

LESSON SIXTEEN 20:1-20; 21:10-14; 23:9-14

g. RULES FOR CONDUCTING THE HOLY WAR

(20:1-20; 21:10-14; 23:9-14)

(1) ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE PRIEST (20:1-4)

When thou goest forth to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, *and* a people more than thou, thou shalt not be afraid of them; for Jehovah thy God is with thee, who brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. 2 And it shall be, when ye draw nigh unto battle, that the priests shall approach and speak unto the people, 3 and shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, ye draw nigh this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your heart faint; fear not, nor tremble, neither be ye affrighted at them; 4 for Jehovah your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 20:1-4

330. It is one thing to say "be not afraid," it is another matter to fulfill this attitude. What element makes it possible?
331. What was the particular job for the priest of these verses?
332. This was truly a "holy war." What so characterized it?
333. There must be a lesson in this for other nations. What is it?

AMPLIFIED TRANSLATION 20:1-4

When you go forth to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army greater than your own, do not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, is with you.

2 And when you come near to the battle, the priest shall approach and speak to the men,

3 And shall say to them, Hear, O Israel, you draw near this day to battle against your enemies; let not your [minds and] hearts faint; fear not, and do not tremble, or be terrified (and in dread) because of them.

4 For the Lord your God is He Who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you. [I Sam. 17:45.]

COMMENT 20:1-4

"The instructions of this chapter are peculiar to Deuteronomy. As the people of God, Israel was not a warlike nation; they were rather to abstain from warfare, and as a general rule to cultivate the arts of

peace. But they had before them the prospect of a serious and protracted conflict before they could occupy the land which God assigned to them; and they might in future years have to go to war to maintain their independence and repel aggression. In view of this, instructions are here given regarding military services" (Pulpit).

THOU SHALT NOT BE AFRAID (v. 1)—See 3:22, 7:17-24, etc. See also our remarks under 1:30.

THE PRIEST (v. 2)—The Hebrew word *Kohen* is consistently so translated, and normally refers to that body of Levites that ministered to the Lord (18:1, notes). If that is so *here*, the priest designated to accompany Israel to war would call on Jehovah for help, and also act as exhorter and inspiration to the soldiers—a "chaplain." This was the *Lord's* war, fought by his people and against his enemies! * See Num. 31:6, I Sam. 4:3 & 4, Num. 10:8, 9, II Chron. 13:10-12.

It was also the custom for a sacrifice to be offered (I Sam. 13) as a further appeal for God's blessing in battle. And sometimes Jehovah was consulted by the high priest before war, Judges 20:27, 28. It should be seen from all this that Israel's war—especially those having to do with conquering their promised land—were "Holy Wars." Because of this, God's chosen ministers were closely involved in its progress and success.

(2) EXEMPTIONS FROM MILITARY SERVICE (20:5-9)

5 And the officers shall speak unto the people, saying, What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it? let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man dedicate it. 6 And what man is there that hath planted a vineyard, and hath not used the fruit thereof? let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man use the fruit thereof. 7 And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her. 8 And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and faint-hearted? let him go and return to his house, lest his brethren's heart melt as his heart. 9 And it shall be, when the officers have made an end of

*We see no need to give "priest" an abnormal meaning here. Gesenius remarks that "there is a very old opinion of Hebrew writers, that *Kohen* also signifies *prince*." But the places in scripture where that definition might apply are, at best, *few*, and even those few are questioned. His function here was basically a religious one." . . . the field preacher, not the high priest" (Lange).

speaking unto the people, that they shall appoint captains of hosts at the head of the people.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 20:5-9

334. The possibilities for deferment from military services were indeed varied. List them.
335. Wouldn't everyone claim exemption? Obviously man would not claim exemption. Why?
336. Cowardize was a recognized fault. We are in the greatest of all armies and engaged in a desperate conflict. Apply.

AMPLIFIED TRANSLATION 20:5-9

5 And 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 return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it.

6 And what man has planted a vineyard and has not used the fruit of it? Let him also return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man use the fruit of it.

7 And what man has betrothed a wife, and has not taken her? Let him return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man take her.

