

THE CAPTIVE BRIDE AS A PICTURE OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH IN
DEUTERONOMY 21:10-14

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Introduction

A popular reality television show known as *Married at First Sight* matches couples for marriage and gives them two months after the wedding to decide if they would like to stay married or divorce. Deuteronomy 21:10-14 reads like ancient inspiration for such a show. This law provides provisions for how soldiers should interact with foreign women captured in battle, particularly women they desire to marry. It outlines a process for marriage, including a waiting period where the soldier can decide whether he wants to continue with his plan to marry the captive. Like the modern television show, a careful reader holds her breath and hopes the soldier is a real prince and not a disappointing frog. Unlike the television show, God has written this law to prepare the Israelite man to be successful. The guidelines outlined in Deuteronomy 21:10-14 protect the rights and dignity of foreign women, control the lusts of soldiers attracted to beautiful captives, provide a way for foreign wives to enter the covenant community, and point to the ultimate design of marriage as a picture of Christ's covenant with the church.

Summary of Deuteronomy 21:10-14

Deuteronomy 21:10-14 is part of a group of laws regarding how the Israelites should conduct themselves in battle once they have established themselves as a nation in the land of Canaan. Some laws pertain to fully conquering the promised land, and some laws, like Deut 21:10-14, pertain to military actions against foreign nations. This particular law gives the Israelite soldier guidelines for taking a foreign captive as his wife. He should first bring her into his home and have her cut her nails and shave her head. She should also remove the garments she was wearing when captured. She is allowed a month to mourn for her parents, and when that time is complete, the soldier may officially marry her and consummate the

relationship. If, after that point, he no longer finds favor in her, he may divorce her and allow her to go anywhere she desires. He may not keep her as a slave after he has chosen to marry her.

Critical Concerns

Deuteronomy 21:10-14 and other similar passages are often the focus of criticism for critical and feminist scholars. In her article about Deut 21:10-14, Caryn Reeder connects Deut 21:10-14 with Judg 5:30 and other similar passages describing rape.¹ Reeder draws the conclusion that, because battlefield rape is included in descriptions of other ancient Near Eastern armies when they come against Israel, Israel must have also practiced wartime rape. She goes as far as to write that the Bible, in fact, condones the practice of wartime rape, noting, “Significantly, the biblical texts do not recognize rape as a war crime, as modern international law and war conventions do.”² Behind Reeder’s claim is an assumption that rape has certainly taken place on the battlefield before the soldier decides to bring the woman into his home as a wife.

Due to the unfortunate, common existence of wartime rape both in biblical times and today, Reeder’s assumptions are understandable; however, secular author, Michael Waltzer notes in his book, *Just and Unjust Wars*, that the passage in Deut 21:10-14 is the “first attempt I have found to regulate the wartime treatment of women.”³ Waltzer does not assume the woman was raped on the battlefield before being brought into the soldier’s home. Instead, he views this Old Testament law as an attempt to regulate common wartime behavior writing, “Whatever theological or sociological account of the rule is appropriate, it is clear

¹ Caryn A. Reeder, “Deuteronomy 21.10-14 and/as Wartime Rape,” *J. Study Old Testam.* 41.3 (2017): 314–36. Reeder also lists Isa 13:16, Lam 5:11, Zech 14:2, and Num 31:9-10 in addition to Judg 5:28-30.

² Reeder, “Deuteronomy 21.10-14 and/as Wartime Rape.” 334.

³ Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1977).

that what is at work here is a conception of the captive woman as a person who must be respected, despite her capture, hence the month of morning before she is sexually used, the requirement of marriage, the ban on slavery.”⁴ Waltzer articulates the heart of the message when he observes the Deuteronomic law as an attempt to curb the common treatment of women during war.

Historical Context

Daniel Block is not unaware of the concerns expressed by feminist scholars concerning the book of Deuteronomy and the laws outlined in it, writing, “In recent years, feminist interpreters have helpfully pointed out the dark side of patriarchy reflected in many biblical narratives. However, such approaches tend to interpret abusive male behavior as natural expressions of patriarchy, despite the fact that authors often deliberately cite such conduct to demonstrate the degeneracy of the times and the persons involved.”⁵ Given the prevalence of not only wartime rape but also the general abuse of power in all societies, including the nations that existed in the ancient Near East, it can be difficult to discern God’s standard from common practice. The Israelites were called to be different from the nations around them, so it is helpful to look first at the practices common in the surrounding nations concerning war and slavery. After examining common practices, it is then beneficial to consider how the Israelites ought to be different.

