

SESSION #11 (19 Jan 10)

I. INTRODUCTION & REVIEW

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|-----------------|---|
| 1:1-5 | Introduction to God's spokesman, the 1st Prophet Moses |
| 1:6-4:40 | 1st Exposition of the Torah = <u>motivation</u> to obey from <u>past gracious actions</u> of Yahweh |
| 1:6-3:29 | Historical analysis of Israel from Sinai to the Transjordanian victories |
| 4:1-40 | Implications for the future of the nation |
| 4:1-8 | A unique way of life for a unique nation |

A. What God is doing in these 4 chapters:

- 2 powerful works of the Holy Spirit: (1) *motivate* and (2) *empower*.
- He works through Moses in **1:6-4:40** to motivate
- How does he motivate?

B. What the Beth Peor incident revealed:

- God's election means the nation is eternally secure -- no demonic forces are strong enough to interfere with that destiny (cf. **Rom. 8:38-39**).
- **But** God doesn't shield them from their responsible choices:
- Issue: where is primary responsibility located—in the people or in their leaders? What happened at Sinai—people or Moses? See post-mortem analysis of the fall of Israel in **2 Kings 17:7-8, 13-14**.

C. Introduction (partial) to the matter of ethics and law:

Historical Oscillation between Paganism and God's Revelation:

- Paganism: Nature > Man in a process of bringing order out of chaos; ANE Canaanites recognized the point (no one god permanently superior to others)
- God's Word in Diaspora: After the dispersion from Israel in the late 5th century BC, most of the "ethical" religions sprung up (probably from the Diaspora Jews influence) → classical Hellenic culture = attempt to objectify law & order first in the Greek city states and then in the Roman republic.¹ The problem with this pagan-biblical mixture is that ethics and law are principles levitating in an totally impersonal environment
- Paganism: Rome went from a republic to a dictatorship under the Caesars and eventually to collapse from social immorality, slavery, corruption (pagan consequence)
- God's Word in "Christendom": Christian influence brings biblical theology and its legal implications [*transcendent law known in its basics to all*] to kings'

¹. "Seven [ethical] world religions appeared within fifty years of each other and all continue to this day." Robert Brow, Religion: Origin and Ideas (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 27. Also, shortly after Israel's fall and the resulting Diaspora classical Greek philosophy arose. Scholars still puzzle over how the idea of a rationally-ordered cosmos suddenly triumphed over chaotic paganism in the 6th century BC. The Bible solves the puzzle.

- attention (Augustine chief spokesman) → strongest in West and after the Reformation strongest in northern Europe and Great Britain
- God's Word in Post-Reformation Europe: Sir William Blackstone wrote Commentaries on the Laws of England that spoke of common law based upon an unchanging higher law of God → US founding fathers
 - Paganism: Enlightenment once again trying to do what classical Greek philosophy had done, erect absolute ethics and law that levitate in an ultimately impersonal environment; by the 19th century it broke down until we arrive in the post-modern relativism of our time.²

II. UNIQUE WAY OF LIFE FOR A UNIQUE NATION (4:1-8)

4:1 now O Israel. . .

Shifting to future based upon experience of the past

Vocab

TORAH: (4:8) instruction (by parents Proverbs, by priests, by court decisions, by MK Isa 2:3, custom or manner of existence 2 Sam 7:19) →

HAKKIM: prescribed task or assignment, area of operation (boundary of the sea, land of Israel, gifts to priests) → some are ethical norms that can't be enforced (e.g., 10th commandment) → ethics and law are mixed together in the Bible

MISHPATIM: judgments, case law, sentence,

A. Relation of Ethics and Law

Otto Bird's The Idea of Justice (1967)

| Concept | Consequences in Practice |
|------------------------------|---|
| Positive Law (ethics = law) | + law is objective ; - unjust law impossible |
| Social Good (ethics > law) | + law relates to social reality; - individual valued in terms of social usefulness & difficulty of calculating the "good" |
| Natural Right (ethics > law) | + law relates to the individual; - evolutionary worldview weakens concept & difficulty of specifying the "rights" |

² Oliver Wendell Holmes, Supreme Court justice (1902-32) stated clearly the modern paganized view of law. 'Law is only a prophecy of what the courts will do in fact, nothing more.' "Truth is the majority vote of that nation that can lick all others." "When it comes to development of a corpus juris the ultimate question is what do the dominant forces of the community want and do they want it hard enough to disregard whatever inhibitions may stand in the way." Frederick Moore Vinson (1890-1953), former Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court stated, "Nothing is more certain in modern society than the principle there are no absolutes." (quotes in Francis Schaeffer, How Shall We Then Live?, p217. Barack Obama in his book, Audacity of Hope says, "Implicit in [the Constitution's] structure. . . was a rejection of absolute truth, the infallibility of any idea or ideology or theology or 'ism,' any tyrannical consistency that might lock future generations into a single, unalterable course." (p93) Of course no one attributes "infallibility" to the Constitution—that's why it has amendment procedures, but the idea that human reason has no absolute standard of reference certainly wasn't the viewpoint of the Constitution's authors.

