

FEMALE CAPTIVES

Of all the laws that are in the Torah, this has got to be one of the strangest, while at the same time being one of the most ingenious. Our heavenly Father knows how we think and He's a Master at cutting us off at the pass. This is the beginning of this week's Torah portion and it has to do with the rules of war. Let's take a look.



Deuteronomy 21:10-14 **Marrying Female Captives**

“When you go out to war against your enemies, and the Lord your God gives them into your hand and you take them captive, and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you desire to take her to be your wife, and you bring her home to your house, she shall shave her head and pare her nails. And she shall take off the clothes in which she was captured and shall remain in your house and lament her father and her mother a full month. After that, you may go into her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife. But if you no longer delight in her, you

shall let her go where she wants. But you shall not sell her for money, nor shall you treat her as a slave, since you have humiliated her."

This is a downright disturbing picture and a strange commandment that Yahweh gives to His people. At least at first glance. If you're in the middle of a battle and you see a beautiful woman, you can take her home with you but you can't marry her until you shave her head and trim her nails. And you have to wait thirty days. Then you can take her as your wife.

QUESTION: What does all this mean? How do we apply this today? What was the original intent?

Those three questions are at the heart of the living Torah that is to be written on our hearts. There is nothing He gives to His people that cannot be applied today in some way. All we need to do is go back to the original intent and look for the underlying spiritual principle from which it derives. Find Yahweh's concern and you'll find His heart. Find His heart and you'll find the exact meaning behind a particular text.

In this text, it's important to know how the art of ancient war worked. The Israelites would not go to war with a country or city without first sitting down with its leaders and negotiating a possible settlement. All of this land was originally given to Israel before they were forced to move to Egypt because of the famine in the days of Joseph. These people had squatted on their land while they were gone for over 400 years and the rent payment was finally due. If terms could not be negotiated, then the two groups would go to war to settle the score. If you lived even a hundred years ago and you came back to your farm after being gone for a while and there were people living in your house and farming your land, you would politely ask them to leave. If they didn't, threatened you, and told you they were staying, you very well might show up the next day guns a-blazing.

As far as women go, this was a society in which they were completely dependent on men. The society was mainly an agricultural one, and very hard labor was required if you wanted to survive. When a city or region was under siege by a foreign nation, it was common practice for all the women to dress in their most attractive and beautiful attire while their husband was fighting. Why? Because if he was killed, she was going to need a new husband quickly, and this strategy created the best opportunity for survival. She did not want to be killed and she wanted to be treated with as much favor as possible. So she "dressed to kill" to save her life.

So if at the end of the war, a young Israelite man saw a woman he was very much attracted to and desired to take her as a wife, the Almighty put a few roadblocks in his way to curb his raging hormones and prevent him from doing something out of selfish ambition or violating her out of lust. The Father knows that the crown of the woman is her hair, so He created a law that forced her to "take off her crown" for a month as a test of his true motives. This process made her look like a man, and because she spent a month in mourning for her lost husband and family, what seemed attractive at first might very well be repulsive after 30 days. But if the Israelite still wanted to marry her at the end of the test, he could go into her and take her to be his wife. However, if he decided he didn't want to keep her after all, he was to set her free.

The order of the text makes it appear as if he took her as a wife first and could then send her back if he didn't like her. But this was not the case. Many times the Hebrew way of telling a story is not in Greek chronological order. Even the word structure of Hebrew is backward from our viewpoint. Where we would say "In the beginning, God created," the Hebrew would be "Barasheet bara Elohim" ("In the beginning created Elohim"). The same concept can be seen in Deuteronomy 22:13 where it says "If any man takes a wife and goes into her and detests her..." The detest has nothing to do with her skill of love but whether or not she is a virgin, which the text shares later. So it is in this case.

In the end, the plain understanding of the text is that Yahweh is creating a rule to prevent rape and to make sure that there is proper protocol for taking a wife that goes deeper than love at first sight.

QUESTION: What can we pull from this that can be used today in real-time? What is the spiritual principle?

The most obvious principle is that He is telling us that we should not make decisions in the heat of the battle or in the passion of emotion. You may wake up in the morning and have buyer's remorse like you never imagined. Many times the enemy tries to take advantage of situations where there is a lot of pressure. These are the times when the battle is raging and you are most vulnerable to suggestions. If he can get you to act out of fear, passion, or pressure, he can cause you to do something that you would never do without it. It is at these moments that we are to "shave the head" of the situation, meaning we remove whatever is drawing our attention away and boil it all down to what's really there. What is the real truth of the situation without all the emotion, fear, anxiety, stress, and pain? What's black and white? When we remove all the distraction and fluff, what's left? Sometimes this requires us to remove ourselves from the situation to allow the emotions to calm down and wisdom to regain its rightful throne. Taking the kettle off the burner forces the water to cool down. "Shaving the head" is removing the fuel from the fire to see what's really behind it, allowing the emotions to calm so we can think clearly.

Secondly, the Spirit is giving clear instructions to young people that when you "fall in love" with someone, you need to back up and take it slowly. This is a lifetime commitment and it needs to be taken seriously. Steps need to be taken to ensure that the love is real, that all parties are in agreement, and that this is from God. And no guys, this does not give you permission to marry her after a thirty-day waiting period. (And by the way, if you're one of my daughters, you need to know that the actual Hebrew says thirty YEAR waiting period. It's a misprint in the English translations.)

Whether it's finding a spouse or buying a new car, the point is that we need to go slowly in making big decisions and do things His way. When we go fast, we make mistakes, and sometimes those mistakes plague us for a very long time!

Shalom!
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