Ilona Rashkow understands the law of the captive wife as a contrast to common practices in the ancient Near East. She asserts that the law in Deut 21 is forbidding what would otherwise be a common practice because in “the ancient Mediterranean world, captive women of vanquished peoples were assumed to be the due sexual prerogative of the

⁴ Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*. 135.

⁵ Daniel I. Block, *The Triumph of Grace: Literary and Theological Studies in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic Themes* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017). 229.

victors.”⁶ Some ancient Near Eastern laws protected a woman’s rights as wife, but in the case of a captive wife, the rules of property law could potentially supersede the family law. According to Rashkow, concerning a female slave, “The special features of her gender were property interests of her owner, to be exploited or disposed of as the owner saw fit.”⁷ Rashkow sees clearly, also, that the “biblical law appears to have afforded a greater measure of compassion to female slaves than other ancient Near Eastern cultures.”⁸ Given the overall tone of the law, the passage may also be viewed as a way to regulate the Israelite soldier and to insist that he show integrity in his actions both on the battlefield and at home.⁹

Daniel Block draws on the integrity that should be evident in the Israelite soldier to demonstrate the overarching theme of Deuteronomy. Israel is called to be different from the surrounding nations, particularly in how the men of Israel interact with the women under their protection. Block insists on the term “patricentric” for the culture God intended for ancient Israel. In this model, the father’s house should be the nucleus of the family and the source of ultimate protection.¹⁰ The protection provided by the fathers in society should stem from their integrity as followers of YHWH. Block writes, “In keeping with a fundamental tenet of biblical leadership, the primary function of leaders is not defined in terms of the tasks they are expected to perform but in terms of the kind of persons they are to be.”¹¹ While feminist critics decry the oppression of women highlighted in the Bible and lament the lack of voice given to the female captive in Deut 21:10-14, Daniel Block establishes

⁶ I. Rashkow, “‘Chattle or...?’ Laws Relating to Female Slaves in Ancient Israel.,” *Jew. Bible Q.* 51.1 (2023): 33–45. 39.

⁷ Rashkow, “‘Chattle or...?’ Laws Relating to Female Slaves in Ancient Israel.” 41.

⁸ Rashkow, “‘Chattle or...?’ Laws Relating to Female Slaves in Ancient Israel.” 42.

⁹ David Resnick, “The Captive Woman at the Intersection of War and Family Laws,” *TheTorah.Com*, 2021, <https://www.thetorah.com/article/the-captive-woman-at-the-intersection-of-war-and-family-laws>.

¹⁰ Block, *The Triumph of Grace: Literary and Theological Studies in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic Themes*. 231-232feminist.

¹¹ Block, *The Triumph of Grace: Literary and Theological Studies in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic Themes*. 232.

Deuteronomy as a book primarily directed to the male leaders in Israel teaching them how to live in holiness and establishing boundaries around their power so that the women in their care were protected rather than exploited. Block acknowledges the lack of female voice in Deuteronomy but also writes, “When women’s well-being and women’s conduct are at issue, the style adopted is telling. These regulations are concerned primarily with men’s treatment of women, rather than the conduct of the women themselves.”¹² Citing Deut 26:19, Block sees Deuteronomy as primarily a book directed to the male leaders of Israel to live in such a way that they demonstrate to the surrounding nations “the transformative effects of divine grace in shaping the culture.”¹³

Exegesis of Deut 21:10-14

In the words of Christopher Wright, “Deuteronomy is a book on the boundary.”¹⁴ Deuteronomy marks Moses’ last address to the nation of Israel. The people are poised to enter the promised land for a second time, their fathers having failed to enter the land forty years prior. In this final address, Moses gives the new generation standards for living upon entering the land. Deuteronomy 21:10-14 is a law concerning warfare that may be conducted under the leadership of a king, as the qualifications for a king are outlined in Deut 17. Therefore, it is possible that this law would not apply to the Israelites for several years to come, as they would need to engage in war against the people in the land (whom they were not allowed to marry) before engaging in war against the people outside the land (whom they were allowed to marry).

¹² Block, *The Triumph of Grace: Literary and Theological Studies in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic Themes*. 227.

¹³ Block, *The Triumph of Grace: Literary and Theological Studies in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic Themes*. 225.

