**Laws for Human Relationships**

Beginning with chapter 21 and continuing through chapter 25, Moses issued a number of laws involving human relations. He began by describing what was to be done when a corpse was found. He described the person as slain, indicating that it would have been apparent that the person was murdered although there was no suspect. The town nearest to the body had to take responsibility by breaking the neck of a heifer after which the elders of the town were to declare their innocence. This would satisfy the requirement for atonement for bloodshed.

Next Moses described the circumstances under which a woman captured in battle could be taken as a wife. She was to be clothed in the manner of the Israelites and allowed to mourn the loss of her family for a month after which she could be taken as a wife. If she was later rejected, she was to be set free rather than sold as a slave.

Moses then established rules for a man who had 2 wives. In the event he loved one more than the other (as Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah), he could not favor a child born to the favorite wife. A firstborn child was due rights regardless of the status of his mother. He was to receive a double portion of the father’s estate. Esau famously forfeited his rights as firstborn as did as did Reuben (see Gen. 49:3).

Moses then expanded on previous instruction given on handling a rebellious son set forth in Lev. 20:9. A child who cursed his parents was to be put to death. Here Moses adds that a child who would not obey his parents was to be taken to the elders of the town who would have him stoned to death. Got Questions-Biblical Answers noted the following: This would have been persistent, ongoing sin, not a single minor infraction. The sin was deep seated, indicating no remorse. The punishment was dealt out by elders who decided the case, rather than parents who might act rashly. Rebellion against parents was rebellion against God due to the many directives in the Bible about honoring one’s mother and father, beginning with the 5th commandment.

Chapter 21 closes with Moses instructing the people that a criminal who was hung on a tree for a transgression was not to be left hanging there overnight. The person would have been stoned to death then hung on a tree to provide an example for others who might commit the same crime. Leaving a person on the tree for more than a day was considered brutal, even for a criminal. Verse 23 says that anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse, a clear reference to Jesus who became our sin and hung on a cross.

Chapter 22 continues with additional laws of varying nature. Moses began by requiring the Israelites to care for any animals belonging to another and return them or any other possession owned by a brother. Next Moses established that men and women were to dress in clothes that were appropriate for their sex. Some regard this as a prohibition against women wearing pants, how quaint. Would that that would be the only argument today rather than the current state of affairs. Moses instructed that parapets be built on houses to protect someone from falling off a roof. He then addressed what Matthew Henry described as odd mixtures: 2 kinds of seed, 2 kinds of animals and 2 kinds of fabric. These were symbolic of keeping the nation of Israel pure amongst the wicked nations of Canaan.

The remainder of the chapter deals with issues related to the 7th commandment. The marriage bed was considered holy and the bride had to be a virgin. Moses went to great lengths to discuss how matters regarding the question of virginity were to be resolved. Adultery and fornication were punishable by death. Curiously, rape was punishable by death on in the event that the woman was betrothed, otherwise the rapist was to marry the woman and pay her father. The chapter closes with the admonition that a man was not to dishonor his father by marrying his father’s wife, a repeat of Lev. 18:8.