

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## DEUTERONOMY 17-21

Once, a golfer really needed to make a putt to stay ahead of his competitors. As he looked over his putt a stranger appeared beside him, and said, “Would you be willing to give up a quarter of your sex life to sink this putt?” He thought for a minute, and said, “Sure, why not...” His 40 foot putt rolled right into the cup.

Later in the round the golfer had a four iron into a par 5, and really needed to make up a few shots. *Oh, if he could eagle the hole...* The same stranger walks up and asks, “Would you be willing to give up another quarter of your sex life to make an eagle?” The guy thought for a minute, and said, “Oh, why not...” He launched his shot... it bounced once on the green... and rolled right into the cup.

On the final hole, a par 3, the golfer was two shots down. He needed a hole-in-one. Just as he addressed his ball, the stranger showed up again, and asked him, “Would you be willing to give up the rest of your sex life to make this hole-in-one?”

This golfer was a real intense competitor. He couldn't stand to lose, so he said, “Okay.” And hit a 180 yard shot that rolled into the cup for a winning Ace! As the golfer was walking off the course the stranger appeared by his side, and said, “Let me introduce myself, “I'm the devil, and from now on you'll have no sex life at all.”

The golfer smiled, and responded, “Nice to meet you. My name is Father O'Malley.” The moral of the story is... *some*

*sacrifices are no sacrifice at all.*

This is what Moses addresses in Deuteronomy 17:1, "You shall not sacrifice to the LORD your God a bull or sheep which has any blemish or defect, for that is an abomination to the LORD your God." We'll donate to Goodwill the old sweater that's threadbare, and the dress that's out of fashion – stuff we'd throw away.

But when we give a sacrifice to God - He wants our best, not our leftovers!

Once, a little boy who had two five dollar bills? His mom suggested he give one to God, but he couldn't decide which one. As he walked to church, one of the bills slipped out of his hand and fell down the storm drain. He looks up to heaven, and says, "God, I'm sorry I lost your \$5 bill." When you give to God give Him your best.

Verse 2 "If there is found among you, within any of your gates which the LORD your God gives you, a man or a woman who has been wicked in the sight of the LORD your God, in transgressing His covenant, who has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, either the sun or moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded, and it is told you, and you hear of it, then you shall inquire diligently." This is a serious issue. Before you accuse, first check it out...

"And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination has been committed in Israel, then you shall bring out to your gates that man or woman who has committed that wicked thing, and shall stone to death that man or woman with

stones.”

Today, we live in a different age. In the Old Testament an incorrigible or unchangeable person was eliminated. *Today there is no such person.*

The blood of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit can soften the hardest sinner. Today, God deals with the sinner differently...*He saves, not stones.*

*But His attitude toward the sin hasn't changed.* He hates occult practices. Any attempt to gain supernatural power or guidance apart from God is forbidden.

Verse 6, “Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness.” A death sentence was never prompted by just one man's word. It required two or three witnesses. There had to be corroborating testimony.

In 1 Timothy 5:9 Paul tells us the same is true for an accusation against an elder. It needs to be substantiated and validated by two or three witnesses.

“The hands of the witnesses shall be the first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So you shall put away the evil person from among you.” The witnesses were the first to throw the stones. This was a reality check. If you're a witness in a death penalty trial and you know you'll be asked to pull the switch you'll be a little more careful with your testimony.

Verse 8, "If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses. And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment." The priests served as a court of appeals. Town leaders could bring difficult cases to them.

"You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which the LORD chooses. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you. According to the sentence of the law in which they instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you." If you appeal your case to the priests, you're bound to live by their decision.

On occasion people come to the pastors and elders to settle a dispute. And it's our duty to mediate - but once we do, it's both parties duty to live by the decision.

If he doesn't, "Now the man who acts presumptuously and will not heed the priest who stands to minister there before the LORD your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall put away the evil person from Israel. And all the people shall hear and fear, and no longer act presumptuously." If you seek the priest's advice, then don't take heed to it you're sentenced to death. Hey, I'm sure if we instituted this today it

would certainly reduce the pastor's counseling load.

If you've been following the news, you know that in recent weeks the folks in Washington have been in a furor over wiretaps ordered by President Bush.

It seems the President has eavesdropped in on the overseas phone calls of a few suspected terrorists. And he's done it without normal court authorization.

