**Laws for Human Relationships (continued)**

Chapter 24 begins with the contrast of 2 marriages, one ending in divorce and the other just beginning in happiness. Moses first commanded that a man who became displeased with his wife could divorce her in writing after which she could remarry. If her second husband divorced her or died, the first husband was prohibited from re-marrying her. The grounds for divorce are indecency in the NIV and uncleanness in the KJV. David Guzik wrote that some rabbis defined indecency as anything that might displease a husband. In Matt. chapter, Jesus was questioned by the Pharisees about divorce. Jesus told them that Moses allowed divorce only because of the hard heartedness of Jewish men. He said that any man who divorced a woman for any reason other than marital unfaithfulness and remarried committed adultery. Clearly, the meaning Moses intended of the terms of indecency or uncleanness had to do with adultery. The disciples remarked that under those circumstances it would be better to remain unmarried (see Prov. 21:9 and 25:4). Paul expanded on divorce in 1st Cor. 7:10-16.

Next Moses addressed how marriages should begin. A newly married man was not to be sent to war or have any other duty assigned to him. During the first year of marriage, the husband was to stay at home to bring happiness to his wife. Certainly the first year of marriage is often the hardest as each party has to adjust to a new life. I read that divorces are most common in years 1&2 then in years 7&8. If both parties spend the first year making the other happy, perhaps it will become a lifetime habit.

Regarding the prohibition of remarrying the first wife, Matthew Henry noted that it may have been intended to prevent rashness of a husband in putting away a wife, only marry a worse one then realize the first was not so bad. This law says “you shall not have her, you should have kept her when you had her”. It is best to be content with such things as we have, since changes made by discontent often prove for the worse. Moses said that remarrying one’s first wife was regarded by God as an abomination and most divorced folks I know would agree with that characterization. Such remarriages are rare, occurring in only 6% of divorced couples but those remarriages apparently are more stable, ending in another divorce 28% of the time which is a little more than half the rate of divorce in first marriages.

Next Moses issued laws related to taking security for a loan, covered in verses 6 and 10-13. He prohibited taking millstones as collateral since the debtor depended on them for his livelihood. As a practical matter, taking the millstones would eliminate the debtor’s ability to earn money and repay the debt. Proverbs 22:7 says “The rich rule over the poor and the borrower is slave to the lender”. That is tempered with the following modern saying: “If you owe the banker $10,000 you have a problem. If you owe the banker $1 million, the banker has a problem.” Moses instructed the Israelites to allow the borrower some degree of dignity by not allowing the creditor to enter the borrower’s house to secured collateral. Also he required that if a cloak was taken as collateral from a poor man, it had to be returned before sunset. A widow’s cloak could not be taken at all. In verse 17, Moses prohibited mistreatment of aliens and the fatherless.

Verse 7 mandated the death penalty for kidnapping. In verse 8, Moses instructed that anyone with leprosy had to carefully follow the instructions of the priests. Much of Lev. chapter is devoted to infectious skin diseases. Verse 16 stated that fathers are not responsible for the crimes of sons and vice versa. This was repeated several times in later books (see 2nd Kings 14:6, Ez. 18:20, Jer. 31:30).

The chapter ends with Moses expanding on previous instructions about harvesting fields and groves (see Lev. 19:9-10, 23:22). The book of Ruth contains a beautiful story about the generosity of Boaz who allowed Ruth to pick gleanings after the harvesters. He went even further, telling his men to leave some sheaves for her and not to embarrass her. His kindness resulted in their marriage and their great grandson was David.