



Deuteronomy - Chapter Twenty Five

III Deuteronomy 12:1-26:19 - Moses' Second Speech: Specific Covenant Stipulations (continues)

III.n Deuteronomy 24:5-25:4 - Miscellaneous Laws (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Twenty Five

The laws in this section relate to things such as the administration of justice, provision for widows, and honesty in business.

The miscellaneous law summaries conclude with a regulation dealing with a dispute between two parties and the punishment that may be incurred by the one in the wrong.

The law for Levirate marriages is specified, which deals with the requirement for a man to take his brother's childless widow as his wife with the first son being accepted as belonging to the dead man so that his name will continue. The law also specifies the punishment for those men who refuse to accept their responsibility to their dead brother's widow.

The chapter concludes with a series of short commands.

¹ Suppose two persons have a dispute and enter into litigation, and the judges decide between them, declaring one to be in the right and the other to be in the wrong. ² If the one in the wrong deserves to be flogged, the judge shall make that person lie down and be beaten in his presence with the number of lashes proportionate to the offence. ³ Forty lashes may be given but not more; if more lashes than these are given, your neighbour will be degraded in your sight.

Deuteronomy 25:1-3

Declaring one to be in the right and the other to be in the wrong. This is the simple responsibility of all government and courts. As Paul described the role of government: <<*For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer*>> (Romans 13:3-4).

The limit of forty lashes was to prevent the guilty man from being degraded or abused, presumably anticipating his restoration to the community. For fear of miscounting and going beyond forty, later Jews limited flogging to thirty nine lashes, as in the case of Paul: <<*Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one*>> (2 Corinthians 11:24). The restriction of thirty nine also fits in with the way floggings were administered by the Jews. The lashes were generally applied in groups of three: two across the back, followed by one across the chest.

⁴ You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.

Deuteronomy 25:4

You shall not muzzle an ox. This law simply commanded the humane treatment of a working animal. In those days, grain would be broken away from its husk by having an ox walk on it repeatedly, usually around a circle. It would be cruel for force the ox to walk on all the grain, yet to muzzle him so he could not eat of it, for it needed to eat to keep its strength for the continued work.

In 1 Corinthians 9:9 and 1 Timothy 5:18 Paul applied this principle to the work of evangelism and disciple-making, and the minister's right to be supported by the people he ministers to. In fact, 1 Corinthians 9:9-10 leads one to believe that this is the real point God is making in this verse, because in that passage Paul asked: <<Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Or does he not speak entirely for our sake?>>.

III.o Deuteronomy 25:5-10 - Levirate Marriage

In Latin, brother-in-law is *levir*, hence the term 'levirate marriage' is applied to this law. Its purpose was protection for the widow and is a case where polygamy was allowed since the brother-in-law may have already been married. The law reflects the strong sense of obligation placed on family, as well as a desire to preserve the family line. Ruth 4:1-12 seems to combine this institution with redemption by the closest kinsman.

In Matthew 22:23-33 the Sadducees use this law in an effort to disprove the idea of resurrection, and Jesus reveals their faulty reasoning. It is possible that Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 7:39, allowing a widow to marry 'whom she wishes,' was addressed to Christians who thought this law was still applicable.

⁵ When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband's brother to her, ⁶ and the firstborn whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. ⁷ But if the man has no desire to marry his brother's widow, then his brother's widow shall go up to the elders at the gate and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.' ⁸ Then the elders of his town shall summon him and speak to him. If he persists, saying, 'I have no desire to marry her', ⁹ then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, pull his sandal off his foot, spit in his face, and declare, 'This is what is done to the man who does not build up his brother's house.' ¹⁰ Throughout Israel his family shall be known as 'the house of him whose sandal was pulled off.'

Deuteronomy 25:5-10

When brothers reside together. It was common for families to continue to live in the same house or on the same plot of land. However, in the wider context, it can be applied to brothers living within the same community. The law may therefore not apply if one of the brothers lived a long distance away.

One of them dies and has no son. In ancient Israel it was seen as a great tragedy for a man to die without leaving descendants to carry on his name, or to whom he can pass on his family inheritance. Therefore, if a man dies and has no son, it was the responsibility of one of his brothers to take the deceased brother's widow as a wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.

The firstborn whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. When a son was born to this union, it would not be counted as the son of the surviving brother, but as son to the deceased brother. Son here may simply mean child. In the history of the interpretation of this Deuteronomic law, difference of opinion existed among Jewish expositors whether *ben* in v.5 meant 'son' or 'child.' The LXX and Josephus

render it 'child.' Moses had already established that when no male heir existed, daughters would be heirs or their father's property; refer to Numbers 27:1-8.

His brother's widow shall go up to the elders at the gate. In the case of a dispute, the widow can take her case before the elders to pass judgement. The city gate was the place where they traditionally met to decide on any disputes or to discuss matters of business for the community.