¹⁴ Christopher Wright, *Deuteronomy*, New International Biblical Commentary (Hendrickson Publishers, 1996). 9.

“When you go out to war” specifies that this law applies to people groups outside the land of Canaan (Deut 21:10, ESV). Going “out” implies the war is not against people residing inside the boundaries of the promised land. Additionally, were the war against the nations inside the land, the law of herem would apply. Not only were Israelite men prohibited from marrying Canaanite women, they were not even to let the women live.¹⁵ In a war conducted against nations outside the land of Israel, slightly different guidelines exist.

The guidelines for war against outside nations are given in Deut 20:10-15. The nation is first given the opportunity to surrender. Wright notes, “The element of restraint is again present, though modern ears may easily miss it. First, there was a preference for peace through negotiation if possible, thus avoiding war and slaughter. An offer of peace probably implies a vassal treaty in which the city would become subject to Israel.”¹⁶ If the nation denies the offer of peace, war may proceed. In the war, men are to be killed, but women and children may live (Deut 20:13-14). Merrill believes that the sparing of women and children shows hope for the nation despite their refusal to make peace writing, “A distant city under such circumstances could not go altogether unpunished for its refusal to capitulate, but in as much as there was hope for repentance by the comparatively innocent women and children, they could be spared.”¹⁷

Some commentators see Deut 21:10-14 as an allowance for a marriage that is not ideal. John Calvin saw this law as a way of bridling men’s lust on the battlefield as the

¹⁵ Jack Lundbom, *Deuteronomy; A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.). 596; Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4 of *The New American Commentary* (B&H Publishing Group, 1994). 291; A.D.H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979). 303; Adolph L. Harstad, *Deuteronomy*, Concordia Commentary (Concordia Publishing House, 2022) 556.

¹⁶ Wright, *Deuteronomy*. 230.

¹⁷ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4. 286.

preference would have been for the men to marry at home within their own tribes.¹⁸

Additionally, Christensen writes, “In ancient Jewish practice, a formal procedure was introduced in which the woman in such circumstances agreed to convert to Judaism. Even so, the rabbis discouraged such marriages...as motivated by lust.”¹⁹ Certainly, Calvin and the ancient rabbis are correct to be cautious, but the fact that the captives were allowed to live seems to provide hope that these women could be brought not only into marriage with an Israelite man but also into a relationship with YHWH.

True to Block’s assertion that Deuteronomy is primarily addressed to the men in society, the success of this marriage seems to rely solely on the Israelite soldier and his choice of action.²⁰ The Hebrew phrase used for “attractive” is **תָּאָרֶיךְ יָפָה**. This phrase can translate “beautiful in form,” and is also used of Joseph in Gen 39:6 when he was a slave in Potiphar’s home. Joseph’s attractiveness is a plausible reason that Potiphar’s wife pursued him. The similar phrasing causes the reader to speculate whether an Israelite man will behave better toward an attractive female prisoner of war than a pagan woman behaved toward a handsome slave in her home.²¹ The law certainly prepares the soldier to exhibit more integrity as most commentators agree that, unlike the intentions of Potiphar’s wife toward Joseph, an intimate relationship can not take place until a series of stipulations including marriage have been met and a thirty day period has passed.²²

¹⁸ John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy 1583* (Great Britain: The Banner of Truth Facsimile Reprint, 1987). 742.

¹⁹ Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger et al., vol. 6B of *World Biblical Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002). 475.

²⁰ Block also supports his claims that Deuteronomy primarily addresses men because the 2mp “you” is used consistently in the address. He acknowledges that this form of “you” would also be used to address a mixed gender group, and he believes that the laws do apply to the entire congregation, but he supports his claims by noting that when a single Israelite is addressed in the book, the person to whom the law is directed is always male.

²¹ Harstad, *Deuteronomy*. 556.

²² Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*, vol. 6B; Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy 1583*; Mayes, *Deuteronomy*; Harstad, *Deuteronomy*; Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*; *A Commentary*; Wright, *Deuteronomy*; Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4.

