

Deuteronomy 21 – Case Law on Marriage

Day 1: The Sanctity of God's Law in a Dark World

Scripture Block

Deuteronomy 21:10–11 (NKJV): "When you go out to war against your enemies, 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, that you would take her for your wife..."

Devotional Teaching and Application

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses is laying out the law of the covenant, applying the Ten Commandments to every area of life. The treatment of women taken captive in war has been one of the great evils that men have inflicted on women throughout history. Among the heathen nations, a soldier believed a captive woman was merely spoil to be used however he pleased. But God's law allows no such thing.

This case law is a direct application of the seventh commandment: "You shall not commit adultery." It demands absolute moral purity. A woman, though taken captive and completely vulnerable, is to be treated with dignity and respect. The only context in which an Israelite man may have her is within the holy covenant of marriage. What do we mean by this? This law forbids all sexual abuse or exploitation of women for the gratification of the lusts of men.

If God forbade Israelite soldiers from taking advantage of a captive enemy, how much more are Christian men forbidden from exploiting women today? This condemns the wicked practices of our culture, from pornography to using a woman's sexuality to sell merchandise. God's law protects the vulnerable and demands that men exercise self-control, treating women with honor.

Personal Reflection Question

How does God's strict protection of this captive woman change the way we view the modern culture's casual and sinful treatment of women and marriage?

Questions for Children

1. How did God tell the soldiers of Israel to treat the women they captured? (He told them to treat the women with respect and honor, not to hurt them.)
2. What is the only relationship where God allows a man and a woman to live together? (Only in the covenant of marriage.)

Daily Scripture Memory Verse

Exodus 20:14 (NKJV): "You shall not commit adultery."

Family Prayer

Father, Your judgments are good. We praise You for Your righteous law that protects the weak and upholds purity. We confess that we live in a society that treats marriage lightly and twists Your good design. Give the men of our home pure hearts, and help us to honor the sanctity of marriage in everything we watch, say, and do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 2: Cleansed from the Heathen Past

Scripture Block

Deuteronomy 21:12–13a (NKJV): "...then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails. She shall put off the clothes of her captivity..."

Devotional Teaching and Application

Before this man could marry the captive woman, there was a necessary period of preparation. He was to bring her into his own home to provide protection, but she had to undergo several symbolic steps. She was required to shave her head, trim her nails, and burn the clothing she was captured in.

Why would God require this? In the law of Moses, shaving the head was done by a leper who had been healed and was being cleansed to re-enter the community. By shaving her head and changing her clothes, this woman was signaling her cleansing from the impurity of heathenism. Her old clothing identified her with a pagan nation and false gods. By destroying them, she was turning her back on her past. She was demonstrating the spirit of Ruth the Moabitess, who said, "Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God."

There is a vital theological truth here for us. To enter the covenant community, there must be true conversion. A Christian must only marry another Christian. We can marry someone from an unbelieving background, but they must be completely severed from their old life of sin and idolatry. They must be washed and given new garments.

Personal Reflection Question

When we come to Christ, we must put off the "clothes" of our old life. Are there any habits or loyalties from the world that you are still holding on to?

Questions for Children

1. Why did the woman have to change her clothes and shave her head? (It was a picture of washing away her old life of worshiping false gods so she could follow the true God.)
2. When Jesus saves us, what does He do to our old, sinful hearts? (He washes them clean and makes us completely new.)

Daily Scripture Memory Verse

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV): "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

Family Prayer

Lord, we thank You that You came to us when we were captives to sin, just like this woman. You brought us into Your house and washed us clean. Help us to gladly put off the old garments of our sinful past. Give us the spirit of Ruth, that we would love Your people and worship You alone. In Christ's name. Amen.

Day 3: Leaving Father and Mother

Scripture Block

Deuteronomy 21:13b (NKJV): "...and shall remain in your house, and bewail her father and mother a full month..."

Devotional Teaching and Application

The next step of preparation for this woman was a full month of mourning. Her life had been turned upside down. Her father was dead; her mother was likely sold into servitude. In the mercy of God, He allowed this young woman time to weep and grieve the loss of her family.

But there is also deep wisdom in this requirement. She had to put her parents behind her before she could successfully become a wife. She could no longer depend on her father for provision or her mother for counsel. She was leaving them to be joined to this Israelite man. Here we see the theology of marriage established in Genesis being practically applied: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife."

