

Keep Your Vows to the Lord
Deuteronomy 22:13-23:24
Expository Lessons from the Book of Deuteronomy

I. Introduction

- a. The **Book of Deuteronomy** consists of a few speeches that Moses gave to the Israelites near the end of their 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness.
- b. Now, in the second half of **Deuteronomy 22 and chapter 23**, we continue in Moses' second address, which provides some interesting instructions for the Jews to follow after Moses dies and they move into Canaan, the Promised Land.
- c. In the course of this series, we have often discussed reasons why Christians should become familiar with the Law of Moses. For example:
 - i. It contains significant prophecies about Jesus.
 - ii. While we are no longer bound by the rules of the Law of Moses, there are timeless principles contained in it that the apostles refer to in teaching about the Christian life. Examples follow.
 - 1. In addressing sexual immorality in the church and what to do about that, Jesus and Paul refer to:
 - a. Example of the sin with the Midianite women, in **Numbers**, and the tragic outcome.
 - b. The typology that after the Passover Lamb (Jesus) was slain, the people had to get rid of all the yeast (sin) from within the community, as first explained in **Exodus**.
 - c. We need to "expel the wicked man from among us" as it says in **Deuteronomy** in several places.
 - d. When applying serious discipline to sin in the church, we should have "two or three witnesses" to establish the matter, as it says in **Deuteronomy**.
 - e. We need to be a holy people, set apart, and not be "yoked (in marriage) to unbelievers", based on a principle we discussed recently, from **Deuteronomy**.
 - f. Marriage is a "one flesh" lasting relationship, with all that entails, as explained by Moses in **Genesis**.

2. There are amazing, faith-building prophecies about Jesus and the kingdom of God throughout the Law of Moses. We recently discussed a major passage in Deuteronomy 18:15-19, where the Lord promises to “raise up” a prophet like Moses.
 - a. The only way to appreciate the meaning of that is to be familiar with the life and ministry of Moses, as found in **Exodus** through **Deuteronomy**.
3. There is a third reason, which we have not yet touched on, but will become important in the current lesson. In the gospels, the religious Jews who oppose Jesus are constantly trying to catch Him violating something in the Law of Moses.
 - a. It is hard to appreciate their attacks, and Jesus’ defenses, if you are not somewhat familiar with the Law.
- d. **Question:** “If God’s plan was to replace the Law of Moses with the teachings of Jesus, *why didn’t He just give us the teachings He ultimately wanted us to follow, in the first place?*”
 - i. **An Analogy that Might Help Answer that Question:** Imagine you are trying to cross a dangerous stream, but you are unable to do so with a single leap, since the stream is too wide (you can’t jump that far). For example, what if the stream is *eight feet* across, but the farthest you can jump in one leap is *five feet*?
 - ii. **Solution to Problem Posed in the Analogy:** Find a spot where there is a large flat rock partway across the stream, and cross it by making two jumps. Use the flat rock as a stepping stone to *cross the stream in two steps!*
 - iii. **Answer to the Prior Question:** The Law of Moses was used by God as an intermediate step, to take the people part of the way where He wanted them to go. Since it would have been too challenging for the Jews to receive all the kingdom teachings of Jesus at that point in time (right after departing Egypt), He used the Law as an intermediate step in what would be a two-step process to lead them to the full teachings that Jesus would bring.
 1. **For example,** Jesus told the Jews that the Lord had permitted divorce and remarriage among them for a time, under the Law of Moses, “because of the hardness of your hearts”.
 - a. Presumably, if the Lord told them that the only way out of a marriage is via the death of a spouse, it would have led to a number of unfortunate “accidents” where an

unfortunate (and unloved) wife perished under mysterious circumstances!

2. Recall that Moses was able to take people (physically) most of the way through the Wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. However, he could not “finish the job”. That would be completed by another, named ‘Jesus’ (= Joshua).
 - a. Likewise, the Law of Moses would only take people part of the way to the goal of the kingdom. Jesus would provide the rest of the teaching when the people were ready for that.
- e. The commands contained in the text we plan to cover today can be arranged into six groups, as follows (some of which we will only skim over today):
 1. How they should treat various illicit sexual relationships.
 - a. Some similarities with **Leviticus 20**.
 2. How they should treat the Moabites and Ammonites, who had mistreated them at a vulnerable time in the past.
 3. Rules for maintaining spiritual (and physical) cleanness when they went out to battle their enemies.
 4. Prohibition on charging usury (interest, or perhaps excessive interest) to fellow Jews.
 5. Insisting that they must keep vows that they make to the Lord.
 6. Provisions to allow trespassers to pluck grain or grapes as they are passing through your fields or vineyards.

