For the destruction of their flesh, what that destruction of their flesh may entail, we don't know, but it was not malicious.

It was in order that their spirit might be saved in the day of Christ Jesus. My assumption is that by kicking the person out of the church, that person was simply thrown into the devil's domain for the devil to batter him as he wished. And hopefully after taking a beating of some sort in the world from the devil, a spiritual beating, it probably may be physical also.

Then that person may come running back to God on God's terms as a repentant person. So the spirit may be saved in the day of Jesus. But it's clear that this idea of putting out of your midst the evil person is absolutely essential to Israel, that they get rid of the people who are going to destroy them spiritually.

And in Israel's case, it may kill them. The church also has to be prepared to put out of

their midst those whose activities are going to destroy the loyalty of the church to Christ, the sanctity of the church, the testimony of the church. And yet we don't kill them.

But putting them out of the church is apparently Paul's idea of the counterpart to putting away from your midst that evil person. Now, Deuteronomy 13, 6, another scenario, someone else tries to lead you astray, not a false prophet, but someone near you, a friend, a relative. If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, that means the wife that you love.

Or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you saying, let us go and serve other gods, which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers. Of the gods of the people which are all around you, near to you or far off from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth. You shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him.

But you should surely kill him. Your hand should be the first against him to put him to death and afterward the hand of all the people. And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

So all Israel shall hear and fear and not again do such wickedness as this among you. Now, this really wasn't practiced on record in Israel. As far as I know, the only time recorded where this action was actually carried out was after Elijah, the prophet, had his contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.

And when it was demonstrated that God, Yahweh, was the true God and that Baal was false, the people suddenly were very loyal to God briefly. And Elijah exploited their enthusiasm at that moment, said, gather up the prophets of Baal and kill them, which they did. Of course, the prophets of Baal should have been killed long earlier, as soon as they were known to be prophets of Baal in Israel.

There shouldn't be prophets of Baal in Israel, but they had actually been the advisors to Queen Jezebel, who was herself a Baal worshiper. And so she should have been killed too. And she eventually was.

But Israel had tolerated this for too long. And as far as we know, the only recorded time, I think, of false prophets being actually executed was on that occasion. And perhaps one reason they weren't executed more is because probably very often people feared to recommend idolatry.

I'm not sure how it crept in. It usually crept in through the government, I think, through kings. And they obviously have the kings seem to be rather immune from being stoned to death.

I mean, not legitimately immune, but just they have the power. So it wasn't easy for

someone to take them out. Verse 12, if you hear someone in your city, in one of your cities.

Which Yahweh, your God, gives you to dwell in, saying certain corrupt men have gone out from among you and entice the inhabitants of their city, saying, let us go and serve other gods, gods whom you have not known. Then you shall inquire, search out and ask diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination was committed among you, you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of a sword, utterly destroying it.

All that is in it and its livestock with the edge of the sword. This is called in the Old Testament, called placing a city under the ban. Under the ban meant it would be utterly wiped out, nothing left.

Jericho was placed under the ban in the initial stages of the conquest of Canaan. Other cities were usually not, but if a Jewish city turned to idolatry, it should be placed under the ban. It should be totally wiped out, annihilated.

And it says then. Verse 16, and you should gather all its plunder into the middle of the street and completely burn with fire the city and all its plunder for the Lord, your God. And it shall be a heap forever.

It shall not be built again. So none of the accursed things shall remain in your hand. That you may turn from the fierceness of his anger and show you mercy and have compassion on you and multiply you just as he swore to your father's.

Because you have listened to the voice of the Lord, your God, to keep his commandments, which I command you today to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord, your God. Now, we're going to see that. They could not destroy a city like this simply on a rumor, if they heard a rumor, it says they must inquire and search out and ask diligently.

There's this is a sentence that suggests that it has to be a very fair inquiry into the matter and not just jump to conclusions on the basis of gossip. You have to check it out, see if it's true, inquire diligently, ask knowledgeable people, get witnesses. And the law that is often repeated in Deuteronomy is you can't take any action of judgment against somebody with only one witness.