The thirty day waiting period includes a time of mourning and purification for the captive woman. Certainly, she has been through a traumatic event as she has lost loved ones in battle and been taken from her home. This law works to protect the interests of the female captive and restricts the power of the conquering soldier.²³ During the time of waiting, the soldier is restricted from an intimate relationship with her, even though she is living in his home. She is to cut her nails (though some scholars read this verse as allowing her nails to grow long), shave her head, and remove the clothes she was wearing when taken captive. Merrill assumes this soldier is unmarried because “nothing was said about the propriety or impropriety of a married man taking a captive girl as his wife. One should assume that this was not sanctioned by the Lord and the community.”²⁴ The laws following this passage regulate polygamy, so some scholars read this passage as creating a difficult polygamous relationship, but there is nothing in the passage being examined to assume the man is married.²⁵

There is general agreement among scholars that the process of shaving her head, cutting her nails, and removing her clothing is an effort toward purification and incorporation into Israelite society.²⁶ These cleansing practices are common in other ancient Near Eastern cultures. The Mari texts describe female captives shaving their heads and removing their clothing to signify purification, a practice that is also associated with purification elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Lev 14:8, Num 8:7).²⁷ The clothing the woman is wearing is somewhat in question. It was not uncommon for resident women in a nation at war to dress in their

²³ Wright, *Deuteronomy*. 234.

²⁴ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4. 291.

²⁵ Lundbom, *Deuteronomy; A Commentary*. 597.

²⁶ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4; John D. Currid, *Deuteronomy* (Webster, New York: Evangelical Press, 2006); Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976); Mayes, *Deuteronomy*; Harstad, *Deuteronomy*; Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*, vol. 1 (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853).

²⁷ Harstad, *Deuteronomy*. 555.; Lundbom, *Deuteronomy; A Commentary*. 598.

nicest clothing to make themselves more attractive to enemy soldiers. It is unclear whether that practice was meant to distract soldiers or to save their own lives.²⁸ Regardless of whether the clothing is the nicest the woman owns or simply what she was wearing when captured, removing it certainly represents “her transference from a foreign community into the family of Israel.”²⁹

After removing her clothing, cutting her nails, and shaving her head, the woman is given a month to mourn her parents. A husband is not mentioned in the text, so the reader can assume she is unmarried. Thirty days was a normal period of mourning allowed for an Israelite citizen (Deut 34:8, Num 20:29).³⁰ Shaving the head, while signifying purification, can also be a common sign of mourning in antiquity.³¹ This time of waiting, accompanied by the woman’s change in appearance, may cause the man to reconsider his desire for marriage. However, if he wishes to continue with his original intention, he may “go in to her and be her husband” (Deut 21:13, ESV). The Hebrew phrase translated “go in to her” is one of several Hebrew euphemisms for sexual intercourse. Some scholars believe these words are used to reflect the first time a man and woman have sex.³² The view that the first sexual encounter between this couple is described in Deut 20:13 is consistent with the text. The man has allowed the woman a month of mourning, and she has symbolically joined the covenant community with her purification exercises. After their sexual encounter, they are legally husband and wife.

Most scholars believe that Deut 20:14 is a stipulation that would come after the marriage has been consummated, but it could be read as the alternative choice to

²⁸ Lundbom, *Deuteronomy; A Commentary*. 598.

²⁹ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*. 281.

³⁰ Harstad, *Deuteronomy*. 557.

³¹ Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*. 598.; *A Commentary*; Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*. 281.

³² Harstad, *Deuteronomy*. 555, 557.

consummating the marriage. For example, Harstad understands Deut 20:14 as reflecting the man’s feelings after the woman has mourned for a month and before he has “gone in to her.” Harstad argues that the reason the man is displeased with the woman is not clear from the text, but he insists that even the Hebrew term, **עִנָּה**, which is the verbal root of “humiliated her,” does not demand that the man’s displeasure comes following sex.³³ Instead, Harstad relies on the noun **שֶׁבֶת**, which is used in the phrase “where she wants” in Deut 21:14 and speculates that the reason the man is no longer pleased with the woman is because she “has not had a change of heart,” and “she will not integrate into the Israelite life of faith in YHWH” (ESV).³⁴ The Hebrew word **שֶׁבֶת** carries the meaning of life and soul. It may represent one’s core desires, and possibly, the soldier can see that her core desires are contrary to a successful life in Israel. Therefore, instead of consummating the relationship and officially marrying the woman, the man could instead decide to let her go where she desires.

Harstad’s argument is plausible, but other scholars, while agreeing that **עִנָּה** can have a variety of meanings, typically interpret it to mean that the woman has been “humiliated” because she has been used sexually and then rejected. The same word is used in Judg 19:24 to describe Shechem’s treatment of Dinah in one of the more violent uses of **עִנָּה**.³⁵ However, given the restraint the Israelite soldier has shown to this point, it seems difficult to imagine the encounter as analogous to Shechem’s actions against Dinah. Mayes suggests a better translation of this word may be “had your will with her,” and he notes that the same word is used in Deut 22:24, describing the treatment of a woman who is betrothed but engages in a

³³ Harstad, *Deuteronomy*. 558.

