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Deuteronomy 21:10-17 The Rights of Wives in Israel

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¹⁰ “When you go out to war against your enemies, and the LORD your God delivers them into your hand, and you take them captive, ¹¹ and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and desire her and would take her for your wife, ¹² then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails. ¹³ She shall put off the clothes of her captivity, remain in your house, and mourn her father and her mother a full month; after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife. ¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ “If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, and they have borne him children, both the loved and the unloved, and if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved, ¹⁶ then it shall be, on the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, that he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, the true firstborn. ¹⁷ But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.

Some years ago, while doing Saturday mission work in the projects, one of the daughters of a family that we had come to know asked me to buy one of her newborn chihuahuas. Of course, I had no choice in the matter and was obligated to do so. The house still had room for one more, and so it would be wrong of me to not buy one.

When I looked into the box, I saw the most beautiful puppy I had ever seen, a light tan-colored one that was more than a delight to behold. He was stunning. There were four or five others as well. One of them was the runtiest looking dog anyone could imagine. She was the epitome of “the runt of the litter.”

Only a fool would turn down that beautiful little tan one. But I don’t mind being called a fool. I knew without a doubt that the runt would make the best dog I would ever have – and Hideko and I have had a lot of dogs together.

So, I grabbed the runt, paid the fee, and brought her home. When I showed her to my friends Sergio and Rhoda, Rhoda asked if she could name it. Being asked kind of obligates you to say, “Yes,” and so she named her Miri – short for Miriam.

Text Verse: “And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.” Hebrews 5:9

A week or two after buying Miri, I got a call from the girl who owned the chihuahuas. She said, “Uncle Charlie, someone brought one of the chihuahuas back and said that they just couldn’t take care of it. Will you buy this one too?”

Of course, I had no choice in the matter and was obligated to do so. The house still had room for one more, and so it would be wrong of me to not buy that one as well. It was that most beautiful of all in the litter. He is a wonderful dog, though a bit stupid. And he will not listen to me when I tell him it's time to come inside.

His name is Pi Shnai. Both are wonderful dogs, but Miri really is special. I knew she would be. Every week at the end of our weekly news report, a picture of her closes out the video. She's a superstar, being seen by many people around the world each week.

Dogs are really special. They, in their own way, reflect a little part of their Creator in that they will always forgive you when you belong to them (yes, they seem to take over in that way), and they are always happy to see you when you return to them.

You may wonder why I brought them up in the intro as I did. Well, stick around and you will get clued into that soon enough. Great things are to be found in His superior word. And so, let us turn to that precious word once again and... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. She Shall Be Your Wife (verses 10-14)

¹⁰ **“When you go out to war against your enemies,**

As a correction, the word is singular – enemy – because in the next clause it says in the singular, “delivers him,” not “them.” It's an important point missed by all twenty-eight versions I referred to for this sermon.

The guidelines now to be presented are not intended to apply to those within the borders of Canaan. This is only to be in regard to wars against those outside of the land itself. The reference for that will be cited now in order to set the stage for what lies ahead –

“When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, ²and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. ³Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. ⁴For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. ⁵But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire.” Deuteronomy 7:1:5

Not only were the people told what to do, they were explicitly told why it was to be so. The anticipation of these words is that Israel is engaging in war, outside of Canaan and with a nation not forbidden for them to intermingle with. If such is the case...

^{10 (con't)} **and the LORD your God delivers them into your hand,**

The word “them” should be “him.” It is third person, masculine, singular. As far as the words themselves, Moses does this repeatedly, stating that it is the Lord who delivers. He just said that Israel is going into battle, and yet the victory can never be assumed apart from the Lord’s allowance.

Israel has its responsibility to engage the war, if indeed the war is to be engaged, but the victory is not because of their power, skill, or military superiority. It is solely because the Lord delivers the enemy into their hands. Speaking of the defeat of Israel, Moses says in Deuteronomy 32 –

‘How could one chase a thousand,
And two put ten thousand to flight,
Unless their Rock had sold them,
And the LORD had surrendered them?’ Deuteronomy 32:30

Moses’ words now are a reminder that the victory belongs to the Lord. Israel is to remember this. If the victory is attained...