The White House argues that since we're in a state of war the Commander and Chief can take special measures to protect the country. Thus, Bush has remained within his constitutional prerogatives. But the President's critics see his actions as a gross expansion of executive powers... *the Prez is overstepping his bounds.*

I'll leave it up to you and the pundits to resolve the debate... but the notion of a leader trying to broaden his authority is nothing new. It's as old as Deuteronomy.

This is the issue dealt with in the last half of Deuteronomy 17...

Verse 14, "When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,' Here Moses anticipates a development God does not desire.

God preferred to be the King of Israel, but once in the Promised Land Israel looked around at surrounding nations, and wanted *a man* to sit on the throne.

The Hebrews thought it would be easier to trust someone they could see, than someone they couldn't see. God gave

them what they wanted. For 450 miserable, years sinful men sat on Israel's throne. The nation swapped *virtue* for *visibility*.

But even before the choice was made, God in His foreknowledge knew this would happen, so He gave Moses instructions to regulate the monarchy.

Verse 15, "you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother." The king must be a Hebrew by birth. The president of the United States also has to be born an American.

And the king was forbidden to accumulate three items – *horses, or a cavalry – wives, or a harem – and silver and gold, or financial reserves*. This put limits on the king's executive powers. Evidently, God does not believe in big government.

Verse 16, "But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, 'You shall not return that way again.' *In times of war* God wanted the king to trust in Him and His power – not in his cavalry. Horses represented military machinery.

The confidence of the king was to rest in God not in his own arsenal.

"Neither shall he multiply wives for himself..." *In times of peace* God wanted the king to strengthen his ties with heaven - not foreign nations. In the ancient world when two kings

signed a treaty they ratified it by giving a daughter in marriage to the other king. You're less likely to attack an in-law.

Thus, a king built his harem through these political alliances.

But this was not God's desire for the Israel. Again, the king's confidence was supposed to be in his relationship with God – not his political alliances.

The greatest danger of the king marrying a pagan woman was her influence... Moses says, **“lest his heart turn away...”** Pagan women worship pagan gods.

Often these foreign queens led the king astray and into idolatry. King Ahab married the daughter of the King of Phoenicia – a woman named Jezebel.

And Jezebel indoctrinated the northern kingdom in the worship of Baal.

The king was forbidden to accumulate  *Broncos, babes... and bucks.*

Verse 17, **“nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.”** *In war time* the temptation was horses. *In peace time* the temptation was wives. *In all times* the temptation is money... We tend to trust in *our money* rather than *our God!*

Billy Graham once said, **“The three greatest dangers to every pastor are power, women, and money.”** It's true. Most pastors are brought down by one of the three.

But husbands too, need to be careful. Men, you are the king of your castle. Don't you fall prey to the *lure of power*, the *lust of sex*, or the *love of money...*

Don't forget Moses' warning...  *Broncos, babes, and bucks...*

*beware!*

"Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites."

Notice, the king is not allowed to hire this job out – or delegate this task to a scribe or some subordinate. He's to copy the Scriptures with his own hand.

The king was supposed to be personally acquainted with the Bible. And this is true of anyone who wants to lead... Dad, you can't delegate Bible study or note taking to your wife – or pastor. God wants you to be personally absorbed in His Word. Here's the point... *God wants His Word in the hearts of His leaders.*

"And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.

The king was not above the law. His heart was not to be "lifted above his brethren." God's Word applies to prince and pauper and priest alike.

Your Bible is a one size fits all book.

Chapter 18:1 reiterates what's been covered before. The priests will not receive an allotment of land when the nation crosses over the Jordan – their inheritance is the Lord. Rather

than *farm the land* they'll *serve the Lord* in the Tabernacle.

They'll be fed through Israel's offerings. Of the sacrifices they get the *shoulder, cheek, and stomach*. And from the tithes they get a portion of the *wine and fleece*.

Verse 9, "When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire..." This was a reference to the worship of Molech.

The name "*Molech*" can mean "*offering of man*" – a reference to the child sacrifice associated with this idol. Molech had the face of an ox and body of a man. He was a fertility god, and all kinds of lewd, perverse practices were carried out in his honor. To appease the evil idol the Canaanites offer up their children.

The idol itself was hollowed out brass. The Canaanites would light a fire within the image - heat the medal until it was glowing hot – then lay a baby in Molech's outstretched arms. The priests beat their drums to drown out the baby's screams.

