

Ki Tetze

פִּי תֵצֵא

“When you go out”

Deuteronomy 21:10 – 25:19

Torah Together



In this *Torah* portion, Moses addresses a wide-ranging list of God's commands, some of which are difficult for us to understand. However, you can sense Moses' heart as he seems to be saying, “. . . and don't forget about this and don't forget about that.”

1. Marrying a Captive Woman - 21:10-14

Why do you think God allowed an Israelite man to marry a foreign wife in this case? What must the woman do before becoming his wife? How was she to be treated?

Any women captives should have been from neighboring nations, not Canaanites who were to be totally destroyed (see Deuteronomy 20:10-15). These women would have been captives of war, their people completely defeated. Thus they were to be assimilated into Israelite culture, submitting to God. The woman was to shave her head, trim her nails, and put away her native clothing, either as a sign of mourning or as a symbol of purification before becoming a believer in YHWH.

2. The Right of the Firstborn - 21:15 - 17

a) What did the firstborn son receive that his brothers did not? When a man had two wives, was he allowed to give this privilege to a son other than the firstborn?

The firstborn son receives a double share of the inheritance (verse 17). The firstborn son was the firstborn, regardless of which wife bore him. (This was a way to ensure that the unloved wife was not treated unfairly.)

b) How would this command apply to Jacob and his two wives, Leah and Rachel? Which of Jacob's sons received the right of the firstborn?

This seems to directly contradict the situation with Jacob, Leah, and Rachel. Although Jacob loved Rachel more, it was Leah that gave him his first son, Reuben. Reuben, however, sinned by sleeping with his father's concubine, Bilhah (Genesis 35:22). It's not clear that such a sin should have disqualified him from his birthright; but in any event, Jacob ended up bestowing the birthright of the firstborn on his firstborn son from Rachel, Joseph. This even though his next 3 sons by Leah (Simeon, Levi, and Judah) were all older than Joseph. It certainly appears as if Jacob specifically disobeyed this command.

Note that because of **Deuteronomy 20:10-15**, a foreign wife would not be a Canaanite woman but a woman from a neighboring city or nation. Such a woman may also have lost her husband or her father in battle.

Scripture Link:

Genesis 48:1–6 may help explain which of Jacob's sons received the right of the firstborn. Did Jacob follow this command?

There is no indication in scripture that this law was ever used. One can imagine that the situation would have to be very serious for both a mother and a father to agree to take it to the elders of the city.

Scripture Link:
In **Galatians 3:13**, Paul explains that when *Yeshua* was crucified (hung on a tree) he was indeed cursed in that he took upon himself the punishment (curse) for our sin.

It is difficult to understand why this command is important to God. If nothing else, it shows his compassion.

God wants us to know that we bear some responsibility for the safety and well-being of others.

3. A Rebellious Son - 21:18-21

In the case of a son who was stubborn and rebellious, not obeying his parents, who brought him before the elders of the city? What was done about the situation? Can you imagine any circumstances that might lead to this outcome?

In the case of a rebellious son, both his father and his mother were to bring him before the elders of the city. (This assured that both parents were in agreement on this critical issue.) The son was to be stoned to death. It would seem that circumstances would have to be hopeless before such a solution was sought by the parents.

4. Various Laws - 21:22 - 22:12

a) What was to be done with the body of a person executed by hanging on a tree? Why do you think this was required? Do you see any parallels with *Yeshua's* execution?

A dead body was not to be left hanging on a tree overnight. God specifically says that "anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse" (verse 23). This law was followed in Yeshua's case and he indeed was under God's curse as he took on the penalty for our sins on the cross (Galatians 3:13).

b) What is your responsibility when you find something of value lost by another or you come across someone in need of help? Is this common today?

A person is responsible for returning items found to their rightful owner and for helping a person in obvious need. While this is still practiced today, it seems to be a rare occurrence. It is more common in certain cultures.

c) How does God view cross-dressing? What reasons might He have for this?