^{10 (con't)} **and you take them captive,**

Again, it is third person, masculine, singular: *v'shavita shivyo* – “and you take captive his captivity.” It is a poetic way of saying that the entity which had its own victories and held its own captives has now become captive. David, probably thinking of this verse right now, penned this in Psalm 68 –

“You have ascended on high,
You have led captivity captive;
You have received gifts among men,
Even from the rebellious,
That the LORD God might dwell there.” Psalm 68:18

Paul then cites this verse from the psalms in Ephesians 4 –

“Therefore He says:
‘When He ascended on high,

He led captivity captive,
And gave gifts to men” Ephesians 4:8

Those who were once the captors (called the abstract “captivity”) had themselves been made captive. They were now the subdued prisoners who were conducted in bonds during the triumphal procession to the victor’s spot of exultation.

Quite often the words in Ephesians are incorrectly cited as a display of the prisoners being released from captivity by the work of Christ. Though this is something He did, it is not what is being referred to there.

Rather, as can be seen from Moses’ words of Deuteronomy, it is the foes of God being brought into captivity. In that captivity, one of the spoils of war is next highlighted...

11 and you see among the captives a beautiful woman,

v’raita ba’shivyah eshet yephat toar – “and you see in the captivity woman beautiful *in form*.” Women are a spoil of war, which, according to custom – and as is seen elsewhere in Scripture – became slaves of the victors.

In this, the victorious side has the right to take them as if they were any other type of property. Although this may seem offensive to us now, it is still a common thing in parts of the world today, and it is how these things simply work. In the case of Israel, the battle is won, they have taken captive the captivity, and then a man sees a woman captive...

11 (con’t) and desire her

v’khashaqta bah – “and are attached to her.” The word *khashaq* comes from a root signifying to be joined to. He is drawn to her to the point where he is attached to her even in love...

11 (con’t) and would take her for your wife,

Some women were taken as slaves, but in this case, the man actually wants her for his own wife. In this case, she is given unusual protections that would not otherwise be found among other nations. They are points of law, and they must, therefore, be adhered to as such. First...

12 then you shall bring her home to your house,

This is a sign of laying claim to her. She is a spoil of war and now belongs to him. The claim on her is made, thus precluding anyone else from making one. Once there...

¹² (con't) **and she shall shave her head and trim her nails.**

v'gilekha et roshah v'asetah et tsiparenekha – “and she shall shave her head and do her nails.” For such seemingly simple words, there is neither agreement on what is being said nor what the purpose of the rites are. The shaving of the head is not in question, but the “doing” of the nails is.

Does this mean “trim” her nails? Does it mean “let them grow?” Does it mean paint her nails? And so on. Each is possible. And reasons for any option are given by scholars.

As for the purpose of them, the debate is equally unsettled. Some see this as a means of purification, such as when the head is to be shaved at certain times in Leviticus for purification. Others say these are given as signs of mourning.

Some say these are to make her ugly so that the man won't lust after her during the period set by the law. Others claim that the rite is a sign of giving up her pagan life and becoming a new woman in the covenant of Israel. A clue to the general tenor of these rites is found in 2 Samuel 19 –

“Now Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king. And he had not cared for his feet, nor trimmed his mustache, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he returned in peace.” 2 Samuel 19:24

Mephibosheth purposely did not take care of himself as a sign of mourning. The entire time David was in exile, he simply let himself go as a sign of his allegiance to him. Regardless as to whether she was to cut her nails or let them grow long (according to whatever custom existed), nothing is said here of purification. Further, that would have been defined in Leviticus.

As far as making her ugly so that he wouldn't lust after her, that seems pointless and a stretched interpretation. He is bound by law to leave her be for a set time. So, that would be otherwise unneeded. And giving up her pagan life and entering the covenant is assumed simply by the act of marriage.