TORAH is objective, relates to social reality, and relates to the individual
HAKKIM provide the moral principles (often in abstract)
MISHPATIM provide by case law specific instances to define the HAKKIM

4:2 MITSOTH (bar mitzvah)

Emphasis upon authority

B. Relation of Law and Authority

Authority is implicit in law → lawgiver or source of law is the authority or “god”

- Genesis 3 debate between God as lawgiver and the creature as lawgiver
- A network of laws reveals the de-facto “religion” of a nation
- Historically paganism = *vox populi vox dei* as in Mao Tse-Tung “Our God is none other than the masses of the Chinese people” (The Foolish Old Man Who Removed Mountains)(**2 Kings 17:7-8,13-14**)

Summer of 1789 French Revolution → Declaration of the Rights of Man (by man)

- Practically anarchy stopped by totalitarianism

4:2 not add. . .not take from it

Deut 18:17-29 → line of prophets for 15 centuries!! Unheard of elsewhere.

1 Chron 29:29; 2 Chron 9:29; 13:22; 20:34; 32:32; 33:18; 35:27

“Such a line of apostle-prophets is unknown to paganism. . . [The pagan prophet] incorporated a unique, self-contained divine power; therefore his ‘mission’ ended with him.” Yehezkel Kaufmann, The Religion of Israel, trans. and abridged by Moshe Greenberg (ppbk ed., New York: Schocken Books, 1972 [1960]) 212.

4:3-4 clingers. . .alive. . .

Baal Peor incident: “Our Baal of Peor”

C. Law Enforcement

As Creator and God, He can “enforce” His laws directly and indirectly (angels in Gen. 3; Divine institution of civil gov’t after Gen. 9)

McClain statement:

“The well-being of men. . .is morally and spiritually conditioned by a principle confirmed by divinely imposed sanctions. Now this principle holds good generally in all nations in every age. But its operation has often been obscured to human eyes by the time ‘lag’ between the moral breach and the infliction of the sanction. . . .In the general history of nations, the divine penalties are inflicted through secondary causes behind the veil of providential control. . . .But in the case of the nation of Israel, the moral judgment of Jehovah was not only declared at Sinai but also was confirmed spectacularly in the recorded history of that kingdom by divine sanctions immediately imposed. And these sanctions were generally supernatural. . . .” Alva McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, p86

4:5 Look!

Past tense of the verb “teach” here → includes the post-Sinai history of experienced consequences

do them in the midst of the land

4:6-8 your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the peoples. . .

wisdom = skill in living

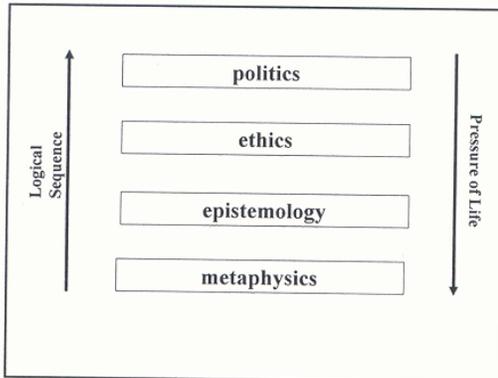
understanding = discernment

Biblical influence on our nation:

Oscar and Lillian Handlin, “Liberty in Expansion” (Harper & Row, 1989), “every man to carry with him Bible and other religious books as we hope not to degenerate into a state of barbarism.”

III. CONCLUSION

- Israel had a unique foundation for its law: Mt. Sinai revelation that alone provides adequate wisdom for successful living within God’s creation
- Israel had the correct view of ethics underneath and supportive of law (inward heart allegiance required to make external law effective)
- Israel had the correct notion of authority—rooted in the Creator, not in man.
- Israel was faced with comprehensive law-enforcement via man and via nature.
- Through the law God revealed freedom of choice and responsibility for consequences.



"Justice Lifts the Nations"
 (1905) in old Supreme Court Building, Lausanne, Switzerland

Cited in Francis Schaeffer, *How Shall We Then Live?* p107

The 3 Great Concepts of "Justice"

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|--|--|
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Declaration of the Rights of Man

"Oath of the Tennis Court" Jacques-Louis David (1789)

"What makes the history of Israelite prophecy *sui generis* is the succession of apostles of God that come to the people through the ages. Such a line of apostle-prophets is unknown in paganism. . . . [The pagan prophet] incorporated a unique, self-contained divine power; there his "mission" ended with him."
 Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*

"The well-being of men. . . is morally and spiritually conditioned by a principle confirmed by divinely imposed sanctions. Now this principle holds good generally in all nations in every age. But its operation has often been obscured to human eyes by the time 'lag' between the moral breach and the infliction of the sanction. . . . In the general history of nations, the divine penalties are inflicted through secondary causes behind the veil of providential control. . . . But in the case of the nation of Israel, the moral judgment of Jehovah was not only declared at Sinai but also was confirmed spectacularly in the recorded history of that kingdom by divine sanctions immediately imposed. And these sanctions were generally supernatural. . . ." Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p86