**Laws for Human Relationships (continued)**

The quote “Justice delayed is justice denied” has been attributed to several people as far back as the 17th century. Civil cases in our court system can drag on for years, the record apparently set by a case in Louisiana involving a dispute over an estate settlement. The suit was brought by Myra Clark Gaines in 1834 and ultimately made its way to the US Supreme Court which ruled in her favor in 1889, 4 years after her death. Criminal cases can also languish in the court system. Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and his brother Tamerian detonated a bomb during the Boston Marathon in 2013 that killed 3 and wounded hundreds of others. When the case went to trial in 2015, his attorney admitted in court that they detonated the bomb, however he plead not guilty. He was convicted and sentenced to die by lethal injection. As of 2023, he remains in prison with his death sentence under appeal. In 1984, the average length of time between sentencing and execution was a little over 6 years. By 2019, that figure had more than tripled to 264 months, or 22 years. In our continuing study of Deuteronomy, we see an Israelite court system that functioned much quicker.

In chapters 25 and 26 of Deuteronomy, Moses concludes his discourse on Mosaic law. He first addressed disputes between 2 men that were to be taken before a court. This appears to address a crime worthy of physical punishment rather than a simple civil matter that would be resolved by paying restitution (see Ex. 22:1, 3-6, Lev. 6:2-5). Here, the guilty party was to be punished by flogging with no more than 40 lashes. Apparently, the normal practice was to administer 39 lashes to guard against a miscount. Notice how quickly the sentence was to be carried out. The guilty man would lie down before the judge who would personally witness the flogging. My NIV study Bible notes that the punishment quickly follows the offense, is commensurate with the crime and was not overdone. I have recently read that in some larger cities, violent felony offenses are often reduced to misdemeanors by prosecutors while some non violent criminals are sentenced to prison terms exceeding those of violent criminals.

Next Moses gave instructions on how families were to deal with widows. A widow’s brother in law was obligated to continuing his deceased brother’s line by marrying the widow if she had no son. The child would take the name of the dead brother rather than the living one. Because of this, some men were reluctant to marry a sister in law, knowing that the first son born would not carry his name. In the event the brother refused to fulfill his obligation, he was to be shamed by the community.

The chapter ends with the requirement that the Israelites deal honestly with one another. They could not use weights and measures to cheat someone. Also Moses reminded the people of the brutality of the Amalekites when they left Egypt. He told them to blot out the memory of Amalek.

In chapter 26, Moses expanded on laws previously given regarding tithes. When the Israelites entered Canaan, they were to set aside the first fruits that were harvested from the fields and groves in accordance with God’s requirement that they celebrate the Feast of Harvest (see Ex. 23:16 and Lev. 23:9). They were to bring the first fruits to the priest at the place of God’s choosing and offer them while reciting an acknowledgement that God had brought them out of Egypt into Canaan and had given them the land which produced the offering. Giving God the first fruits required self denial. Matthew Henry wrote “When therefore God appointed them to lay those by for Him he taught them to prefer the glorifying of His name before the gratifying of their own appetites and desires”.

Moses then repeated the requirement that they observe the tithe year which was every 3 years (see Deut. 14:28-29). In the tithe year, one tenth of their harvest was to be given locally to the Levites, aliens, fatherless and widows. In doing so, they were to pledge that they had honored God’s commands and had fulfilled all requirements so that the offering would be considered sacred (see 1st Cor. 11:28-29).

The chapter ends with Moses telling the people that the decrees and laws he had set forth in the preceding chapters were from God and they were commanded to follow them. The covenant is re-stated as the people were declaring that the Lord was their God and they would walk in His ways and God was declaring that they would be His people, His treasured possession.