In verse 5, God specifically prohibits cross-dressing. This is consistent with God's view of homosexuality, a related issue.

d) What is to be done when one finds a mother bird on her nest with eggs or young birds? What reasons do you think God might have for this rule?

A person was allowed to take the eggs or chicks only, not the mother bird. This seems to be a humane law but also practical as the mother bird would then live to have other young.

e) Why do you think God cares if you build a parapet around the roof of your house? What general principle can you learn from this?

The idea behind building a parapet on your roof is probably related to the safety of others. One should not knowingly set up situations which could be hazardous to others. We have some responsibility for the safety of others.

f) What do you think God is trying to teach us with rules about not mixing dissimilar things, like seeds, fabric, or draft animals?

It is not clear exactly why God required this. It could be to reinforce the separation between the holy and the common. It might also refer to some pagan practices although it is not known in what way.

5. Marriage Violations - 22:13-30

a) Why might a husband slander his (new) wife, according to verse 13? What was the procedure to be followed when this occurred? What happened if the husband's accusations were false? What if they were true? How do you feel about this?

This law was primarily intended to protect a woman whose husband had grown unhappy with her. If he slandered her by saying that she was not a virgin on their wedding night, the girl's father could bring proof to the elders of the city and the husband was fined and could not ever divorce the woman. If the accusations were true, however, the woman was stoned to death. (See question in the "Digging Deeper" section concerning Mary & Joseph.)

b) What was the punishment when a man slept with a woman who was betrothed to another? Why did it matter whether this occurred in a town or in the country?

If a man had relations with a woman who was betrothed to another and she did not cry out, then both were guilty and stoned to death. If it could have been the case that she cried out but no one heard, then only the man is stoned.

c) What was the punishment if a man raped or seduced a virgin who was not betrothed?

If a man raped (or seduced) a virgin, he was to pay a fine to the father, marry her and never divorce her.

6. Exclusion from the Assembly - 23:1-8

a) Why do you think God excluded those who had been emasculated from His assembly?

Some of the pagan practices at the time included emasculation as a part of their worship practice. God wants no pagan practices in his worship.

b) What do you think is meant by the term "forbidden marriage" in verse 2 and why were the offspring of such marriages excluded from the assembly?

The Hebrew term for the child of a forbidden marriage is mamzer. While it includes the offspring from unwed parents, it also includes offspring from other "prohibited marriages," such as a man who remarries a wife whom he divorced.

See the first question in the "**Digging Deeper**" section for a discussion of how this law might have applied in the case of Joseph and Mary, the mother of Yeshua.

Scripture Link:

See **Numbers 22-25** tell the story of how Moabites used Balaam to try to curse the Israelites.

c) For what reasons were Ammonites and Moabites excluded from the assembly? By contrast, when were Edomites or Egyptians allowed into the assembly?

The Moabites and the Ammonites were excluded because they did not receive the Israelites when they came during the Exodus. However, the Egyptian or the Edomite (after the third) generation could be included.

7. Uncleaness in the Camp - 23:9-14

God was concerned that the Israelite camp remain pure. What were some of the practices that God decreed to make sure the camp remained clean?

A man was to remain outside the camp if he had become unclean because of a nocturnal emission. Also, the Israelites were to defecate in a hole and cover it up "for God moves around your camp" (verse 14).

8. Miscellaneous Laws - 23:15-25

a) As an Israelite, if a slave seeks refuge with you, what are your responsibilities? Does this seem consistent with God's character?

An Israelite was not to hand a slave seeking refuge over to his master nor oppress him. This seems consistent with God's character of mercy.

b) In what cases was an Israelite allowed to charge interest?

An Israelite was allowed to charge a foreigner interest but not an Israelite.

c) How does God view a vow made to Him? Should vows be very commonplace?

Any vow made to God must be kept or paid. This should be true of all vows, but especially those made to God. In general, one should be very careful in making vows.

d) Was it allowable to pick fruit from a neighbor's field? What were the restrictions? Does this seem fair to you? Does it seem compassionate?