³⁴ Harstad, *Deuteronomy*. 558

³⁵ Currid, *Deuteronomy*. 353.

sexual relationship with another man without crying for help.³⁶ In that situation, the Hebrew word is translated “violated,” but the woman is violated simply because the man used her according to his will, not because she was a nonconsenting partner. A final interesting use of the word נָנָּה that could relate well to Deut 21:14 is found in Gen 31:50. Laban uses the term when he asks that Jacob not “oppress” his daughters, implying that the cause of such oppression would be that Jacob would discard them for other wives when he reached the land of Canaan (ESV). Read this way, the decision to let the woman go in Deut 21:14 causes humiliation because the man has broken faith with a woman to whom he was legally and covenantally bound in marriage.

Reading “humiliated her” to mean a break in agreement, therefore, means that this couple has engaged in a sexual relationship as a result of the man’s initial choice to marry her. He became her husband, and she became his wife in every sense of the word. As such, his shift in attitude toward displeasure and the decision to send her away means divorce. Currid and Craigie observe that the Hebrew term in verse 14, חָלֵשׁ, is a term that is often used to describe divorce.³⁷

A similar situation is described in Exod 21:7-11 where a female Israelite is sold by her father into slavery with the understanding that at the appropriate time, she will be wed to the man who buys her or to one of his sons. If, later, he decides he does not wish to marry her according to the agreed terms, he must let her be redeemed by her family or go out free, but he may not sell her to a foreign nation because he has “broken faith” with her (Exod 21:8, ESV). The word used for “broken faith” is not the same word used for “humiliated” in Deut 21:14, but both laws carry a tone of disapproval for the man in power and provisions for the

³⁶ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*. 304.

³⁷ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*. 282.; Currid, *Deuteronomy*. 352.

woman in his care. In Exodus, the Israelite slave is not sexually engaged or officially married, as is the foreign captive in Deuteronomy, so different language may be employed for that reason. Nevertheless, both women are disgraced because the intentions the man had for them when they entered the home have changed, and they are now left in a vulnerable situation.

Unfortunately, unlike the Israelite slave in Exodus who presumably has family to redeem her, the captive woman is alone in a foreign country. Certainly, the Israelite soldier who put her in such a situation is not to be seen in a favorable light; however, this law does permit him to divorce her. There is agreement among scholars that, though permitted, divorce was not the ideal outcome for any marriage.³⁸ Currid specifies, “It is clear from the beginning that God did not want his people to divorce, or have many wives, or to commit adultery (Gen 2:15-25),” but sometimes divorce is allowed to regulate sin.³⁹ In other words, allowing divorce in this situation may prevent further atrocities than have already been committed. In fact, Deut 21:14 also specifies that the man may not treat his wife “as a slave” (ESV). Interestingly, the Hebrew verb used in the phrase “treat her as a slave” is *נָשַׁי*, and it is only used in this exact way one other time in the Old Testament to describe a situation where a man kidnaps a fellow Israelite and then sells him into slavery (Deut 24:7).⁴⁰ Mayes acknowledges this connection but consults Ugaritic texts that appear to define the word as “the action of one who claims unlimited power of disposal over others.”⁴¹ However, the kidnapping situation described in Deut 24 seems to fit the situation described in Deut 21:10-14. The woman has essentially been kidnapped from her home and taken into the

³⁸ Block, *The Triumph of Grace: Literary and Theological Studies in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic Themes*. 237.; Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4. 291.; Currid, *Deuteronomy*. 353.; Harstad, *Deuteronomy*. 557.

³⁹ Currid, *Deuteronomy*. 353.

⁴⁰ Lundbom, *Deuteronomy; A Commentary*; Mayes, *Deuteronomy*. 304.

⁴¹ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*. 304.

house of an Israelite soldier, and instead of treating her like a wife as promised, he has “humiliated” her. Rather than let the situation go from bad to worse, though, he is expressly prohibited from treating her as a slave and selling her like the kidnapper did with his fellow Israelite.⁴² Divorce is not preferable, but God allows it to prevent a greater sin against this vulnerable woman.