Human sacrifice sounds so barbaric - far removed from modern culture - until we consider today's abortion industry. We use saline solution to burn our unborn to the god of sexual pleasure? Then a liberal media drowns out the silent screams of the murdered babies. *We want the pleasure of sex without its responsibilities.*

In a saline abortion the amniotic fluid is replaced with a highly concentrated salt solution. The child is poisoned. His

body ends up scorched and charred. Pictures turn your stomach... *And we think our society would never tolerate child sacrifice.*

Moses also warns against, **“one who practices witchcraft.”** The modern version of witchcraft is called *Wicca*. Its adherents claim to be white witches, as opposed to black witches. Supposedly they harness spiritual power and use it for good.

White witches deify nature. They believe in a *life force* that permeates all things. They're usually feminists and worship Gaia, the Earth Goddess.

But make no mistake about it, they reject and despise the one, true God

Also beware of the person who is **“a soothsayer.”** This is an astrologer. He consults the stars for supernatural guidance. It's sad, but 3 out of 4 American newspapers now carry a horoscope column. And it's all a tool of Satan.

Satan's goal is to replace confidence in God with a sinister substitute.

He warns us of **“one who interprets omens”** – tarot card readers, or palm readers, or crystal ball seers, or tea-leaf readers. They're all forbidden.

**“Or a sorcerer”** This is a person who uses drugs to connect spiritually. The sad truth is they're not connecting with God - but with sinister, satanic sources.

**“Or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.”** Mediums supposedly stand

between the psychic world and physical world, and communicate with the dead. In reality they end up manipulated by demons.

Hey, God takes all these practices seriously, and forbids them completely.

The Bible forbids any attempt to access supernatural power or derive guidance apart from direct communication with God. Bypass the God of Israel – the God of the Bible - and its forbidden. You're opening yourself up to demonic influences.

**“For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you.”**

The Hebrew word translated **“abomination”** means *“disgusting or abhorrent”*.

The ultimate insult to God is to bypass Him, and ally oneself to a demon. *And for God's own people to be guilty of this...* well, nothing could be more repulsive.

The Canaanites were driven out of the land for these crimes. If Israel repeats these abominations how will they receive any less of a punishment?

Moses says in verse 13, **“You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the LORD your God has not appointed such for you.”**

While Israel wandered in the wilderness she had but one leader... Moses.

But after the nation entered the Land of Promise - and over the course of her history - she developed three types of leaders – *kings, priests, and prophets*.

And it's interesting that Moses has something to say about each of Israel's future forms of leadership. In 17:14-20 he addressed *kings*. In 18:1-8 he talked to the *Levites and priests*. And now in verses 15-22 he speaks about *prophets*.

"The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren." Moses was a prophet. He was a spokesman for God. But just before he dies Moses predicts God will send another prophet like himself.

This other Prophet will also be a Hebrew - and work miracles like Moses.

"Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the LORD your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.' "And the LORD said to me: 'What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.'"

In Acts 7:37 when Stephen gave his defense before the Jewish Sanhedrin he said that Jesus was the Prophet who Moses predicted would be like him.

In Acts 3 Peter referred to Jesus as the Prophet Moses said would come.

In John 5:46 Jesus told the Jews, “If you believed Moses, you would believe in Me; for he wrote of Me.” I believe Jesus was referring to Deuteronomy 18:15.

Jesus was the prophet like Moses.

No one in the history of Israel rose to the stature of Moses – except Jesus. In his commentary on Exodus, AW Pink lists 75 ways Jesus was like Moses...

*Both were shepherds.*

*Both fasted 40 days*

*As infants, both were attacked by tyrants who slaughtered innocent kids.*

*Moses turned water into blood – Jesus turned water into wine.*

*Both were willing to die for the nation.*

*Both interceded, and God spared the people.*

*Both were rejected by their brothers.*

*Both were redeemers.*

*Both occupied all three major Hebrew offices – prophet, priest, and king.*

The list goes on and on. Yet Hebrews 3 makes it clear Jesus was not only *like* Moses, He was *far greater!* Moses was *God’s servant* - Jesus was *God’s Son*.

Jesus was the true prophet, but false prophets will also come. And the next few verses provide a couple of very simple tests for how to discern a false prophet...

Verse 20, “But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’

If a prophet contradicts what God has already said in His Word - or he lures you after other gods – he should be branded a false prophet.

Verse 21, "And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken? - when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.'"

Here's the other way to discern a false prophet - watch his track record.