8 And the officers shall speak further to the people, and say, What man is fearful and fainthearted? Let him return to his house, lest [because of him] his bretheren's [mind and] heart faint as does his own.

9 And when the officers finish speaking to the people, they shall appoint commanders at the head of the people.

COMMENT 20:5-9

A house built but not dedicated; a vineyard planted but not harvested; a man betrothed but not married; a man faint-hearted but on the front lines of battle (i.e., a *coward*)—all these are allowed to return home until or unless their circumstances changed and they were thus qualified to wage war. In the case of the first three, if they died in battle it would be left to others to consummate what they had begun.

NEW HOUSE . . . NOT DEDICATED (v. 5)—“Probably formal possession was taken of the house by some solemn ceremony, followed by a festive entertainment” (Pulpit).

THAT HATH BETROTHED A WIFE (v. 7)—The Hebrew word *aras* signifies “to espouse a woman; properly, to make a spouse (Gesenius),

"become *engaged to (a girl), betroth (a wife)*" (Baumgartner). Cf. 28:30. Whether the wedding *ceremony* was over or not, he had not yet begun to make a home with his fiancée. Compare 24:5. In the economy of Israel, one betrothed was considered legally bound. See note, 22:23-27.

FEARFUL AND FAINT-HEARTED (v. 8)—"Is there anyone afraid and disheartened" (The Torah); "afraid and weak-hearted" (Berkely). And note the reason for sending him home—LEST HIS BRETHREN'S HEART MELT AS HIS HEART (v. 8)—His influence might spread like leaven, disheartening and discouraging the entire army (especially if there were several of them around!) Cf. 1:28.

It is not too hard to see that the same principle applies to those of us joined together in the warfare for Christ! Speak, act, and think discouragingly and, because we are *all* creatures of *influence*, others are caused to have feeble knees and weak hands. That is why Jesus taught "If ANY man would come after me [if any man would join his hosts and do battle against 'the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places'], let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24).

(3) TREATMENT OF CITIES IN FAR-OFF NATIONS (20:10-15)

10 When thou drawest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. 11 And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that are found therein shall become tributary unto thee, and shall serve thee. 12 And if it will make not peace with thee, then thou shalt besiege it: 13 and then Jehovah thy God delivereth it into thy hand, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword: 14 but the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take for a prey unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which Jehovah thy God hath given thee. 15 Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities which are very far off from thee, which are not of the cities of these nations.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 20:10-15

337. For what particular cities were there instructions given? Why the difference in treatment of enemies?
338. Does this scripture sanction slavery?
339. Read Numbers 15:15, 16 for further information concerning this section.

AMPLIFIED TRANSLATION 20:10-15

10 When you draw near to a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace to it.

11 And if that city makes an answer of peace to you and opens to you, then all the people found in it shall be tributary to you and they shall serve you.

12 But if it refuses to make peace with you and fights against you, then you shall besiege it;

13 And when the Lord your God has given it into your hands, you shall smite every male there with the edge of the sword.

14 But the women, the little ones, the beasts, and all that is in the city, all the spoil in it, you shall take for yourselves, and you shall use the spoil of your enemies which the Lord your God has given you.

15 So shall you treat all the cities which are very far off from you, that do not belong to the cities of these nations.

COMMENT 20:10-15

PROCLAIM PEACE UNTO IT (v. 10)—They were to attempt peace negotiations on the terms specified.

SHALL BECOME TRIBUTARY (v. 11)—The Hebrew word *mas* Baumgartner defines as "forced labourers . . . forced services, task word," and here specifically, "be forced to taskwork." Thus the added phrase "and shall serve thee."

THOU SHALT SMITE EVERY MALE (v. 13)—The rest of the people could be spared, and taken captive. Those children or women who settled in Israel, however, when then subject to Israel's law (Num. 15:15, 16).

The law towards those people living in the area of Israel's promised land, however, was far different. See below.

(4) TREATMENT OF CANAANITE CITIES (20:16-18)

16 But of the cities of these peoples, that Jehovah thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth; 17 but thou shalt utterly destroy them: the Hittite, and the Amorite, the Canaanite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite; as Jehovah thy God hath commanded thee; 18 that they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so would ye sin against Jehovah your God.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 20:16-18

340. Isn't there some admission of weakness in the need to utterly destroy these nations so "that they teach you not to do after all their abominations" . . . ?
341. Why not teach the other nations rather than learning from their teaching?