You have to have at least two witnesses. So in a sense, although it seems severe from our point of view to totally annihilate a city and everyone in it, it is only done very cautiously. It is only done after it is certain that the city has tolerated idolatry, which no city in Israel should ever do.

There's a sense in which this is more severe than what we would want to approve in our with our natural sensitivities, but on the other hand, it's more fair than what we often do,

because we will often accept accusations against people without two witnesses. We'll just hear gossip about somebody, we'll hear a rumor about somebody and without inquiring diligently to find out if it's true, we'll assume it's true. And although we don't kill people over it, we often will treat them as if they are guilty of something without having yet discovered if they really were.

We've just heard something about it. And so the rule in Israel was that they could only condemn somebody if there were sufficient legal testimony against them. And God was very concerned that no injustice be done.

And God didn't just fly off the handle and didn't want Israel to fly off the handle upon the report that there is idolatry in the city. But if there was, if they could make inquiry and find out that this was, in fact, true, then that city deserved what it got. Now, in verse 16, where it says they gather all the plunder and they burn it, there may have been this ruling in the minds of the Christians in Ephesus over in Chapter 19 of Acts.

Where there were a number of people who were converted, who had practiced the black arts and had been involved in the occult. And it says in Acts 19, 19, many of those who had practiced magic. Brought their books together and burned them.

In the sight of all, and they counted up the value of them, and it totaled 50,000 pieces of silver. And so the word of the Lord grew, my lane prevailed as they made a big bonfire, which is apparently of a large number of books. The number of pieces of silver, I wouldn't know how to translate that into actual numbers of books.

But the fact that the number is given, the value, seems to indicate it was quite a considerable amount of books that were simply burned up in a big pile, a big bonfire, because they were an abomination. And being rid of them was the thing to do, just like burning up all the rubble of this city that was involved in this abomination. And it says in Deuteronomy at the end of verse 16, there that city shall never be built again.

It does not say why. It may be just that it should be a perpetual memorial of what's going to happen to cities if they depart from the Lord. It may also be that because they got involved in idolatry, that there are demonic powers that become associated with the location.

And building a city on that location again would be not a wise idea because it does appear, although the Bible is not explicit about this, it does appear that demonic powers, once they are invited into a home or into a place or even into a person, sometimes feel that that's their territory. And even if driven out, they sometimes come back, Jesus said. And in an area like that where people have turned over to demon worship, it may be that they have opened a portal for demonic entrance into an area and that building another city on that spot would just result in the same problems resulting in it.

Remember when in the law of leprosy in chapter 14 of Leviticus, it talks about leprosy in a house that if you find leprosy in a house, which would probably be mold growing on the walls, you first remove all the stones that have that are affected, take them out to an unclean place and leave them and scrub the house down and sweep out the dust of it and get it all out of the house and replace the stones with good new stones and plaster, new plaster and so forth. Hopefully, you've gotten rid of the problem, but if it reappears, then the whole house be dismantled. The whole house has to be taken down.

It's the end of that house because it's got a chronic condition, a recurring condition. And so I said that that law may have relevance to the house of Israel having a recurring chronic condition of idolatry that even when God purges it out, it seems to return. And that may have been especially true of particular cities that invited idolatry into their into their walls.

It may be that many cases these became a place where there was a spiritual presence of an evil sort that would cause the leprosy of idolatry to grow again in the same place. And so the whole thing had to be dismantled and considered an unclean place and not a place to build a new city. Now, Chapter 14, you are the children of the Lord, your God.

Now, this is unusual to speak of Israel as God's children, not unheard of, but unusual in the Old Testament. Remember, Jesus made that his primary emphasis in his ministry, that we are God's children. God is our father.

That's how we're supposed to think about God. That's how God thinks about us. But that was not the common way that Israel thought of God, they thought of him in somewhat more remote and aloof terms than of a father.

Yet Jesus, in bringing that up, is only reminding them of what the Old Testament says, though it does not say very often. It says that sometimes and it is this aspect of God's relationship with his people that Jesus thought should be underscored and remembered in all relations with him. That he is like a father and he views his children like a family.