When a man and woman marry, there must be a cutting of the ties of the past—emotionally, financially, and spiritually. A young woman entering marriage will be crippled in her new role if she is constantly looking back to the provision and life she had in her parents' home. She must move forward into her new status.

Personal Reflection Question

How can parents properly prepare their children to one day leave their home and fully commit to their future spouse?

Questions for Children

1. Why did the woman need a month to cry? (Because she missed her parents and her old home, and God is kind and let her grieve.)
2. When people get married, why do they leave their parents' house? (Because God says a husband and wife must start a brand new family together.)

Daily Scripture Memory Verse

Genesis 2:24 (NKJV): "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

Family Prayer

Father, thank You for the gift of family. We pray for the marriages in our church and the future marriages of our children. Teach us what it means to faithfully leave our father and mother and to cleave to our spouses. Help us to build strong, independent households that serve You and honor Your covenant. Amen.

Day 4: Becoming Her Lord

Scripture Block

Deuteronomy 21:13c (NKJV): "After that you shall go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife."

Devotional Teaching and Application

After the month of preparation, observing her character, and ensuring she truly desired to forsake her heathen past, the marriage was consummated. The scripture says, "You shall be her husband, and she shall be your wife."

In the original Hebrew, the word translated as "husband" is actually a verb that comes from the root word *baal*, meaning Lord. Literally, the text says, "You shall take the rule over her, and she shall become your wife." Whether the modern world likes it or not, the Bible teaches male headship from beginning to end. In God's order, in God's way, the husband is called to be the loving head and protector of his wife.

The New Testament beautifully captures the moral theology of this relationship. In 1 Peter 3, wives are told to be in subjection to their own husbands, trusting in God, even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And husbands are commanded to dwell with their wives with understanding, giving them honor. The husband is not to be a tyrant; he is to protect, provide, and honor his wife, just as this Israelite soldier was commanded to bring this vulnerable woman into his home and shield her.

Personal Reflection Question

How does the biblical command for male headship differ entirely from the world's idea of a man being a tyrant or a bully?

Questions for Children

1. Who does God say is the head of the family? (The husband and father.)
2. How is a husband supposed to treat his wife? (He is supposed to lead her with love, protect her, and honor her.)

Daily Scripture Memory Verse

1 Peter 3:7 (NKJV): "Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered."

Family Prayer

Lord God, we thank You for Your perfect design for the family. We pray for the men of our home, that You would make them godly leaders, protectors, and providers who honor their wives. We pray for the women, that they would have the incorruptible beauty of a meek and quiet spirit. May our family structure reflect the love of Christ for His church. Amen.

Day 5: The Goal of Delight

Scripture Block

Deuteronomy 21:14 (NKJV): "And it shall 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 have humbled her."

Devotional Teaching and Application

This case law concludes with a provision for divorce if the man has "no delight in her." This is a difficult reality, but the Bible addresses human sin. The word "delight" here does not

mean a selfish whim or just getting tired of someone. It means to take pleasure in someone because of their intrinsic, godly qualities. God delights in those who keep His covenant. A husband delights in a wife who honors the Lord. If she lacked those qualities and broke the covenant, the law provided a way to let her go—though he could never sell her as a slave.

While this verse addresses the darker side of human failure, it teaches us an incredible positive truth. The goal of every wife should be that her husband takes delight in her. Proverbs 31 gives us a beautiful picture of a husband who trusts and delights in his virtuous, industrious, and submissive wife. He praises her, saying, "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all."

Likewise, husbands must be men of such faith, devotion, and gentleness that their wives naturally take delight in them. Every marriage is vulnerable to sin, but by God's grace, we can fight the good fight of faith. We must plead with the Holy Spirit to cultivate the intrinsic godly qualities in us that make our marriages a place of deep, lasting delight.

Personal Reflection Question

What intrinsic, godly qualities are you actively cultivating in your own life that bring delight to your spouse (or future spouse)?

Questions for Children

1. What kind of person does God delight in? (Someone who loves Him, obeys His word, and is kind to others.)
2. How can we make our home a place of joy and delight? (By serving each other, forgiving each other, and seeking God's wisdom together.)

Daily Scripture Memory Verse

Proverbs 31:28 (NKJV): "Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised."

Family Prayer

Father, we thank You that Your judgments are good. We confess that human sin ruins marriages, and we ask You to protect our home from the deceitfulness of sin. Drive us to Christ. Make us men and women of godly character. May we cultivate such grace and virtue in our lives that we truly delight in one another, and in doing so, bring glory to Your great name. Amen.