AMPLIFIED TRANSLATION 20:16-18

16 But of the cities of these people, which the Lord your God gives you for inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes.

17 But you shall utterly exterminate them, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the Lord your God has commanded you;

18 So they may not teach you all the abominable practices they have carried on for their gods, and so cause you to sin against the Lord your God.

COMMENT 20:16-18

With these cities there was to be no arbitration, no peace conferences, no long negotiations for "peaceful coexistence." They were to be totally and finally destroyed. And God well knew what would happen if they were *not* (v. 18). See also 7:1-5 and notes.

(5) RESPECT FOR NATURAL RESOURCES (20:19, 20)

19 When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by wielding an axe against them; for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down; for is the tree of the field man, that it should be besieged of thee? 20 Only the trees of which thou knowest that they are not trees for food, thou shalt destroy and cut them down; and thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee, until it fall.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 20:19, 20

342. Why would trees be destroyed? Why not destroy them?
343. What two-fold use was made of trees?

AMPLIFIED TRANSLATION 20:19, 20

19 When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by using an ax on them, for you can eat their fruit; you must not cut them down, for is the tree of the field a man, that it should be besieged by you?

20 Only the trees which you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, that you may build siegeworks against the city that makes war with you, until it falls.

COMMENT 20:19, 20

As we can now see, all is *not* fair in love and war! This law, strange as it may appear, was probably designed for Israel's own good. In the process of waging a long war (v. 19), when everything living in the path of combat would normally be destroyed, the *fruit* trees were to be spared.

FOR IS THE TREE OF THE FIELD MAN . . . ? (v. 19)—the Canaanites were being destroyed, not only to make way for Israel, but because of their *wickedness* as a nation Gen. 15:16, Lev. 18:24, 25. But the fruit-trees were to be spared. ". . . it was a merciful provision to spare all fruit-bearing trees, because they yielded the fruit which supported man's life; and it was sound policy also, for even the conquerors must perish if the means of life were cut off.

It is diabolic cruelty to add to the *miseries* of war the horrors of *famine*; and this is done where the trees of the field are cut down, the dykes broken to drown the land, the villages burnt, and the crops wilfully spoiled. *O execrable war!* Subversive of all the charities of life!" (Clarke).

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER TWENTY

Directions concerning campaigns, 1. The priest shall encourage the people with the assurance that God will accompany and fight for them, 2-4. The officers shall dismiss from the army all who had just built a new house, but had not dedicated it, 5. All who had planted a vineyard, but had not eaten of its fruits, 6. All who had betrothed a wife, but had not brought her home, 7. And all who were timid and faint-hearted, 8. The commanders to be chosen after the timid, &c., had retired, 9. No city to be attacked till they had proclaimed conditions of peace to it, provided it be a city beyond the bounds of the seven Canaanitish

nations; if it submitted, it was to become tributary; if not, it was to be besieged, sacked, and all the males put to the sword; the women, children, and cattle to be taken as booty, 10-15. No such offers to be made to the cities of the Canaanites; of them nothing shall be preserved, and the reason, 16-18. In besieging a city no trees to be cut down but those who do not bear fruit, 19, 20.

[See 21:1-9 discussed in lesson fifteen (II, B, 3, f.)]

(6) MARRYING WOMEN CAPTIVES (21:10-14)

10 When thou goest forth to battle against thine enemies, and Jehovah thy God delivereth them into thy hands, and thou carriest them away captive, 11 and seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and thou hast a desire unto her, and wouldest take her to thee to wife; 12 then thou shalt bring her home to thy house; and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails; 13 and she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and shall remain in thy house, and bewail her father and her mother a full month: and after that thou shalt go in unto her, and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife. 14 And it shall be, if thou have no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go whither she will; but thou shalt not sell her at all for money, thou shalt not deal with her as a slave, because thou hast humbled her.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 21:10-14

344. How sad to be defeated when God planned victory. The lack of conquest was not because God had not already assured triumph. Why then was Israel not victorious?
345. Why would a pagan woman from a distance city be any more qualified for a wife than one from Canaan?
346. Why the shaving of the hair, paring nails, putting off raiment of captivity?
347. Show the protection and honor accorded these women. Why so?
348. Careful provision was made for the proper attitude in marriage. Discuss this as of today.