You are the children of the Lord, your God. You shall not cut yourselves or shave the front of your head for the dead, for you are a holy people to the Lord, your God. And the Lord has chosen you to be a people for himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Now, the idea that God is a father, we often understand from Jesus teaching that that speaks of how kindly he feels toward us like a father feels toward his children. Even in the Old Testament, in Psalm 103, it says, like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him. So those who fear God are likened to the children of a father who pities them.

That's in Psalm 103, verse 13. Psalm 103, 13, as a father pities his children, so the Lord

pities those who fear him. And so Jesus talks about how earthly fathers delight to give good gifts to their children.

How much more does your heavenly father wish to do so? And so Jesus emphasizes, you know, God is on your side like a father is on the side of his own family. And it may be that that will be the only aspect of a father that we think of when we think of God as a father. He's an indulgent, sympathetic God.

Now, some people have just the opposite impression of God and think of him as very non-sympathetic. But but we we can go the other direction to say that God is a father, does speak of his concern and his sympathy and his love for us as children, but also has another side to it. And that is he's a father.

We are his children. He is the one to whom we are to be loyal. He is the one who we're supposed to obey like children obey a father.

We have to remember whose family we belong to and that our father is the one. Who determines how we are to behave, and that's the point that Moses makes here, you're the children of God, so behave like it. Don't act like the priests of the false religions who shave their hair in a certain configuration, probably referring to a widow's peak kind of a configuration such as some of the demonic priests did and which has come to be in in sort of a stereotype in an artwork of Satan, pictures of Satan and even Satanists and even sometimes vampires and other, you know, demonic creatures and persons are are depicted with this kind of hair.

So are they. They shave the bald area up into their forehead, but they leave the point in the middle. That was something that the Canaanite priests did.

And God says, don't do that kind of thing and don't cut yourselves. That's also something that false prophets and priests did. Remember when Elijah and the prophets of Baal were squaring off on Mount Carmel? It says the prophets of Baal were cutting themselves, trying to get Baal to pay attention.

That is not the way God is to be worshipped. And therefore, because you're God's children, you don't do the things that other gods require their people to do. You don't cut yourselves or shave the front of your head for the dead.

You don't mourn that way. You don't worship that way. You're a holy people to the Lord your God.

Verse three, you should not eat any detestable thing. These are the animals that you may eat, the ox, the sheep, the goat, the deer, the gazelle, the roe, the deer, the wild goat, the mountain goat and the antelope and the mountain sheep. Now, looks like there's 10 or 11 animals listed here.

The rules that follow from this verse on through verse 21 present the same standards for clean and unclean foods that we found given in Leviticus chapter 11. It's almost entirely a repeat. The listing of certain clean animals individually here in verses four and five is unusual in that the chapter 11 of Leviticus doesn't name the clean animals.

It just tells what constitutes a clean animal. And that's the same thing we will read of here in verse six. You may eat every animal that with cloth and hooves, having the hoof split into two parts and that choose the cud or a ruminant among the animals.

So that that's the general rule. We've seen that already in Leviticus, an animal that has both those characteristics. It's a ruminating animal that chooses the cud and it also has a cloven hoof, a divided hoof.

Those two features, when found in the same animal, make it a clean animal. It's just it's unique to Deuteronomy to actually give the list of animals that are clean. You don't really need a list like that as long as you know these two qualifications.

You can decide what animal is clean and what's not. And then it gives examples of animals that chew the cud or appear to chew the cud that don't have a cloven hoof and therefore they don't qualify. And then it gives again the example of the swine in verse eight, which does have a cloven hoof, but does not chew the cud.

And therefore, these animals, though they have one of the two characteristics, they do not have both. And therefore, they're not clean. And then in verse nine, he talks about the clean things that are in the sea.

And as in Leviticus 11, it's the same. They have fins and scales. If they don't have fins and scales, they are unclean.

And then the birds in verse 11. The birds you may eat and then all clean birds you may eat. But then he lists the unclean birds.

That is as it was also in Leviticus. There is no list of clean birds. There are birds that can be eaten.