God doesn't make mistakes. He has a 100% success rate. Therefore, if a prophet continues to make false predictions he's obviously not a true prophet.

The Jehovah Witnesses said Jesus would return in 1914 - then again in 1975. Obviously, both their predictions were bogus. The JWs must be false prophets.

Mormons - Joseph Smith and Brigham Young - both said God told them there were men on the moon six feet tall, and dressed like Quakers. In fact, you can fill several volumes with the false prophecies of the Church of Latter Day Saints.

JWs and Mormons are both false prophets. *Don't trust what they teach!*

In Chapter 19:1-13 Moses repeats His instructions for the cities of refuge.

"When the LORD your God has cut off the nations whose land the LORD your God is giving you, and you dispossess

them and dwell in their cities and in their houses, you shall separate three cities for yourself in the midst of your land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess.”

Numbers 35 also discusses cities of refuge. We're told there were six – 3 east of the Jordan and 3 west of the Jordan.

“You shall prepare roads for yourself, and divide into three parts the territory of your land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, that any manslayer may flee there.”

Jewish tradition says the roads to these cities were quite wide – 32 cubits or 48 feet - as broad as a four-lane highway. They were built with no impediments. Bridges were always opened. The roads were well maintained.

"And this is the case of the manslayer who flees there, that he may live: Whoever kills his neighbor unintentionally, not having hated him in time past –“

The cities of refuge were for the man who accidentally killed another man.

He could flee to the city, and once inside, the bereaved relatives of the man he'd killed couldn't harm him – or take vengeance on their brother's death.

Moses lists an example of unpremeditated murder, or manslaughter...

“As when a man goes to the woods with his neighbor to cut timber, and his hand swings a stroke with the ax to cut down the tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies - he shall flee to one of these cities and live; lest the avenger of blood, while his anger is hot, pursue the manslayer and overtake him, because the way is

long, and kill him, though he was not worthy of death, since he had not hated the victim in time past.” It was an accident.

Verse 7 “Therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall separate three cities for yourself.’” Three cities east of the Jordan had already been established: Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan. But after Israel takes possession of the land west of the Jordan they should mark three more cities: Kadesh, Shechem, and Hebron.

"Now if the LORD your God enlarges your territory, as He swore to your fathers, and gives you the land which He promised to give to your fathers, and if you keep all these commandments and do them, which I command you today, to love the LORD your God and to walk always in His ways, then you shall add three more cities for yourself besides these three, lest innocent blood be shed in the midst of your land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and thus guilt of bloodshed be upon you.”

In a sense, all sin is murder. The wages of sin is death. When you sin you take your own life. You initiate a slow suicide. We need a place to run when we sin where we can find a safe haven, and avoid the consequences of our sin.

Jesus is that place of refuge. As long as we're in Christ we're forgiven – we're safe from judgment. When we sin we need to run to Jesus as fast as we can.

This was why the road to the city of refuge was wide and well maintained.

According to Jewish tradition these roads were marked by

signs with large letters which read, “*Miklac*”, or “*Refuge*”. Everything was done to make it as easy as possible for the guilty party to find their way to the place of refuge.

And this is our job. God wants us to make it as easy as possible for people to come to Christ. Our job is to keep the road cleared of misconceptions - the bridges of understanding open... Our lives should be road signs pointing to Jesus.

The cities of refuge are wonderful pictures of Jesus... in at least 10 ways...

**The gates were never locked** - and the way to Jesus is never barred.

**As long as you were inside the city you were safe. If you left you were on your own.** - The same is true with Jesus. We need to continue to abide in Christ.

**You had to pick up and leave all your possessions to come.** - Likewise, to follow Jesus you have to leave behind anything that rivals your devotion to Him.

**The city was within easy reach.** – Likewise Jesus is only a cry of faith away.

**Refuge was available, but you had to come.** - The same is true with Jesus.

**Once inside the city there were plenty of provisions.** - Likewise, all that a human heart might need is found in fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

**The cities of refuge were established in advance.** - Likewise Jesus was slain before the foundation of the world. He too was chosen beforehand.

**According to Numbers 35:15, strangers and Gentiles, as**

well as Jews, were welcomed to come to the cities of refuge – as they are in Christ.

The death of the High Priest granted total freedom. - And it's because of the death of our High Priest, Jesus, that we've been granted a permanent pardon.