He will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me. If the brothers of the deceased man refused to take this responsibility, they were to be called to open shame by the widow. The shame was compounded as they would remove his sandal and the widow would spit in his face, thus bring shame on him and his family for his failure to fulfil his duty to his brother: <<*They abhor me, they keep aloof from me; they do not hesitate to spit at the sight of me*>> (Job 30:10). He is not, however, forced into taking the widow as his wife, which would have protected her from being shackled to a reluctant husband.

III.p Deuteronomy 25:11-19 - Various Commands

Moses once again summaries apparently unrelated laws and commandments.

¹¹ If men get into a fight with one another, and the wife of one intervenes to rescue her husband from the grip of his opponent by reaching out and seizing his genitals, ¹² you shall cut off her hand; show no pity.

Deuteronomy 25:11-12

You shall cut off her hand. In this difficult passage, various suggestions have been made as to why such a severe punishment was commanded. Possibly it was representative of similar offences and provided a standard for judgement in all such cases. Perhaps also, the law arose from the desire to protect the reproductive organs and thus obviate anything that might prevent a man leaving descendants.

Show no pity. Although God had instructed the Israelites to show no mercy to its enemies: <<*When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you – the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you – and when the Lord your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy*>> (Deuteronomy 7:1-2), the expectation here might be that one would expect mercy to be shown to such a woman whose natural instinct would be to rescue her husband in these circumstances, but none was to be shown. In 1683 Matthew Poole wrote: "Partly because of the great mischief she did to him, both to his person and posterity, and partly to deter all women from

immodest and impudent carriages, and to secure that modesty which is indeed the guardian of all the virtues, as immodesty is an inlet to all vices, as the sad experience of this degenerate age shows; and therefore it is not strange that it is so severely restrained and punished.”

¹³ You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, large and small.

¹⁴ You shall not have in your house two kinds of measures, large and small. ¹⁵ You shall have only a full and honest weight; you shall have only a full and honest measure, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. ¹⁶ For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly, are abhorrent to the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 25:13-16

Two kinds of weights, two kinds of measures. A dishonest person could use one set of weights or measures for selling and another for buying, in order to buy more goods for the set price or to sell less produce for the price. Other Scriptures expand on this law: <<*A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but an accurate weight is his delight*>> (Proverbs 11:1), <<*Honest balances and scales are the Lord's; all the weights in the bag are his work*>> (Proverbs 16:11), <<*Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying, 'When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practise deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat*>> (Amos 8:4-6), and: <<*Can I tolerate wicked scales and a bag of dishonest weights?*>> (Micah 6:11). Refer also to Leviticus 19:35-36.

So that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

This was a promise given to those who would obey the command to honour their parents (Deuteronomy 5:16). This did not merely mean a long life, but one that experienced God's presence and favour.

¹⁷ Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey out of Egypt,

¹⁸ how he attacked you on the way, when you were faint and weary, and struck down all who lagged behind you; he did not fear God.

¹⁹ Therefore when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies on every hand, in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; do not forget.

Deuteronomy 25:17-19

Remember what Amalek did. The Amalekites' **attacked** Israel during the Exodus, which led to the first battle. Joshua led the armies of Israel in victory over the Amalekites as Moses prayed for them, assisted by Aaron and Hur. The account is recorded in Exodus 17:8-16. The Amalekites remained a thorn in Israel's side. Notably, Saul failed to destroy them (1 Samuel 15:1-9), although David later defeated them (1 Samuel 30:1-20).

He did not fear God. This was a primary reason why God wanted the Amalekites to be totally destroyed. They were the type of people whom David so despised: *<<Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in their hearts; there is no fear of God before their eyes. For they flatter themselves in their own eyes that their iniquity cannot be found out and hated. The words of their mouths are mischief and deceit; they have ceased to act wisely and do good. They plot mischief while on their beds; they are set on a way that is not good; they do not reject evil>>* (Psalm 36:1-4)

Therefore when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies on every hand. Israel was to make this war against the Amalekites later, when they were at rest in the land. Some 400 years later, God directed Saul to make war against the Amalekites, and his failure to completely destroy them was the primary act of disobedience which cost Saul the throne: *<<Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord, and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you today>>* (1 Samuel 28:18).

Although **rest** here conveys simply peace after warfare, it is a theologically rich term, suggesting the well-being of God's people in God's place under his rule. Thus the notion hints back to the seventh day of creation: *<<Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation>>* (Genesis 2:1-3)

You shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. Because of God's strong command to battle against Amalek until they were completely conquered, many see the Amalekites as a picture of the flesh, which constantly battles against the spirit and must be struggled against until completely conquered: *<<For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want>>* (Galatians 5:17).