

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Deuteronomy: Moses' Great Appeal For Israel To Obey God For Blessing Part V: Specific Treaty Stipulations Of The Great King, Deuteronomy 12-26 C. Heeding God's Blessed Way Of Facing The Issue Of Death (Deuteronomy 14:1-2)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

We face a great need today to understand how to handle death and dying in an edifying manner:

- (1) Since the start of this summer, we as a Church have lost a total of six close relatives in death -- a brother-in-law, a grandmother, three mothers and a husband.
- (2) However, facing death is not easy: 1 Corinthians 15:26 claims death is an enemy even for us believers!
- (3) With my own Mother's recent passing and our trip last week out to California for her graveside gathering, I of course had to apply this sermon in my own life before could I deliver it to you today. The Lord has obviously led us as a body to this issue today in our expositional trek through Deuteronomy, so He wants us to address it now:

Need: *Accordingly, we ask, "How does God want me to view and handle death in an edifying manner?"*

- I. **The Deuteronomy 14:1-2 directive on handling death is part of God's Deuteronomy 12-26 specific treaty stipulations (Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 260) that were not an exhaustive list of God's laws, but that instructed Israel on specific challenges she would face upon entering Canaan, *Ibid.*, p. 283; Deut. 4:1.**
- II. **Thus, Deuteronomy 14:1-2 told Israel to handle death *OPPOSITE* the way the *PAGAN* Canaanites did:**
 - A. The practices of cutting the flesh and shaving the head that God commanded Israel not to perform in Deuteronomy 14:1-2 were Canaanite religious rituals performed in mourning for the dead, *Ibid.*, p. 287.
 - B. Since all lost men fear death, and Satan holds them in bondage to do his will by that fear (Hebrews 2:14-15), Canaan's pagans tried to "cheat" death and so minimize their fear of it by these rituals: they thus tried to force the spirits to do their will like the prophets of Baal who, by cutting themselves, tried to force Baal to ignite their sacrifice in 1 Kings 18:28. This practice was thought to give the deceased one's spirit freedom from the spirits to reach its eternal abode. (D. Eric Williams, "Another Hole In Your Head," *dewms.com*, 4/29/05)
 - C. Actually, self-cutting aligns with Satan's intent to kill man (John 8:44), and the demoniac practiced it in Mark 5:2-5, so trafficking with evil spirits may have led the Canaanites to be deceived into thinking this practice would help them when the demons were actually urging them to cut themselves akin to destroying themselves!
 - D. However, Israel was in a treaty relation with God as His "son," so she was to avoid such rituals, Deut. 14:1-2:
 1. Three times in Deuteronomy 14:1-2, God noted that Israel as His "son" was to be *distinct* from pagan man:
 - a. In Deuteronomy 14:1a, the introductory pronoun "You" is written separate from the verb as an emphatic pronoun (Kittel, Bib. Heb., p. 285) to *contrast* Israel's **sonship** with God *opposite* the pagan Canaanites.
 - b. In Deuteronomy 14:2a, the introductory "You" is **again** written as an emphatic pronoun with the **SAME** focus of *contrasting* Israel's **sonship** with God *opposite* the pagan Canaanites, *Ibid.*
 - c. In Deuteronomy 14:2b, God emphasized the fact that Israel had been chosen of God to exist as a special treasure for Himself above all of the other peoples upon the face of the earth!
 2. Accordingly, due to her special treaty "sonship" relation with God, Israel was *not* to practice the Canaanite **pagan** rituals of cutting one's self or shaving one's head so as to try to manipulate the spirit world!
- III. **The *REASON* for this rule was that, in view of Biblical history, Israel's *God* was *sovereign over death*, and being the *Good Creator of the universe*, He would give His "son" *Israel victory over it* (as follows):**
 - A. Genesis 1:31; 2:16-17 and 3:1-24 reveal that death is *not* a part of the *initial* "good" *natural* order (opposite evolutionary theory with its "survival of the fittest" idea), but that it entered the world as **judgment for sin!**
 - B. Thus, Israel was *not* to try to *manipulate the spirit world* in dealing with death, but look to **God in faith** as the **Sovereign Creator** of a "*very good*" universe for a "*very good*" **solution** to the **problem of death**, Gen. 1:31!
 - C. Indeed, that solution was implied even in Adam's fall into sin: God put cherubim by the Tree of Life to "keep, preserve" (*shamar*, *Ibid.*, Kittel, p. 5; B. D. B., A Heb.-Eng. Lex. of the O. T., p. 1036-1037) its "way" (Gen. 3:24), and since the Tree of Life is found again in heaven available for justified men in Revelation 22:2, the **Good God** of the **initially GOOD universe planned** one day to **SAVE man FROM DEATH!**
- IV. **That blessed victory is realized in its fullest sense in the Church era (as follows):**
 - A. From Romans 3:23-28, we know God's solution to death is found in Christ's substitutionary atonement, for His death provides those who trust in Him God's gift of justification and forgiveness of sin that produces death!