II. Laws Regarding Sexual Purity

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 22:13-29**.
- b. Keep in mind some of the ground rules related to marriage under the Law of Moses, in ancient Israel. In many ways, it was different than in our own culture. In that culture:
 - i. Polygamy was permitted under the Law of Moses (a man could have more than one wife).
 - ii. In general, women were more vulnerable than men, both physically and economically.
 - iii. Women typically relied on a man (husband, father or surviving offspring) to provide for their basic physical needs.

- c. Let us do our best to appreciate the culture that they were living in, and be slow to judge them by the norms and expectations of our own culture.
- d. The text we have just read can be as follows:
 - i. **(Deuteronomy 22:14-21)** If a man marries a virgin and immediately regrets it and wants to get out of the marriage, by claiming his new wife deceived him and was not a virgin (he discovered she had slept with other men):
 - 1. The elders would decide the dispute based on physical evidence.
 - a. If they discovered the man was lying, the punishment is that he can never divorce her, “all the days of his life”. Regardless of what it says about divorce in **Deuteronomy 24!**
 - b. If the man was telling the truth and the woman was deceitful, the men of the city shall stone her to death.
 - 2. Notice the instructions here are *neither* to “always trust the man” nor “always trust the woman”.
 - ii. **(Deuteronomy 22:22)** If a man is found lying with a married woman, they are told to *kill both of them!*
 - 1. Read **John 8:1-11**. The woman caught in adultery; the Pharisees try to trap Jesus regarding violating the Law of Moses.
 - a. Recall that both the man and the woman were supposed to be stoned. Did the man in this story escape somehow?
 - b. Notice that in His response to the challenge, Jesus did NOT violate what the Law of Moses said here.
 - iii. **(Deuteronomy 22:23-27)** If a woman *betrothed* to a man becomes intimate with another man.
 - 1. Betrothal was a very serious form of engagement; pledged to be married to a man, but marriage has not yet taken place. The woman was considered to belong to her future husband at this point.
 - 2. Two options:

- a. If the man forced himself on the woman and there was no way for her to call out for help (being in a remote place), then *the man* violating her was to be *put to death*.
 - i. It seems to me that this implies that most men would be upright and could be called upon to protect vulnerable women from any wicked, predatory men who are out there.
 - ii. Most men, therefore, would be willing to “come to the aid” of a woman in trouble.
 - b. If the woman was somewhere that she could have cried out in protest (but did not), then both of them will be put to death.
- iv. **(Deuteronomy 22:28-29)** If a man forces himself on a woman who is not betrothed,
- 1. After being caught, he must pay the father and marry the woman.
 - 2. He can never divorce her, “all the days of her life”.
- e. Early Christian writer Tertullian saw in these instructions that Moses was setting a pattern that would be followed by Jesus.
- i. “Thus you have Christ following spontaneously the tracks of the Creator everywhere, both in permitting divorce and in forbidding it. You find Him also protecting marriage, in whatever direction you try to escape. He prohibits divorce when He will have the marriage inviolable; He permits divorce when the marriage is spotted with unfaithfulness.”
 - 1. (Source: Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 405)
 - 2. Here we find Jesus following “in the tracks of Moses” before Him:
 - a. Allowing divorce (in the case of immorality),
 - b. Prohibiting divorce, and
 - c. Protecting marriage.

3. This seems to me to be another classic example of how Jesus was indeed “the prophet like Moses” as foretold in **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**.

III. More Laws Regarding Sexual Immorality

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 23:1-3**.
 - i. A man cannot take his father’s wife (a form of incest).
 1. Note that this was the specific sin Paul addressed in **1 Corinthians 5:1**.
 - ii. A eunuch and castrated man shall not enter the assembly of the Lord.
 - iii. The child of a prostitute shall not enter the assembly.

IV. The Ammonites and Moabites Shall Not Enter the Assembly

- a. **Deuteronomy 23:4-9**
- b. The Ammonites and Moabites hired Balaam to curse Israel, and were heartless (not providing bread and water) when the Israelites were in need. Therefore, they were not allowed to enter the assembly.
 - i. **Lesson for Us:** We must provide for the basic needs of others; do not be selfish and greedy. Recall what Jesus said in the parable/teaching of the Sheep and Goats, at the end of **Matthew 25**.
 1. “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’ Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (**Matthew 25:41-46**, NKJV)
- c. In contrast, even the Egyptians’ and Edomites’ descendants (of the third generation) may enter the assembly.