In fact, apparently most birds can be eaten, but some cannot. And the ones that are listed are birds that eat rotten flesh, really, that eat carrion or that are prone to do so. They don't necessarily live entirely on it, but they are carnivorous birds and they are unclean.

And then it says in verse 19, also, every creeping thing that flies is unclean for you. They shall not be eaten. Now, creeping things that fly.

This may be a reference to insects that fly, although we know that in Leviticus 11, there's one caveat there. You can eat an insect if it has jointed hind legs where the joint

is above the body, like a grasshopper's hind legs or cricket's hind legs. Now, those fly, but they have another special characteristic that qualifies them to be eaten.

All other insects should not. Now, other creeping things that fly could considerably, I mean, you could consider maybe a flying squirrel as a creeping thing that flies, although it really glides. It doesn't really fly like a bird or an insect.

But I think probably it's a reference to insects that fly, but it leaves out the qualification that's given of the jointed legged insects mentioned in Leviticus, which, by leaving it out, reminds us of the rule of interpretation that we've observed on other occasions in interpreting scripture. And that is that when there are two passages about the same thing and one does not mention an exception to the rule, but the other passage does mention the exception of the rule, then we count that the one that gives the exception is correct and is giving us information that the other is omitting. Here, all flying insects seem to be forbidden.

In Leviticus, there's an exception given, except the ones that hop, like grasshoppers, locusts. They're an exception to this general rule. Here, the general rule is stated without the exception, but that doesn't cancel out the exception.

So feel free to eat grasshoppers if you want to. And, of course, at the end of it, it says you should not boil a young goat in its mother's milk. We saw that this rule was also given previously in Exodus 23, 19, and also in Exodus 34, 26.

And yet it's a strange rule. Why would this be an issue, boiling a kid in his mother's milk? And as I said at the time when we covered it in Exodus, I think it's because it was a pagan practice and it just seems like a perversion of nature. Obviously, God gives a goat milk to feed and to nurture its young.

For its young to end up being boiled in its mother's milk just seems like a twisting of things. It's not, strictly speaking, immoral. It just seems like it's a perversion of nature.

And that people would do it when it's unnecessary to do means that they would do it, pagans, if they did that under their gods. It's probably because they're serving gods that delight in perversions of nature. But our God doesn't delight in perversions of nature, he created nature and it's the demons that love to pervert it.

So it's no doubt a pagan practice that Israel would observe among other religions around them, but which they are forbidden to duplicate. Then it says in verse 22, it gives certain new rules about tithing. Now, tithing, of course, has been commanded previously, but there's some new ideas here.

You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that your field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the Lord, your God, in the place where he chooses to make his name abide. And the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil of your firstlings,

of your herds, of your flocks and that you may learn to fear the Lord, your God, always.

But if the journey is too long for you so that you are not able to carry the tithe or if the place where the Lord, your God, chooses to put his name is too far from you when the Lord, your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange it for money. Take the money in your hand and go to the place which the Lord, your God chooses, and you shall spend that money on for whatever your heart desires for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires. You shall eat there before the Lord, your God, and you shall rejoice you and your household.

You shall not forsake the Levite who is within your gates, for he is no part nor inheritance with you. Now, what we learn here is that although the Israelites were to take a tenth of the produce of their land and of their animals and their flocks and so forth and offer them to the Lord, that is, give them to the Levites for the support of the Levites, yet in doing so, when they would transport their tithes to the temple or the tabernacle, on the occasion of delivering them to the Levites, they themselves would share with the Levites in a festal meal of worship. They would actually eat their tithes, not much of it, because, of course, a year's harvest would be, a tenth of that would be way too much to eat in a single meal.

In fact, it should be enough for Levites to live on all year. But you would at least take enough of it to feed your family for a single meal. And traveling with your tithe might be a problem if you had, for example, several wagon loads of grain that constitute your tithe, rather than, you know, bringing a caravan down to Jerusalem or Shiloh or wherever they're going with it, you can turn your tithe into actual money, which could be carried in a bag and turn it back into edibles.

When you get to the place where the tabernacle is. But those could be in any form. Your tithe might have been in the form of wheat.