Thus, this is certainly given as a sign of mourning. It is explicitly stated as much in the next verse. But this also identifies her as having a new authority, a new head over her. For now, more words of law are first given...

¹³ **She shall put off the clothes of her captivity,**

Again, there are at least two opinions on what this is saying. One is that the clothes of her captivity were her finest clothes because when captivity was inevitable, the women would put on their best in order to make themselves more attractive to their captors.

Another view is that these are garments signifying servitude that the victors would put over the captives. Or, leaving aside either of these, they could simply be the garments the woman normally wore, understanding that most people had one or two garments.

The first option is quite possible, and it would be for this reason that the woman caught the eye of the man in the first place. This is actually something that is recorded in 2 Kings 9 –

“Now when Jehu had come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she put paint on her eyes and adorned her head, and looked through a window. ³¹ Then, as Jehu entered at the gate, she said, ‘Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of your master?’” 2 Kings 9:30, 31

Unfortunately for Jezebel, all the mascara on the planet couldn’t cover over her wicked heart and deeds. As an exciting end to her rule, the words go on to say –

“And he looked up at the window, and said, ‘Who is on my side? Who?’ So two or three eunuchs looked out at him. ³³ Then he said, ‘Throw her down.’ So they threw her down, and some of her blood splattered on the wall and on the horses; and he trampled her underfoot.” 2 Kings 9:32, 33

Unlike Jezebel, however, the woman of captivity that found favor in the eyes of a victor by looking her best at such a time of crisis would then be allowed to put off her marks of beauty and exchange them for signs of mourning, including garments of sackcloth.

In other words, the entire point of these laws is directed to the authority of the man, and yet it reflects a merciful allowance upon the woman. Just as people had a period to mourn their dead, this woman is being given the same courtesy. With her physical condition reflecting the state of her soul, she was to...

¹³ (con’t) **remain in your house, and mourn her father and her mother a full month;**

Whether her mother and father were dead or not in reality, they were as good as dead to her in her new state. She would probably never see them again. Thus, this is a merciful provision on a woman who was to enter into life among the covenant people.

As for the time, the Hebrew says *yerakh yamim* – “a month of days.” In other words, it didn’t go by a calendar month, as if the change from January to February was sufficient, even if it was only eighteen days. It was to be a full thirty-day period. Then...

13 (con't) after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife.

These words, as much as the explicit timeframe, show that the hair and nails clauses already seen were as signs of mourning and a changing of authority. A person's hair will not grow back that much in thirty days. It is not the attractiveness of the woman, but the state of her heart, and the authority over her, that the law is concerned with.

Like in the laws concerning female servants found in Exodus 21:7-11, these verses do not deny that tragedy will befall people, nor do they deny that conditions of captivity or servitude exist. But what they do provide are allowances for a woman that were unheard of in other cultures, and which are more caring of the state of such women than countless cultures that still exist in our world today.

14 And it shall be, if you have no delight in her,

In other words, the appeal of the eyes doesn't match the reality of the situation and she turns out to be a disappointment as a wife. If such is the situation...

14 (con't) then you shall set her free,

v'shilakhtah l'naphsah – “and you shall send her to her soul.” In other words, wherever she desires to go, she may go freely and without any coercion or mandate. To ensure that this is understood, Moses then says...

14 (con't) but you certainly shall not sell her for money;

There is a strong emphasis here: *u-makor lo timkerenah ba'keseph* – “and selling no you shall sell her in the silver.” She is a wife and not a possession. Because of this, she is to be treated as any wife of Israel was to be treated. This is a complete contrast to the regular allowances for slaves already set forth –

“And as for your male and female slaves whom you may have—from the nations that are around you, from them you may buy male and female slaves. ⁴⁵ Moreover you may buy the children of the strangers who dwell among you, and their families who are with you, which they beget in your land; and they shall become your property. ⁴⁶ And you may take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them as a possession; they shall be your permanent slaves.” Leviticus 25:44-46

Though she came in as a captive, she is not to be sold off as one...