And finally, the names of the cities all speak of the blessings of Christ – *Kadesh* means holiness – *Shechem* means shoulder and Jesus shoulders our burdens – *Hebron* means fellowship – *Bezer* means fortified place – *Ramoth* means exaltation – *Golan* means joy. *All the above is found in Christ Jesus!*

And notice the one crucial distinction between Jesus and the cities of refuge. The cities were for the innocent. *Even the guilty can find refuge in Jesus.*

Verse 11, "But if anyone hates his neighbor, lies in wait for him, rises against him and strikes him mortally, so that he dies, and he flees to one of these cities, then the elders of his city shall send and bring him from there, and deliver him over to the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die. Your eye shall not pity him, but you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with you." In the case of premeditated murder the death penalty applied.

Verse 14 "You shall not remove your neighbor's landmark (or property pin), which the men of old have set, in your inheritance which you will inherit in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess." Once, a fellow asked a farmer to walk off the borders of his land. He asked, "Are you

a buyer or a tax collector?”

The land was God’s gift to the people. And as a result, property boundaries were considered sacred. There was to be no tampering with the landmarks.

"One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established. If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, then both men in the controversy shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days. And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you." Swift and fair punishment was a deterrent to crime.

“Your eye shall not pity; but life shall be for life (capital punishment is a command of God), eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”

Remember the human tendency is not foot for foot. Stomp my foot, and I’ll want to stomp your foot *AND* punch you in the mouth. Our tendency is one-upmanship.

God’s Law might seem harsh to our squeamish sensibilities and soft-on-crime attitudes, but in the ancient world it actually set the tone for mercy and fairness.

In a few days Joshua will be leading the people into the land against their enemies. Deuteronomy 20 provides instructions for the brink of battle...

"When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

God commands His people to have courage. He wants men with backbone.

And for those who lack it – who, for some reason are weak-kneed - God would just as soon weed them out and send them home. Why carry excess baggage into battle?

"So it shall be, when you are on the verge of battle, that the priest shall approach and speak to the people. And he shall say to them, 'Hear, O Israel: Today you are on the verge of battle with your enemies. Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them; for the LORD your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.'

"Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying: 'What man is there who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it.

And what man is there who has planted a vineyard and has not yet eaten of it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man eat of it.

And what man is there who is betrothed to a woman and has not married her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man marry her.'

"The officers shall speak further to the people, and say, 'What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faint like his heart.' "And so it shall be, when the officers have finished speaking to the people, that they shall make captains of the armies to lead the people.

As far as God was concerned what mattered was not *the size of the army*, but *the heart of the army*. In Judges 7 this is proven with the example of Gideon.

Hey, when it's time to fight you don't want half-hearted people by your side. In the midst of battle you're better off by yourself, than with people you can't trust.

To be honest, this is also my approach to ministry.

I want people at my side, who are totally committed, focused, and passionate. If they're not – if they're half-hearted and lukewarm - then when we the heat gets turned up they end up more a liability than a help. Even if you have to thin out the ranks, it's better to go into battle with only those people who are up for the fight.

"When you go near a city to fight against it, then proclaim an offer of peace to it. And it shall be that if they accept your offer of peace, and open to you, then all the people who are found in it shall be placed under tribute to you, and serve you."

This does not apply to the upcoming invasion of the Promised Land.

The Canaanites were so corrupt – so steeped in demonic and occult activities – they were to be totally annihilated – men, women, children, cattle... everything...

Now if the city will not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it. And when the LORD your God delivers it into your hands, you shall strike every male in it with the edge of the sword. But the women, the little ones, the livestock, and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall plunder for yourself; and you shall eat the enemies' plunder which the LORD your God gives you. Thus you shall do to all the cities which are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations.” He’s speaking here of future battles...

“But of the cities of these peoples which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the LORD your God has commanded you, lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the LORD your God.” Nothing that breathes should live...

Verse 19, "When you besiege a city for a long time, while making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them; if you can eat of them, do not cut them down to use in the siege, for the tree of the field is man's food." Don't waste the fruit trees to make battering rams. "Only the trees which you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, to build siegeworks against the city that makes war with you, until it is subdued."

This was an ecology-friendly view of warfare. God wanted

Israel to take a long term view. The need for food was ultimately more vital than the need for a battering ram. Destroy a city's food supply, and it defeats the reason for taking the city.