Connection to Christ

Deuteronomy 21:10-14 does not end on a hopeful note. What started as a potential “fairy tale romance” has ended in crushing disappointment. If the relationship ends with the choice reflected in Deut 21:14, the Israelite soldier is not the man any reader would have wished him to be, and the woman is alone and vulnerable in a country not her own - no other stipulations exist directing what she should do next. In this passage, it is clear why divorce is not the preferred outcome of the marriage relationship. Jesus specifies that marriage is the combining of two individuals into one flesh, and therefore they should not be separated (Matt 19:5-6). Likely with this law and others in view, Jesus notes that “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because of your hard hearts, but from the beginning it was not this way” (Matt 19:8, NET).

The hardness of heart is the issue in view in Deut 21:14. The soldier being permitted to divorce his wife for the simple reason that he no longer delights in her is an allowance due to the hardness of his heart. Presumably, were his heart not hardened, divorce would not have even been considered. In the beginning, Adam and Eve were made to be united as one flesh. However, due to their sin, their hearts became hardened toward God and one another.

⁴² Presumably, were the man to sell her or use her as a slave, his consequence may have been death, as death was the payment required of the offender in the kidnapping situation described in Deut 24:7. Regardless, it is reasonable to assume that using this woman strictly for sex and then allowing her to return to her captive status would be detestable to the Lord.

God's words in Gen 3:16 make it obvious that that sin will impact the marriage relationship. The NET version translates the verse, "You will want to control your husband, but he will dominate you" (Gen 3:16). This wording foreshadows the caution to the Israelite soldier not to treat his wife "as a slave" were he to lose interest in her, and permits divorce as a better alternative to such behavior (Deut 21:14, ESV). Wright sees the power dynamic at play in this scripture and writes, "The case could be written up as a matter of human rights. Deuteronomy characteristically prefers to express it as a matter of responsibilities. As such, its relevance is clearly applicable beyond the realm of war to all kinds of analogous situations of weakness and power."⁴³ God's people today are no longer engaged in holy war, so the specific situation of being attracted to a foreign woman while at war is unlikely for many believers. When it does occur, it would not be in the context of holy war. However, on the issue of Christian marriage, especially given that Jesus speaks directly to the Mosaic laws regarding divorce, this law is still relevant.

First, it would be helpful to view the soldier and his wife as a model of Christ's pursuit of the church. Similar to the Israelite soldier, Christ pursues his bride, calling her out of a pagan lifestyle to be joined to himself. Like the woman in Deut 21:12-13, the bride is purified, not by rituals that she undertakes, but by the very blood of Christ. Ephesians 5:25-27 describes Christ's purification of the church while also connecting his relationship with the church to the husband/wife relationship: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (ESV).

⁴³ Wright, *Deuteronomy*. 234

Jesus engaged in holy war when he fought sin and death to save his people. When an individual places faith in him, he or she is purified from sin and presented blameless before God. The captive woman in Deut 21:10-14 was destined for death (both physically and spiritually), but potentially rescued from both by the pursuit of a Hebrew man elected to be a blessing to the nations. However, given the provision for divorce in Deut 21:14, it is clear that not all post-battle marriages ended in a foreshadowing of Christ's relationship with the church. In the church age, there is hope that Christian marriage can succeed where Israelite soldiers may have failed. Unlike the Israelites in Deuteronomy, the law is no longer an external document. Christ's sacrifice has forever purified believers so that, with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the law is written on their hearts. Jeremiah anticipated this day when he prophesied, "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer 31:33, ESV). Jesus seems to anticipate this softening of hearts when he tightens the parameters of divorce from "if you no longer delight in her" to only "sexual immorality" (Deut 21:14, Matt 19:9, ESV). With the law written on their hearts, God's people can be expected to honor their wives the way Christ honored the church.⁴⁴ Rather than divorce himself from the Church, Christ remains faithful until his bride's final glorification at his second coming.

As Paul indicates in Eph 5:22-23, such a model of selfless love should be true for Christian marriage. In his address to the church at Ephesus, Paul references Gen 2:24, and commands that husbands should love their wives as their own bodies (Eph 5:28). Christians, like the nation of Israel, have an obligation to be a blessing to the world, and one way that

⁴⁴ Interestingly, Christ suffers even marital unfaithfulness as Christians continue to struggle against idolatry, which is often compared in scripture to adultery.

can be done is through Christian marriage, which displays a beautiful picture of the sacrificial love Christ has for his Church.

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