V. Keeping the Camp Pure and Clean

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 23:10-15**.

- b. These instructions pertained to when they went out as an army to battle against their enemies.
- c. All soldiers were to be issued a special 'stick' (perhaps serving like a trowel) to dig with. They must go outside the camp and use a stick to make a hole to bury their excrement.
- d. This reinforces the idea that God's people must be holy, so that the Lord can "walk among them". That is the only way they will see victory in the battles before them!
 - i. The camp of soldiers has to be a holy place. When going to war, must be sure to be a holy place, so that the Lord can walk among us, and save us from our enemies. We need Him to be with us in our battles, to fight for us!
 - ii. Read **2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1**.
 - 1. "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: '*I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.*' (**Leviticus 26:12**) Therefore 'Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. *Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.*' 'I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty.' Therefore, having these promises, beloved, *let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*" (**2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1**, NKJV)
 - 2. Perhaps this presents a graphic visual of how the Lord wants us to be, so that he can "walk among us"; how we are called to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh".
 - 3. Christians are called to be a holy people, engaged in a spiritual battle. Like the ancient Israelites, we must keep our own camp "clean" from all filthiness, so that the Lord can be among us as we fight our battles.
 - 4. Let us view sin and spiritual uncleanness as God does (as something vile and unclean)!
- e. From another angle, there may be a compelling public health case for this practice, too.
 - i. In wars fought in earlier times (such as the Revolutionary War in the colonial U.S.), it was not unusual to have more soldiers die from diseases than from bullets and cannon fire.

- ii. I recall a discussion years ago with Dr. Rheinbolt, who came to Boston to pursue a master's degree at the Harvard School of Public Health.
 - 1. He told me that of all the things he did as a medical missionary in Guatemala (including running clinics, immunizations, nutrition for mothers and infants, delivering babies, etc.), the thing that he felt made the greatest improvement to public health in Central America was providing water and sanitation facilities. That was the single thing that could save the most lives and prevent the most illness.
- iii. The drive to build the first sewer system in Boston in the late 1800s was spearheaded by physicians who were trying to cut off diseases at the source.
- iv. Even with all the progress made over the past hundred years, the greatest public health problem in much of the world remains water contamination from sewage that leads to all kinds of illnesses.
- f. In this passage from **Deuteronomy**, we have an important lesson for us on holiness, in figurative form, couched in rather graphic imagery. However, we also have here an unusual public health advisory, given over 3,000 years ago through Moses; one which took the world many centuries to fully appreciate!

VI. Laws on Runaway Slaves and Prostitution

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 23:16-19**.
- b. This deals with female prostitutes as well as with male (homosexual) prostitution, which were features of ancient pagan religions.

VII. Do Not Charge Interest to Your Brothers

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 23:20-21**.
- b. This seems to be related to *giving financial assistance to those in need* (as opposed to loaning money for capital investments for housing or business enterprises of the wealthy).
 - i. The term used here could be translated either as “interest” or “excessive interest”.
- c. It was allowable to charge foreigners, though.
- d. Clement of Alexandria, writing c. 195 AD, pointed to this passage as one more example of the kindness and compassion of the Lord toward those in need, as revealed in the Law of Moses. (See *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*, book 2, chapter 18; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, p. 366.)

VIII. Keep Your Vows

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 23:22-24**.
- b. Jesus took this to a much higher level of personal integrity and righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount.
 - i. Read **Matthew 5:33-37**.
 1. “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”
(**Matthew 5:33-37**, NKJV)
 2. “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No,’ lest you fall into judgment.” (**James 5:12**, NKJV)
 - ii. We should not ‘swear’ anything; rather, simply *affirm* what we say.
 - iii. *This statement by Jesus calls His followers to the highest ethical standard of all time. Everything out of our mouths is true. We keep all our commitments. Our word is all it takes.*
 1. This is one of the hardest things to do (try for 100% in just one day).
 2. For me, it is especially hard to keep my word regarding time deadlines. (As a consequence, I tend to make very few promises!)
- c. Note also *that the entire Christian faith hangs on an honest account of the apostles regarding Jesus’ miracles and resurrection.*
 - i. The message that the apostles spread throughout the world included that a follower of Jesus *must follow the highest moral standard of all time. They must always tell the truth*, not just when swearing. (See Eusebius, *Proof of Gospel*, book 3)
 - ii. Either the apostles were telling the truth regarding his death, resurrection and miracles...or they were all conspiring together and lying!