Chapter 21, "If anyone is found slain, lying in the field in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess, and it is not known who killed him, then your elders and your judges shall go out, and they shall measure the distance from the slain man to the surrounding cities." In the case of an unsolved murder someone had to take responsibility and stone for the crime down in Israel.

"And it shall be that the elders of the city nearest to the slain man will take a heifer which has not been worked and which has not pulled with a yoke. The elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with flowing water, which is neither plowed nor sown, and they shall break the heifer's neck there in the valley. Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister to Him and to bless in the name of the LORD; by their word every controversy and every assault shall be settled. And all the elders of that city nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley."

Understand there might be an unsolved murder, but never an unresolved murder – maybe *unsolved*, but never *unresolved*.

If the perpetrator was never brought to justice, the city closest to the crime scene took responsibility for offering a sacrifice and atoning for the bloodshed.

"Then they shall answer and say, 'Our hands have not shed

this blood, nor have our eyes seen it. Provide atonement, O LORD, for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, and do not lay innocent blood to the charge of Your people Israel.' And atonement shall be provided on their behalf for the blood. So you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you when you do what is right in the sight of the LORD." God was etching into the minds of His people that sin was serious and a price had to be paid when even an un-owned sin was committed.

Verse 10, "When you go out to war against your enemies, and the LORD your God delivers them into your hand, and you take them captive, and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and desire her and would take her for your wife..."

What happens when you find a beautiful POW, and want her to be your wife?

"Then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails. She shall put off the clothes of her captivity, remain in your house, and mourn her father and her mother a full month..." She had to make a complete break with her past. She needed to be willing to start a new life.

The potential husband lived with the woman for 30 days without sexual contact. This made sure the attraction was more than lust, but a real desire for marriage.

"After that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife." After precautions... *then* you could exchange a V-O-W with a P-O-W.

But what if the situation sours later, verse 14, “And it shall be, if you have no delight in her, then you shall set her free, but you certainly shall not sell her for money; you shall not treat her brutally, because you have humbled her.” After uprooting the woman from *her home* - then bailing on her being in *your home*...

The least you can do for her is set her free and treat her with respect.

Verse 15, “If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved...” This obviously has all the makings of a miserable home. This is another reason why polygamy was never a good idea. God tolerated it, but He never approved it.

“And they have borne him children, both the loved and the unloved, and if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved, then it shall be, on the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, that he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, the true firstborn.” The rights of the firstborn were a big deal in ancient Israel, and they needed to be respected.

“But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.” The firstborn always received a double portion of his father’s inheritance. If there were 3 sons, the inheritance was carved into 4 pieces. One piece was given to the 2 younger sons. Two portions were given to the older.

Now when my kids were younger we made them obey. Kathy was bigger than them. If she wanted them to be still

she could always sit on them. But there came a point when our kids got bigger and stronger than their mom. By then though, she had trained them to show respect. She can now control them with a word.

But what happens when that normal development fails to occur... And all you have is a rebellious teenager, or twenty-something running roughshod over his parents – abusing his parents? I know situations where this is a real problem.

Well, in ancient Israel there was a solution. It appears in verses 18-21...

I'm just going to read these verses, and I want every teenager in the room to listen, and quake in your boots... This is called *fear therapy*... It's good for you...

"If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. And they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.' "Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear." The older child who is incorrigible – who's callous and unresponsive to discipline – and becomes a drain on society - is to be judged by the elders and stoned to death... *And we lack the courage to administer a good spanking...*

Hey, there were no juvenile detention centers in ancient Israel.

The rabbis say throughout their history this law was never put into practice. Apparently, the mere threat was enough to produce the desired results.

Understand, I don't advocate us reverting back to this Old Covenant law. Today, God's power – not the threat of punishment – transforms people.

The Old Covenant provided an external standard, but it had no power to change the heart. Thus, habits were set in childhood and rarely changed.

Yet under the New Covenant, through the work of Jesus, God takes out the heart of stone, and replaces it with a soft heart. Today, there's hope for an incorrigible kid. Jesus has the power to crack... even the toughest nut.

Verses 22-23 explain one of the reasons the Jews had such a hard time accepting Jesus as God's Son and their Messiah. "If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God."

Since Jesus hung on a cross the Jews wondered, how could He be the Son of God – when He's cursed by God? In Galatians 3:13, rabbi Paul give us an answer, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.")." The curse that Jesus bore was not His own. It was our curse. He was cursed, so we could be blessed.