When you turn it into money, you come down to the temple or the tabernacle, you then can buy any edible thing. It doesn't have to be wheat. Anything of equal value that's edible, you can buy livestock, you can buy whatever you want, and you can have a feast there and give the rest of it to the Levites.

Now, it says in verse 28, and this is what many commentators are not quite sure what to do with this section in verse 28 at the end of every third year, you should bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates and the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates may come and eat and be satisfied that the Lord, your God may bless you in all the work of your hands, which you do now. In verse 22, it says they bring the tithe year by year. That means annually.

But here we read of a tithe of the third year, every third year, this tithe is treated

somewhat differently. It is not apparently brought to the tabernacle. It is stored within your gates that is in each city.

There would be a storage, grain storage room, which we used to feed the Levites who lived in the area, as well as the poor and the strangers. That is, it was sort of a food bank for the poor, sort of instead of a welfare system. Apparently, it was thought that the tithe of the produce of the land.

For any given year would be enough to feed the poor for three years. And so they only had to do this every three years. Now, what scholars are not totally in agreement about is whether this was simply the way the tithe, the ordinary tithe of the third year was used or whether this was an additional tithe every third year.

That in addition to the regular tithing, which was taken to the priests in in Shiloh or wherever, there was a second 10 percent, a second tithe every third year that they were supposed to put aside for the poor and not bring to the tabernacle. But do it in their gates. And I believe that the tradition of the rabbis in the intertestamental period was that this was a second tithe additional to the first so that on the third year, they'd really be giving 20 percent, 10 percent they'd take to the tabernacle as usual and another 10 percent they'd store in their own gates for the local Levites who lived there and for the poor and so forth.

Again, that's not certain, but that is the way the Jews came to understand it. Now, Chapter 15. We have here the law of the Sabbath years, which have been discussed in a few other places already in Exodus, Chapter 21.

Verses two through six, we already had a law about the release of Hebrew slaves on the seventh year. It was called the year of release. Every seventh year was a Sabbath year.

It was also called the year of release. And the Hebrew slaves were offered their freedom in the seventh year. And if they didn't want their freedom, then they could stay slaves the rest of their lives.

They could make that decision if they wanted to. And if they did, they would have their ear pierced. Now, the rest of their lives probably would mean until Jubilee, if there happened to be a Jubilee in their lifetime.

Jubilee came every 50 years. Some people might live their whole life and never, never know a Jubilee, or it might occur when they're young children and they wouldn't live long enough to see the next one. But I think that even a slave for life had to be released at Jubilee, though they might not want to be.

Again, I assume that at Jubilee, a slave could still renew his desire to remain a perpetual slave. I wouldn't think he'd have to go free. But the main thing here is that the seventh year, as it's been described in Exodus chapter 21, verses two through six, was said to be

a year of the release of Hebrew slaves.

Likewise, Leviticus 25 had discussed it in verses 39 through 55. So this is not the first time we have a discussion of the seventh year, and we see that in this chapter, 15 verses 12 through 18, we have a repetition of the law about releasing the Hebrew slave on the seventh year. One difference here that is not mentioned in the previous occasions is in verse 12.

It mentions a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman. The previous passages only spoke about a Hebrew man slave. But this mentions that female slaves would also be included in this legislation.

And the same thing applies to them. They're offered their freedom at the end of six years. In the seventh year, they're offered freedom, but they can remain slaves for life if they choose.

It also says that when you release the slave. It says that you should not send them away empty in verse 13, but rather, verse 14 says you shall supply him liberally with your from your flock, from your threshing floor, from your wine press, from what the Lord has blessed you with. You should give him.

And therefore, when they would release their slave, they wouldn't he wouldn't just go empty handed. The problem seven years earlier with him was that he was poor and he couldn't pay his bills. So he sold himself into slavery.

If you release him equally poor, then you've you know, there's been you've just kind of the cycle begins again. And he's just as dependent as he was before he came in. He's going to have to sell himself again.

So the idea is after he has served you for six years. Without pay, you kind of give him some back pay, you give him some kind of you set him up financially so that he can live for a while without your support, without your further support. And he can get on his feet.