- B. Thus, there is hope of the resurrection for all who believe in Christ, 1 Cor. 15:20-23, which hope is applied to Old Testament believers in the Kingdom (Dan. 12:13) and to Christians at the rapture, 1 Thess. 4:14-18:
1. Old Testament believers will be resurrected at the start of Christ's messianic Kingdom, Daniel 12:11-13.
 2. We Christian believers will be raptured before the Great Tribulation Period, 1 Thessalonians 4:14-5:11:
 - a. Since Christ died for sin and rose again, those who have trusted in Him in the Church era and who have physically died will have their spirits brought from heaven by God with Christ at the rapture, and they will be reunited with their bodies that will resurrected and raised up to meet Him in the air, 1 Thess. 4:14-16.
 - b. Then, we living believers will be translated into glorified bodies and caught up to join the Lord and the rest of the Church in the air, and proceed back to heaven before the Great Tribulation, 1 Thess. 4:17-5:11.
- V. **So, instead of grieving like the lost world does at death (1 Thessalonians 4:13), we believers in Christ are to comfort one another with the words of this blessed hope of the pretribulation rapture, 1 Thess. 4:18!**
- VI. **However, to fill the VACUUM of the loss of another in death by a *PRODUCTIVE DIRECTION* while AWAITING the RAPTURE, opposite pagan mourning rituals as condemned in Deuteronomy 14:1-2, we believers are to *FOCUS on GOD'S MINISTRY ASSIGNMENT*, and He will "carry" us, Rev. 1:17-19:**
- A. When John wrote the Revelation, Christians throughout the Roman Empire faced persecution under vile Emperor Domitian, with believers all around him dying for the faith, *Ibid.*, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 925.
 - B. In light of all this personal loss for John, Jesus gave him an assignment just opposite paganism, Rev. 1:17-19:
 1. Opposite the pagan view that the spirit world can be manipulated by self-mutilation, Jesus presented Himself as "the first and the last," as the Almighty, Sovereign God, Rev. 1:17a, c with Isaiah 44:6.
 2. Opposite the pagan view that death is to be dreaded, Jesus affirmed He had died and risen forevermore in conquest of death, Revelation 1:18a, the basis for the hope of the believer's resurrection, 1 Thess. 4:14.
 3. Opposite the pagan view that death could be "cheated" by our manipulating the spirits, Jesus said He held the keys of death and Hades, sovereign over when all men died and where their souls went, Rev. 1:18b.
 4. Accordingly, in place of getting preoccupied in futile pagan mourning practices in the face of losing others in death, John was to busy himself ministering God's Word to His people, Revelation 1:19. When John did so, the Sovereign, Risen Lord, as signified by His laying His right hand of power and honor on John, would equip him to succeed in God's ministry assignment to the glory of God, Revelation 1:17b.

Lesson: *God called Israel to avoid the futile pagan view and practices relative to death and mourning, and instead trust Him, the Good God, ultimately to give His people victory over death, and so to serve Him with blessing.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ for salvation from sin, hell and eventually death, John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23. (2) Then, may we (a) submit to Christ's sovereignty over death, dying and the places of the souls of the departed dead to (b) heed His ministry assignment for us. (c) As we do so, we will "carry" us in rich blessing!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

On Saturday, July 6th after my Mother had passed on July 2nd, I drove to the Church to erect a memorial display for her in Fellowship Hall so it would be available for the congregation for the next day's Sunday services. After setting up the display and stepping back to look at it, I realized Mom was **really** gone, and fought off a massive wave of grief that hit me by recalling God's promise of meeting her again in the rapture as 1 Thessalonians 4:18 calls us to do! ***However, I noticed I needed a productive direction in my life now that I had no more contact with Mom.***

Well, upon reflection, I recalled that on June 30th, the Sunday ***before*** Mom had passed, Maureen, Rhoda and Ruth Maron, long-time former members who had since moved to another state, had visited us, and greatly encouraged us to keep ministering God's Word. I also recalled that the day ***after*** Mom had passed, we learned she had accepted Christ as her Savior at a Children's Bible Camp in 1935, a ministry akin to our V. B. S. that was set to run July 8th-12th. Thus, I saw these events that "sandwiched" Mom's passing as the Lord's circumstantial leading (as in Acts 16:6-10) that He wanted us to occupy ourselves in view of Mom's absence by focusing on His ministry assignments for us much like Jesus directed John to minister in the face of the death he faced all around him in Revelation 1:17-19.

When we then focused on the Lord's ministry, He emotionally and mentally "carried" us, giving one encouragement after another in our work. He carried us beyond our work at Nepaug to edify us as we ministered to extended family members in California who had born the brunt of the burden of Mom's care in her last days on earth.

May we trust in Christ as Savior for eternal life. Then, if we face the issue of death, may we recall the hope of the rapture for comfort, but also fill the vacuum of our loss of a loved one by heeding God's directive to perform His ministry assignments for us! In doing so, we will see Him "carry" us with encouraging blessings!