

God's Law On Marriage in Deuteronomy

In the Garden of Eden, the marriage relationship was established by God. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2.24). Later on, we read of Lamech deviating from the one man for one-woman pattern and having two wives. While the word divorce is not found in Genesis, one can infer that man disregarded God's law on marriage during the days of Noah.

God intended for Israel to be a pure and holy nation. This can be seen in His law regarding the marriage relationship. Keep in mind at this time women were treated as possessions, almost like cattle. This did have an influence upon the Israelites. While God intended for each man to have his own wife, some had multiples. Deuteronomy 21.15-17 addressed a problem this would create where one wife was loved more than the other. There was the tendency for the children of the loved wife to receive preferential treatment. The firstborn son of the man was to receive a double portion of the inheritance. God specifically states that if the firstborn was from the unloved wife, he would still receive the double portion.

In Deuteronomy 24 God gave His law concerning divorce. Keep in mind that during this time a man could simply cast aside his wife with impunity. Again, the law restricted what the custom was. While we read of men having multiple wives we do not read of women having multiple husbands. Generally, a woman was at the mercy of her husband. God protected the woman by requiring a writing of divorce. Deuteronomy 24.1-2, "and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, and puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house." This gave her the opportunity to find another husband. Once she married another man she could never return back to her first husband, as stipulated in the next two verses.

The question arose about the phrase "uncleanness in her" and what that meant. Keep in mind that in Deuteronomy 22 God covered what would or could happen if a man married a "virgin" and thought that perhaps she had not been a virgin. "But if the thing is true, and evidences of virginity are not found for the young woman, then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done a disgraceful thing in Israel to play the harlot in her father's house. So you shall put away the evil from among you" (Deut. 22:20-21). If Deuteronomy 22 was properly applied then the uncleanness could not have referred to sexual immorality. But what about a woman that had been married for some time and her husband suspected that she had been unfaithful?

"The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death." (Lev 20:10-11) Again the uncleanness could not have referred to sexual immorality since death would have ended the marriage bond.

All one can say about the "uncleanness" is that it did not refer to sexual immorality but it was supposed to be a reason. Today preachers talk about "burning the bread" as a trivial reason for divorce, but I doubt seriously whether God intended for divorce to be for such reasons.

At the same time God intended to protect the woman from simply being accused to being immoral. Back in Deuteronomy 22 if a man accused his new wife of being immoral, but was wrong, he had to pay his father in law a fine and he would never be able to divorce his wife. (Think how that would affect the relationships inside that family.)

There were a couple of other situations where divorce would never be allowed. "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, then the man who lay with her shall give 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 conduct of the priest was restricted even further in that they had to marry a virgin and could not marry a widow, a divorced woman, a defiled woman, or a harlot, Leviticus 21.13-14.

In speaking of a woman "betrothed to a husband" (Deut. 22.23) and she lies with another man, both she and that man was to be put to death. In verse 24 the phrase is used "because he humbled his neighbor's wife." In the New Testament we read of Mary and Joseph being betrothed, Matthew 1.18. When Joseph learned she was with child, he thought about "putting he away secretly", Matthew 1.19. This was due to the betrothed parties were looked upon as being married. - - Dennis Tucker