One was allowed to pick grapes or heads of grain from a neighbor's field, but not to carry anything away. Thus, one could only satisfy one's hunger, not steal. Although the owners may complain, it seems a compassionate law.

9. Miscellaneous Laws (continued) - 24:1-22

a) What restriction was placed on a woman twice divorced?

A woman twice divorced (or widowed by her second husband) was not allowed to remarry her first husband. God finds this detestable.

If nothing else, these varied commands give us a sense of God's attention to detail. They also emphasize how seriously God views our words and our actions. God expects us to be compassionate to those less fortunate than us and to take an active part in the welfare of others.

b) How does God view kidnapping? Does this seem harsh to you?
One found guilty of kidnapping was put to death. God said that this evil must be purged from Israel (verse 7). In many countries, this is the law today.

c) When making a loan to a neighbor, what was to be done with his security or pledge? How are the poor or less fortunate to be treated? What was done at harvest time?

When making a loan, the security or pledge must be returned to the borrower if he used it to make a living or if it would cause great inconvenience otherwise. The poor were to be treated compassionately. Any harvested crops left in the field were to remain there for the poor also known as gleanings.

10. Miscellaneous Laws (continued) - 25:1-19

a) Why do you think there was a limit placed on the number of lashes a guilty man should receive?

This was probably designed to prevent torture or cruel punishment.

b) A man's responsibility toward his brother's widow is known as the Law of Levirate Marriage. Describe how this law worked. Can you see the reason for this law?

This law required a man to take his brother's widow as his wife if he had no children. This assured that the inheritance would remain in the family. This was similar to the situation in the story of Ruth.

c) How does God feel about dishonest weights and measures?
God detests dishonesty and so condemns unequal weights and measures.

"For YHWH your God detests anyone who does these things, anyone who deals dishonestly."

Deuteronomy 25:16

d) What were the Israelites to do to the Amalekites after they entered the land of *Israel*?

The Israelites were to completely blot out the memory of the Amalekites.

Scripture Link:

The book of **Ruth** contains several examples of situations covered by these verses, particularly the Law of Levirate Marriage. What others can you find?

Scripture Link:

Exodus 17:8-16 tell the story of the Amalekite attack on the Israelites as they left Egypt. Although it is clear that God desired that the Amalekites be completely destroyed, history shows that this was not carried out, at least until the time of King David.

Digging deeper

1. Read Matthew 1:18-21. Given the commandments concerning marriage violations in Deuteronomy 22:13-29, what were Joseph's options when he discovered Mary was pregnant? What would have been Mary's fate?

Joseph could have accused Mary of not being a virgin, which would have been taken as true, and she would have been brought to her father's door and stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:20-21). There could have also been an investigation for the "father" and, if found, he could have been put to death. Joseph could also have quietly given Mary a divorce (which is what he planned to do). Instead, God's intervention led Joseph to take Mary as his wife.

It is often instructive to remember that when God met with the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai (**Exodus 19-20**), in a very real sense, He "married" the Israelites. Based on this understanding, whenever the Israelites engaged in idolatry, God viewed it as adultery. This can give you some interesting insight to the way God feels about his "marriage" to Israel.

2. Read Matthew 19:3-12. In this passage, the Pharisees are asking for *Yeshua's* interpretation of the text in Deuteronomy 24:1. (Some thought that it allowed a man to divorce his wife for any reason.) What do you find interesting about *Yeshua's* understanding of this passage? How might this apply to God's "marriage" to Israel?

Yeshua interprets the passage rather strictly, implying that in order for a man's wife to deserve divorce, she would have had to commit adultery. He thus clarified what God meant by the command and was at odds with those Jews who had interpreted it more liberally to allow a man to divorce his wife for almost any reason. Yeshua confirmed that God intended for marriage to be a permanent commitment, which is exactly how He views His marriage to Israel.

For further study, see

Haftarah : Isaiah 54:1-10

Brit Hadashah : Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-12; 22:23-32;
Mark 10:2-12; 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-38;
I Corinthians 9:4-18; Galatians 3:9-14;
I Timothy 5:17-18