14 (con't) you shall not treat her brutally,

lo titamer bah – “no you shall sheave her.” Here, Moses introduces a new word into Scripture, *amar*. It means “to bind sheaves.” It comes from a root signifying “to heap up.” The idea here is probably that of the state of her life as it has progressed.

She was taken captive, she lost her family and culture, she was taken in as a wife and now she is rejected as a wife. Each of these has been as a sheaf of pain being added one upon another. Thus, he was not to add further pain on top of what she has experienced through selling her off as merchandise...

14 (con't) **because you have humbled her.**

takhat asher initah – “under which you have afflicted her.” The word *anah*, or afflict, gives the sense of looking down, or browbeating. Adding that to the words, “under which,” gives the sense of complete degradation. She has already been looked down upon, and by adding to her sheaves of pain, it would be completely degrading of her.

The entire passage is one of mercy upon the afflicted and care for the person. Where people read passages like this in Deuteronomy and find fault in what is presented, the opposite is true. Captivity for women in battle is the way things are.

It is a fallen world, and it is one where the women will often pay a high price in such a defeat. Just ask the Russian women when the Germans attacked, and just ask the German women when the Russians later responded. However, the Law of Moses gives them a set of protections not otherwise heard of.

A beautiful woman to be my wife
I'm set on making her mine
One to share the moments of life
From working at the mill to picking grapes from the vine

I have no doubt that I want this one
She is the one who is right for me
Soon the waiting will be over, and the deal will be done
This is how things are going to be

And once a wife, always a wife
That is how God sees it, despite how things may be
Once a wife, it is for life
From day one and off to eternity

II. The Son of the Unloved Wife (verses 15-17)

Here, we have an interesting transitional section. The previous spoke of the rights of a wife. The next (18-21) will deal with the issue of a rebellious son. This one between the two deals with both the protection of the wife and the son. As such, it begins with...

¹⁵ **“If a man has two wives,**

Of this and the coming verses, the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown commentary states that it –

“...seems highly probable from the other verbs being in the past tense – ‘hers that was hated,’ not ‘hers that is hated’; evidently intimating that she (the first wife) was dead at the time referred to. Moses, therefore, does not here legislate upon the case of a man who has two wives at the same time, but on that of a man who has married twice in succession, the second wife after the decease of the first; and there was an obvious necessity for legislation in these circumstances; for the first wife, who was hated, was dead, and the second wife, the favorite, was alive; and with the feelings of a stepmother, she would urge her husband to make her own son the heir. This case has no bearing upon polygamy, which there is no evidence that the Mosaic code legalized.” Jamieson-Fausset-Brown

In other words, they are saying that nothing in the Law of Moses legalizes polygamy. This is an incorrect analysis, and it is not the intent of the Hebrew at all. Their analysis has been constructed based on an obvious bias against polygamy.

This is not a good way to figure out the intent of a passage. The case says nothing of a dead or divorced wife. It speaks of two wives without such regard.

Their argument about the Mosaic code not legalizing polygamy is an argument from silence. The precedent of multiple marriages is already seen in Genesis, and it is unknown if even Moses had two wives at the same time based on a statement made about having married an Ethiopian woman in Numbers 12:1.

Secondly, the passage concerning kings multiplying wives in Chapter 17 says nothing of only one wife but implies the heaping up of wives, and the reason for that is specifically given.

And more, if having only one wife was implied in the Mosaic code, there would not be the multitude of examples of polygamy found throughout the rest of the Old Testament, including a note from the Lord that He *gave* David the wives he possessed.

Even in the New Testament, Paul's only restriction on polygamy is directed towards elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1). As such, and looking at the matter objectively, having two wives is not at all frowned upon in Scripture.

Jacob started out his married life almost immediately with two wives (prior to the law). The father of Samuel, Elkanah, had two wives (after the giving of the law). And so on. This short section deals with a particular issue in such a circumstance.