AMPLIFIED TRANSLATION 21:10-14

10 When you go forth to battle against your enemies, and the Lord your God has given them into your hands, and you carry them away captive,

11 And you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and desire her, that you may have her as your wife,

12 Then you shall bring her home to your house; and she shall shave her head and pare her nails [in purification from heathenism],

13 And put off her prisoner's garb and shall remain in your house, and bewail her father and mother a full month. After that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife.

14 And if you have no delight in her, then you shall let her go absolutely free; you shall not sell her at all for money, you shall not deal with her as a slave or a servant, because you have humbled her.

COMMENT 21:10-14

As in the case of the coming appointment of kings (17:14-17), this law is made as a *provision*, because of the *foreknowledge* of God. It is made in condescension to (not endorsement of) the weakness of men—and, incidentally, for the protection and honor of women.

This passage does not concern Canaanite cities, where "thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth (20:16), but distant cities where the males were either killed or taken as slaves, and the women and little ones taken as prey (20:10-15). No alliances or marriages were to be made with Canaanite women.

A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN (v. 11)—The word "beautiful" is a translation of two Hebrew words *yephabh*, beautiful, bright, fair, and *toar*, dilineation, form, body. Thus, literally, "beautiful of form." It is used of Rachel in Gen. 29:17, where Clarke says of the word, "beautiful in her *shape, person, mien, and gait.*" In this trait, as well as being "well favored" (*yephabh mareh*) she stood in contrast to Leah.

We would, of course, seriously question a man's wisdom who would choose his life's partner on such a superficial basis, with little or no chance to consider whether she was beautiful in *character*. We would wonder whether this "love at first sight" was not ninety per cent infatuation! We are tempted to warn him (as Solomon warned the young man of the seductress), "Lust not after her beauty in thy heart; Neither let her take thee with her eyelids" (Prov. 6:25). We would appeal to him on the basis of the overwhelming marital difficulties of taking a non-Israelite to wife—one who probably knew little or nothing of serving Jehovah God. "Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain; But a woman that feareth Jehovah, she shall be praised" (Prov. 31:30).

But regardless of all this, God provides what shall be done when such a one *is* taken. The question here is not what he *should* have done, but *what he should now do*.

SHE SHALL SHAVE HER HEAD, AND PARE HER NAILS (v. 12)—Both of these ceremonies, as well as the putting off of the garments worn when she was taken captive (v. 13), were signs of purification, separating her from her former heathenism, and preparing her for becoming a part of the people of God. Compare the law of the leper, Lev. 14:8, and the cleansing of the Levites, Num. 8:6, 7. Shaving the head was also a sign of *mourning*, Job 1:20, etc.

PUT THE RAIMENT OF HER CAPTIVITY FROM OFF HER (v. 13)—“the putting off her gorgeous dress in which ladies, on the eve of being captured arrayed themselves to be the more attractive to their captors.” (J.F.B.) She then dons the garments of mourning and bewails her father and mother (who were now to her the same as dead) for thirty days. This period would also give her a chance to “pull herself together,” adjust to her new condition, and otherwise prepare herself for her new life-role.

More and more now, her husband is to see her as she really is.

It is well to observe the protection afforded womanhood here. By general consent in ancient times, the women were considered part of the “spoils of war,” and even in modern times this has often been true. Any one acquainted with the fearful license practiced among many nations towards female captives taken in war, can surely appreciate the humanizing influence these verses were intended to exert. A woman captive was not to be a plaything of passion or lust, but was to be dealt with honorably and with dignity. The requirements of this passage stand in sharp contrast to the conduct common among soldiers who have devastated a foreign power, and whose women are at their mercy.