That's the idea. You don't just send him out poor, you send him out better off than he came in. Now, those rules in verses 12 through 18 are added to what has been said about that before.

Now, verses one through 11 and another provision for the seventh year. Not only is it a year where they are to release their Hebrew slaves is also a year where they're supposed to cancel debts. Now, canceled debts is how it's translated, but actually, some scholars think this means simply postpone the payment of debt.

That is, if someone owes you something that is to be paid in the seventh year, that is, the debt comes due, that you don't make him pay it in the seventh year, you give him a

year leeway. And so the debt isn't fully canceled, necessarily, but postponed. There is not agreement among scholars about this, although Jesus seemed to suggest that total cancellation of debts is a Christian response to a man's indebtedness to you.

Because in Luke 6, 35, Jesus says, do good and lend, hoping for nothing in return. That is, you lend, but you lend with the being prepared to cancel the debt. Now, you lend, really, the person who borrows from you should plan to pay you back and should, as much as possible, fulfill that plan.

Because you shouldn't borrow money and not repay it, but if you do borrow money and cannot repay it, the Christian lenders should be prepared to absorb the loss. That's what Jesus seemed to teach. And that would be perhaps his application of this general rule.

Only Jesus doesn't say do it on the seventh year. He basically says do it as a way of life. The seventh year would just be a time where this principle is illustrated once every seven years.

At the end of every seven years, verse 15 says, you shall grant a release of debts. And this is the form of the release. Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall release it.

He shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother because it is called the Lord's release of a foreigner. You may require it. But your hand shall release what is owed to you by your brother, except when there may be no poor among you.

Now, if the time ever came where there were no poor among you, then there's no debts there to release. However, we're going to see down in verse 11, for the poor will never cease from the land. There will always be poor among you.

But if there were no poor among you, then this wouldn't apply. This is this is about helping the poor. That's what it's about.

And so if there comes a time when there's no poor among you, which is hypothetical, he says, for the Lord will greatly bless you in the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you to possess as an inheritance. Only if you carefully obey the voice of the Lord, your God, to observe with care all the commandments which I command you today for the Lord, your God, will bless you. Just as he promised you, you shall lend to many nations, but you should not borrow.

You should reign over many nations and they should not reign over you. Now, as you should not borrow, it's not a command. There is no command in Scripture not to borrow, but it's a promise.

It's basically saying, of course, you wouldn't borrow if you don't need to. No one would want to be in debt, certainly. They couldn't imagine our modern society where people go

into debt for fun.

You know, to buy recreational toys and things like that, to upgrade their lifestyle just unnecessarily, and they incurred debt upon themselves. We live our whole society lives that way. In those days, a person would be ashamed to go into debt.

Who wants the burden of a debt? It's crushing. It's hard enough to live without having to also make payments on a previously owed amount. The assumption is if you're in a debt, it's because you were poor, you couldn't help it, you had to go into debt to survive.

And therefore, the idea was that if God blesses you, you will not borrow because you won't have to. And you certainly wouldn't do it if you didn't have to, would you? No one would want to go into debt, it is assumed. Now, we do because we're presumptuous about the future.

We are not willing to live according to our means that God provides. And we incur bondage that we don't even consider to be bondage. Maybe because it's in the back of our minds, if we can't pay it off, we can always declare bankruptcy and get out of it.

And there are people who have that as an option in their mind. They figure, well, we'll probably be able to pay this off, but if we can't, we can just declare bankruptcy so we can live high, we can we can live beyond our means. We can take advantage of other people's money to increase our standard of living.

And then if we can't pay it off, of course, we can just default. We can file for bankruptcy. And that's how people live in this society.

That wasn't the way it was in that society. They didn't borrow from banks to capitalize ventures and things like that, like we do. They inherited their houses from their ancestors, so they didn't have mortgages.

They didn't practice venture capitalism, which is frankly, there's nothing wrong with capitalism. But the idea that you go into debt in order to capitalize a business is something that they just wouldn't do. To borrow from others was considered to be under a curse.

Not that you were sinning by borrowing, but you had to borrow because something earlier in your life had been a sin. And the fact that you were in a condition to have to borrow was a curse, was something you wouldn't want. And we says you shall lend to many nations and you shall not borrow.