Because the verse begins with the note of having two wives, the first issue of care is that of the wife. This is clear. Though dealing with the rights – meaning inheritance – of the firstborn, it still is clearly dealing with the rights, care, and remembrance of the wife.

If the husband dies and the wife continues on, the son of the greater inheritance will have more to tend to his mother. Further, the blessing of simply knowing her son will prosper is a merciful kindness to her. Therefore, the issue at hand is as much about care for the state of the woman as it is for the son. This is seen with the words...

¹⁵ (con't) **one loved and the other unloved,**

The Hebrew is more specific: *ha'akhat ahuvah v'ha'akhat senuah* – “the one loved and the one hated.” The word *sane* means to hate, and it can signify enemy, foe, odious, and so on. It is the same word used to describe Jacob's attitude toward Leah in Genesis –

“When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren.” Genesis 29:31

Jacob loved Rachel. However, his feelings toward Leah seem to be given in a comparative sense – hated in comparison to his love for Rachel. Whether that is the case here or not is not stated. It simply says that she is hated.

It should be noted that divorce has already been mentioned four times, showing that it is something both understood and possible. Later in Chapter 24, the allowance will be made explicit by Moses when he says that a man finds an indecency in his wife, he was allowed to give her a certificate of divorce and send her packing.

It may be that this is a comparative love/hate, or it may be that he really hates her. If so, one might think, “If he hates one of his wives, why doesn't he just divorce her?” That is irrelevant to the case here.

She may be the best cook on the planet, and he just doesn't want to lose that, despite hating her. He may be a cruel husband and just not want to see her enjoy life with another man. Or,

he may be obligated to her, without possibility of divorce for his entire life for a reason that will be stated in the next chapter –

“If a man finds a young woman who is a virgin, who is not betrothed, and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are found out, ²⁹ then the man who lay with her shall give to the young woman’s father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife because he has humbled her; he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days.”

Deuteronomy 22:28, 29

The issue as to why he hates her is irrelevant. He is living with his two wives...

¹⁵ (con’t) **and they have borne him children, *both* the loved and the unloved,**

Moses uses the same general terms again: *ha’ahuvah v’ha’senuah* – “the loved and the hated.” Both women have children that issue from him. For all we know, the children might be the reason for not wanting to divorce hated Helen. He just doesn’t want to upset the applecart for the sake of the family. Whatever. If such is...

¹⁵ (con’t) **and *if* the firstborn son is of her who is unloved,**

v’hayah ha’ben ha’bekor la’seniah – “and *it* is the son, the firstborn to the hated.” The meaning is obvious. The hated wife has borne him his first son. One could think of all kinds of things he could do to make her miserable, including taking it out on her and the son at the same time through the process of inheritance. Well, the law is way ahead of him in this regard...

¹⁶ **then it shall be, on the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons,**

We generally think of passing on possessions to our children after our deaths, but this is not the idea expressed in Scripture. For example, this was already a culturally accepted norm. Abraham did it over four hundred years earlier –

“And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. ⁶ But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east.” Genesis 25:5, 6

Even in New Testament times, this was still practiced, such as in the parable of the prodigal son, this practice is clearly seen as being something that precedes the death of the person –

“Then He said: ‘A certain man had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.” So he divided to

them his livelihood. ¹³ And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.”
Luke 13:11-13

There is a time when the parent divides up the possessions to his children according to a set cultural standard. One precept of that is now incorporated into the law itself as a protection for the firstborn, highlighting his rightful status regardless as to the father’s relationship with the mother. In this precept, he says...

¹⁶ (con’t) **that he must not bestow firstborn status**

As at other times, the Hebrew reads in an interesting way: *asher yiyeh lo lo yukal l’baker* – “which he is not able to firstborn.” In other words, he is incapable of doing so because the law forbids it. This does not mean that he cannot do this for other – justifiable – reasons.