IF THOU HAVE NO DELIGHT IN HER (v. 14)—This is after the marriage (v. 13). In the Hebrew home, the husband was unconditionally and unreservedly the head of his wife and family in all domestic relations. Nowhere is this headship more obvious than in his right to divorce. He might, under certain circumstances, divorce his wife—but it was much more difficult for her to reverse the procedure. And in view of her position here as “captive,” she would have even less ability to claim her “rights” in marriage. See Num. 5:12-31, Duet. 22:13-21, and particularly in connection with this passage, 24:1-4.

If he *was* displeased with her, however, he could not retain her in some subordinate or inferior capacity.

THOU SHALT NOT DEAL WITH HER AS A SLAVE (v. 14)—The Hebrew word *amar*, rendered here by five English words, signifies "To show self a tyrant (Young), "deal violently, tyrannically with (Baumgartner). It occurs again in 24:7, where it is again rendered "as a slave." She had, in fact, become his *wife*, and she was not now to be dealt with as if she had *only* been a captive servant (20:14). She was to be free to go where her inclinations led.

(7) UNCLEANNESS (23:9-14)

9 When thou goest forth in camp against thine enemies, then thou shalt keep thee from every evil thing. 10 If there be among you any man, that is not clean by reason of that which chanceth him by night, then shall he go abroad out of the camp, he shall not come within the camp: 11 but it shall be, when evening cometh on, he shall bathe himself in water; and when the sun is down, he shall come within the camp. 12 Thou shalt have a place also without the camp whither thou shalt go forth abroad: 13 and thou shalt have a paddle among thy weapons; and it shall be, when thou sittest down abroad, thou shalt dig therewith, and shalt turn back and cover that which cometh from thee; 14 for Jehovah thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy, that he may not see an unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 23:9-14

349. There are some very delicate subjects here discussed in a most candid and yet modest manner. This should offer some example for our approach and discussion of such subjects.
350. It will be of interest to note in this passage what God classifies as "unclean"; why so? Unclean in what sense? Cf. Numbers 5:1-4.

AMPLIFIED TRANSLATION 23:9-14

9 When you go forth against your enemies and are in camp, you shall keep yourself from every evil thing.

10 If there is among you any man who is not clean by reason of what happens to him at night, then he shall go outside the camp, he shall not come with the camp;

11 But when evening comes he shall bathe himself in water, and when the sun is down, he may return to the camp.

12 You shall have a place also outside the camp to which you shall go [as a comfort station];

13 And you shall have a paddle or shovel among your weapons, and when you sit down outside [to relieve yourself], you shall dig a hole with it, and turn back and cover up what has come from you.

14 or the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp to deliver you and to give up your enemies before you; therefore shall your camp be holy, that He may see nothing indecent among you, and turn away from you.

COMMENT 23:9-14

We have placed this section here because it obviously concerns warfare (v. 9).

FROM EVERY EVIL THING (v. 9)—Heb. *ra-a*, here, evil in the sense of blemish, uncleanness. Gesenius mentions that the word may imply “to be noxious, hurtful”—and there seems to be such overtones in this passage. The fact that they were *in camp* and in the midst of a *war*, did not relieve them of certain responsibilities. Discipline and safety are the rule in any army camp, and it is not difficult to see the wisdom of these words. All impurity and uncleanness was to be kept out. This *basic* rule of course, also applies to the camp as a whole, Num. 5:1-4.

QUESTIONS, LESSON SIXTEEN

(20:1-20, 21:10-14, 23:9-14)

1. What function did the priest have who accompanied the army to the battlefield.
2. Was there a clear line of demarcation between civil and religious laws under the Old Covenant?
3. Can you recall the four classes of soldiers who could return home from the battlefield? (Finish before proceeding.)
4. What *reason* is given for allowing the “fearful and faint hearted” to return home?
5. Can you name two differences (related) between the way Israel’s army should treat *distant*, as contrasted with *Canaanite*, cities.
6. What kind of trees were not to be destroyed in battle?
7. In this lesson, what was the soldier’s reason for taking a foreign wife?
8. What was required of her before the marriage was official?
9. Discuss how 21:10-14 uphold such a woman’s dignity and honor.
10. Upon what basis could her husband let her go?
11. Why couldn’t he sell her as a slave?
12. What would *Jesus* have taught about such a marriage?