He's basically saying you'll be prosperous enough that you will be free from the need to borrow. If you obey God's laws, the nation will be. It says if there is among you a poor man, verse seven of your brethren within any of the gates of your land, which the Lord your God has given you.

You shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs. Beware, lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying the seventh year, the year of release is at hand and your eye be evil against your brother, your poor brother. And you give him nothing.

And he cry out to the Lord against you and it become a sin unto you. Now, he anticipates human greed. You would normally help the poor, but you realize, wait a minute, if I lend him money right now, you know, in a few months, it's the year of release.

I have to release the debt. I'm not going to get my money back. So I'm not going to lend him any money.

God says, don't succumb to that way of thinking. Don't be greedy, be generous. Don't let your eye be evil.

That's a Hebrew idiom for being greedy, having an evil eye. And he says that will become a sin among you, verse 10, for you should surely give to him and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing, the Lord, your God will bless you in all your works and in all which you put your hand to do for the poor will never cease from the land. Therefore, I commanded you saying you shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor, to your needy and your land.

The poor will never cease to land is no doubt a quotation of a verse that Jesus quoted when Mary had poured the oil or the perfume over Jesus and Judas complained and said this should have been given to the poor. Jesus said, you'll always have the poor with you. You can give to them whenever you want to.

He was apparently quoting this statement, you'll always have poor with you. Some Christians I've known have used that expression, say we shouldn't try to alleviate poverty because the Bible says you'll always have poor people. In other words, it's a losing battle to try to end poverty.

Why help the poor when there's always going to be poor people? You can't help more than. You can't help them all, you know, like the starfish story, probably everyone's heard that by now, where the guy was on the beach and that night of thousands of starfish had been washed ashore and strand on the beach and and the guys out there throwing them like frisbees into the water, sending them back home off the beach. But there's still thousands he's not getting to.

And as a pastor writes, what's the point? It doesn't make any difference. All these are going to perish. Why throw these ones in there? It's not going to make any difference.

And the guy who hurled one into it made differences to that one, you know, and you can't you can't end poverty completely. But you can help somebody who's in poverty

and it'll make a difference to them, can change their whole life. And so he says you're always going to poor people, but you should give to them.

You didn't say you're always going to poor people. So why bother trying to help? That's the way some people translate it. Even Christians, I've heard Jesus said, you'll always have the poor with you.

So why mess with it? Why do I change the circumstance? Well, you may never end poverty, but you can end it for one family or two or three. And some of us would be in the position to help a lot of families, poor people in other lands, even. The point is that God wants you to have compassion on the poor.

He then goes into the description of releasing the slave in the seventh year. And then in verse 19, all the firstborn males that come from the herd and from the flock, you shall sanctify to the Lord your God. You should do no work with the firstborn of your herd, nor share the firstborn of your flock, as you don't take for yourself any of the benefits of that animal.

It's not yours. It's God's. You and your household shall eat it before the Lord, your God, year by year in the place which the Lord chooses.

So you do get to eat one meal of it when you offer it to the Lord at the tabernacle. But you don't get to experience the financial benefits of the ownership of the animal. But if there is any defect in it, if it is lame or blind or has any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to the Lord, your God.

You may eat it within your gates. The unclean and the clean person alike may eat it as if it were a gazelle or a deer. Only you shall not eat its blood.

You should pour it out on the ground like water. Now, this is essentially just saying that the firstborn animal belongs to the Lord, but you can't offer it to the Lord as a sacrifice if it's not qualified, if it's got defects. You can eat it at home.

But the assumption is, and it's stated earlier in other laws, that you can eat it at home only after you redeem it. It belongs to the Lord. It's not yours.

So you have to buy it. You have to give the Lord the cash value for it. And plus, of course, 20 percent.

That's what the law in Deuteronomy made clear. I mean, in numbers made clear that you can you can redeem certain holy things like the firstborn only by paying the cash value of it, plus a 20 percent interest or a penalty more like on it. OK, so that brings us to the end of Chapter 15.

And there we will stop for now.