It has already been culturally established that such could be done for valid reasons. Jacob did this, as is intimated concerning his firstborn in Genesis 49 –

“Reuben, you are my firstborn,
My might and the beginning of my strength,
The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power.
⁴ Unstable as water, you shall not excel,
Because you went up to your father’s bed;
Then you defiled it—
He went up to my couch.” Genesis 49:3, 4

This is explicitly then stated in 1 Chronicles 5:1, 2 as well –

“Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel—he was indeed the firstborn, but because he defiled his father’s bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that the genealogy is not listed according to the birthright; ² yet Judah prevailed over his brothers, and from him came a ruler, although the birthright was Joseph’s.”

Despite this, a father under the Mosaic code had no authority to do this simply out of partiality. He cannot bestow such a status...

¹⁶ (con’t) **on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, the *true* firstborn.**

The prohibition is set, and the weight of the law would forever rest upon this precept. Any challenge to it would have to be for a just, legal, and accepted reason. Such a case of changing the firstborn status is recorded in 1 Chronicles 26 –

“Also Hosah, of the children of Merari, had sons: Shimri the first (for though he was not the firstborn, his father made him the first), ¹¹ Hilkiah the second, Tebaliah the third, Zechariah the fourth; all the sons and brethren of Hosah were thirteen.”

1 Chronicles 26:10, 11

The reason for this father’s designation is not given. One thing that is certain, however. If the motive was arbitrary or vindictive, it could easily be appealed because of the precept of the law now being stated by Moses. The right of the firstborn is of such importance that the precept was to never be arbitrarily abused...

¹⁷ But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn

What Moses has done is turn the words of verse 16 around from the negative to the positive in order to provide emphasis –

- * he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, the *true* firstborn

- * he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn

In this, there is no legal wiggle room that may otherwise be conjured up by some perverse-hearted soul.

^{17 (con’t)} by giving him a double portion of all that he has,

latet lo pi shnayim b’kol asher yimatse lo – “to give him mouth two in all which finds he.” If you are still curious as to why I mentioned our dogs at the beginning of the sermon, I’ll let you know now. Moses uses the term *pi shnayim*, or “mouth two.” It is rare, being found only here, in 2 Kings 2:9, and in once more in Zechariah 13:8 –

“And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?’

Elisha said, ‘Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.’” 2 Kings 2:9

“And it shall come to pass in all the land,”
Says the LORD,

“That two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die,
But one-third shall be left in it:” Zechariah 13:8

It signifies a double portion. When Cassandra called me up and asked me to buy a second dog, (of which I had no choice but to say, “Yes”), I needed a name. Well, we had one dog, and now there is another, a second portion. And so, we named him Pi Shnai, a poetically shortened form of the words *pi shnayim*.

Thinking up an introduction to a sermon can be a challenging thing, but not this time. Eventually, we’d get to these words, and it was as simple as telling you a story about two of our dogs.

This *pi shnayim* is a double portion as the rights of the firstborn. The idea is that if there were four sons, the inheritance would be divided into five equal parts.

From there, the firstborn would receive two parts while the others received one. Thus, when Jacob blessed Manasseh and Ephraim, Joseph’s two sons, he – by default – gave Joseph the *pi shnayim*, or “mouth double,” meaning double portion right of the firstborn.

The idea is as if the firstborn is given enough for two mouths to feed. In the case of Manasseh and Ephraim, that was literally true. That case was an exception, but under normal circumstances, it would be given to the firstborn...

¹⁷ (con’t) **for he is the beginning of his strength;**

It is emphatic: *hu reshit ono* – “He, firstborn of his strength.” It is the same words that Jacob spoke upon Reuben in Genesis 49:3 that was cited earlier. However, Reuben lost his right as firstborn for his perverse conduct.

*¹⁷ (fin) **the right of the firstborn is his.**

The word *mishpat* is used. In this case, it signifies a legal right indicating that this is the way it is to be. He was the first of the strength of his father, and therefore he is not to be denied the right of the judgment granting him the *pi shnayim*, the double portion.

Two wives for a man; there are laws for such
He has a responsibility that he cannot shirk
Even if one is greatly loved, and the other not so much
He must accomplish the law – that is his work

When the inheritance is to be divided up

The firstborn must be given his just due
He shall have a double portion, an overflowing cup
To this precept, the man must remain faithful and true

And it is good and right that it is so
The firstborn is the beginning of his strength as such
And so, he is to receive the double-portion, even though...
Yes, even if his mother isn't loved so much

III. Pictures of Christ

The two passages today uniquely look back to the story of Rachel and Leah, probably as a means of helping us to understand why they are included in the law as they are, and thus how they point to Christ. In the first passage, Moses introduces the thought of taking captivity his captive. If you remember, it was in the singular – meaning a single enemy.

It is a way of saying that the enemy who held the captives is taken captive himself. Among his captives is a beautiful woman. The Hebrew is *yephat toar* – beautiful *in* form. It is the exact same phrase used of Rachel in Genesis 29:17 –

“Now Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah’s eyes were delicate, but Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance.” Genesis 29:16, 17

If you go back to that sermon, you will be reminded that she was made to be a picture of God’s grace. This woman of the captives is brought into the people of Israel through marriage.

She goes through a rite in order for that to come about, and then she is made the wife of the victor. This is especially so because the passage itself speaks in the singular throughout.

The one marrying her stands as representative of any victor, and thus Israel. A premise is given that the husband may not have delight in her. This is simply a proposition of what may occur, it doesn’t say it actually ever will.

In fact, the man may remain crazy about her forever. The proposition is merely set forth as a possibility. If such is the case, it says that this husband is to set her free, but he is not to sell her “in the silver.” In the Bible, silver pictures redemption. The idea is that she is not to be unredeemed by him and thus redeemed by another.

Simply put, this short set of verses anticipates Christ's victory over Satan and his choosing a bride beautiful in form, just as Rachel was. As Rachel pictured grace, so this chosen wife pictures the doctrine of salvation by grace as well.

Christ is the Victor over Satan – the enemy, Captivity. She was his captive, but she is given unmerited favor and brought into the commonwealth of Israel.

But that is not the main focus of what is being conveyed. The passage hinges on her rights, not his. Even if displeasing, she is never to be sold off again. As it says, she is set free *l'napsha*, or "to her soul." The purpose of this passage is to present to us the doctrine of eternal salvation.

A variety of verses in the New Testament speak of this, many in fact, but one that matches what is conveyed here exactly is –

"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁵ 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."

1 Corinthians 5:4, 5

The shaving of her head and the doing of her nails implies that she is now under the authority of a new head – her husband. This explains the meaning of the otherwise very complicated passage in 1 Corinthians 11 –

"For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. ⁷ For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. ⁸ For man is not from woman, but woman from man. ⁹ Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. ¹⁰ For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels." 1 Corinthians 11:6-9

Her hair symbolizes headship and authority. Paul was probably thinking of this passage in Deuteronomy when he wrote out the words to the Corinthians. When one moves from Satan to Christ, the new authority is permanent.

As already stated, the words of Moses here are set forth as a proposition that may or may not occur. However, if it does, there are set limits on what may happen to the wife who is displeasing. And there are set limits on what may happen to a believer who is saved by grace.

The putting off the garments of her captivity means she is no longer under the captivity of Satan. She is granted a new status under Christ – His righteousness.

As far as Moses' words concerning setting her free, this is an allowance of the Law of Moses, it is not what God originally intended for marriage. Jesus clearly indicates in Matthew 19 that marriage is to be a permanent arrangement. And so, even if this is an allowance under the law, for Christ – who embodies the law – it will never come to pass. The marriage is permanent.

Though displeasing (even if in the extreme) that person's redemption will not be sold off again. That person is free to live his or her life, even being delivered to Satan again for destruction of the flesh, but ultimate freedom has been granted and it will not be removed. The saving of the person is guaranteed.

This is perfectly obvious from New Testament passages, but how sad it is that people still teach that one can lose his salvation. The Bible never speaks of such a thing – it forbids it.

In the second passage, two wives are mentioned. The same terminology is used of them as was used of Rachel and Leah – loved and hated. As Rachel (the loved) pictured grace, Leah (the hated) – if you remember – clearly pictured the Law. The pattern continues here.

The son of the unloved wife is the Son of the Law – Christ. He came through the law, He lived out the law, and He died in fulfillment of the law. In this, He was given a *pi shnayim*, or “mouth two,” meaning a double portion.

He redeemed those who were under law from the law, and He redeemed those who were not under the Law of Moses but who were still separated from God through the law of sin. This is what Paul is referring to in Galatians and Romans –

“Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, ² but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. ³ Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” Galatians 4:1-5

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. ²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” Romans 8:28, 29

These two short passages today, though seemingly uninteresting except as a curiosity, and though found in the seemingly tedious book of Deuteronomy, are not at all uninteresting. And Deuteronomy is anything but tedious.

These verses were given to Israel to express matters of law for the conduct of the people. This is true, and they were matters of law to be obeyed. But, ostensibly, they may never have had such a scenario arise in the entire fourteen hundred or so years of their history.

Despite this, they were placed there as guides for the people, but they were more specifically placed there to show us what God has done, and what God is doing, for us in Christ. Christ is the purpose, and He is the reason for these things to be stated.

And in seeing what He has done, we can then see how we fit into the overall scenario of the redemptive narrative. Will we trust in Christ's fulfillment of the law, or will we attempt (and fail) to be the one to try and usurp His status as the firstborn? Who would even think of such a thing!

And yet, it has happened since the beginning, and it continues on today when people attempt to merit God's favor apart from Christ's finished work.

And when we are in Christ, do we really trust that we are in Christ? Do we really believe that we have been brought into the commonwealth of Israel with an eternal guarantee? Or do we think that, displeasing as we may be to Him, Christ will sell us off once again? Who would even think of such a thing!

And yet, it has happened since the beginning, and it continues on today when people attempt to earn God's favor apart from His finished work.

The fact is that if you can lose your salvation at any point after being saved, then it is not of grace, but of works. And if you believe your continued salvation is because of what you must do, then you do not understand what the word "grace" means.

But it is found here, right here in the book of law known as Deuteronomy, if you will just look for it. It is found here because this book looks to Christ. Let us do so too, to the glory of God who sent Him to redeem us. It is He who has brought us out from the power of the captivity unto Himself. Praise God for Jesus Christ who has done all these things for us.

Closing Verse: *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." Galatians 2:20, 21*

Next Week: Deuteronomy 21:18-23 *The words seem unusual, even odd...* (He Who Is Hanged Is Accursed of God) (63rd Deuteronomy Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you. He has a good plan and purpose for you. But He also has expectations of you as He prepares you for entrance into His Land of Promise. So, follow Him and trust Him and He will do marvelous things for you and through you.

The Rights of Wives in Israel

“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
-----yes, she is really grand...

And desire her and would take her for your wife
Then you shall bring her home to your house
And she shall shave her head and trim her nails
Before she can become your spouse

She shall put off the clothes of her captivity
Remain in your house, and mourn her father and her mother
-----a full month of her life
After that you may go in to her and be her husband
And she shall be your wife

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, for sure
You shall not treat her brutally
Because you have humbled her

“If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved
And they have borne him children, both the loved and the unloved
-----a certain difficulty
And if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved
Then it shall be...

On the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons
That he must not firstborn status adorn
On the son of the loved wife
In preference to the son of the unloved, the true firstborn

But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife
As the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has
For he is the beginning of his strength
The right of the firstborn is his, double... and all that jazz

Lord God, turn our hearts to be obedient to Your word
Give us wisdom to be ever faithful to You
May we carefully heed each thing we have heard
Yes, Lord God may our hearts be faithful and true

And we shall be content and satisfied in You alone
We will follow You as we sing our songs of praise
Hallelujah to You; to us Your path You have shown
Hallelujah we shall sing to You for all of our days

Hallelujah and Amen...