

March 22, 2020 - Deut. 23:9-21 - Purity in the Camp
Torah Reading: Deuteronomy 23:9-21 - Purity in the Camp
Psalm 133-135
Haftarah: Isaiah 1:16-26

Purity in the Camp

Deuteronomy 23:9 - "When the host goeth forth against thine enemies, then keep thee from every wicked thing."

The Targum of Jonathan adds, by way of explanation, "from strange worship, uncovering of nakedness, and from shedding innocent blood"

Rashi - for Satan accuses in time of danger [thus extra care must be taken in time of war, when danger prevails]. — [Yerushalmi Shab. 2:6; Tanchuma, Vayiggash 1]

War is a time when the laws of God and man cannot be heard above the noise of arms. Sin burdens the conscience with guilt, and depletes men of confidence.

According to Maimonides (Moreh Nevochim, par. 3. c. 41.), God's military camp must be different from those of the Gentile nations, in which abound corruptions of all kinds, transgressions, rapines, thefts, debauchery and lewdness.

Deuteronomy 23:10-11 - "If there be among you any man, that is not clean by reason of uncleanness that chanceth him by night, then shall he go abroad out of the camp, he shall not come within the camp: But it shall be, when evening cometh on, he shall wash himself with water: and when the sun is down, he shall come into the camp again."

This is the same procedure for a nocturnal emission or any other "issue" required for the Israelite camp around the Tabernacle in **Leviticus 15:16**. The idea was that the camp of the army was just as holy, and had to be free of defilement. Any blood or semen that didn't go into creating new life made a person ritually unclean, requiring this remedy.

The law in **Leviticus 15:16** did not require him to leave the camp - but this is required here because he has no house to which he could retire and separate himself.

(This isn't necessarily among the "wicked" things mentioned in the previous verse, but is an additional provision).

A Clean Camp

Deuteronomy 23:12-13 - "Thou shalt have a place also without the camp, whither thou shalt go forth abroad: And thou shalt have a paddle upon thy weapon; and it shall be, when thou wilt ease thyself abroad, thou shalt dig therewith, and shalt turn back and cover that which cometh from thee:"

Maimonides adds: "that men might not be like the brute animals."

Not just ritual uncleanness but common and natural feces and urine must not be scattered everywhere in the camp, but designated for a latrine area.

The Essenes, according to Josephus (De Bello Jud. I. 2. c. 8. sect. 9.), used to make it a foot deep with a spade or mattock, and to everyone that was newly admitted among them, a little pickaxe was given for that purpose.

Why?

Deuteronomy 23:14 - "For the LORD 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 see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee."

When they came into the land of Canaan, and went to war with their enemies, the ark sometimes went with them.

There was nothing shameful in the excrement itself; but the want of reverence, which the people would display through not removing it, would offend the Lord and drive Him out of the camp of Israel.

"no unclean thing" - "by this phrase God meant to deter ... from whoredom, which is too usual and common among soldiers, as long as they are absent from their own houses; that therefore we may be delivered and abstain from those impure works, God has commanded such things to be done, which may bring to our remembrance that his glory dwells in the midst of us" - Maimonides

This all points to a spiritual type of inward purity - Paul commented on this:

- **2 Corinthians 6:16 - 7:1**, "God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them. . . . Having therefore these promises . . . let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Miscellaneous Laws - A Runaway Slave

Deuteronomy 23:15-16 - "Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee: He shall dwell with thee, even among you, in that place which he shall choose in one of thy gates, where it liketh him best: thou shalt not oppress him."

Rashi - even a Canaanite servant of an Israelite who fled from outside the land to the Land of Israel. — [Gittin 45a]

"oppress him" - Targum of Jonathan adds, "by calling him a fugitive servant, or by any opprobrious name."

This is remarkable considering how "Bible-believing" slave owners in America could

ignore this command (along with the one condemning kidnapping) while passing laws requiring the opposite.

Many Christian and Jewish commentators on this verse refuse to see it as a blanket condemnation of slavery, but qualify it in different ways. For instance, it doesn't relate to wicked slaves who are fleeing justice, etc. Or it only relates to slaves who are fleeing to become converts.

There is one aspect worth noting of why it is mentioned at this point in the chapter:

"It seems, from the connection, that this has a particular relation to times of war, when heathen soldiers or servants might desert and come over to the Israelites with intent to turn proselytes to the true religion. In which case, they were neither to send them back, and expose them to the severity of their heathen masters, nor use them hardly themselves, but permit them to live peaceably, and with full enjoyment of all the liberties and privileges of a proselyte in Israel." - *Benson Commentary*

Deuteronomy 23:17-18 - "There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel. Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the LORD thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the LORD thy God."

The words signify a man (*kedesh*) or woman (*kedeshah*) consecrated to some deity like Baal and Ashteroth, who served their gods by prostitution. "The price of a dog" is the gains of the kadesh, or male prostitute, here called a dog, as the type of all uncleanness (see **Revelation 22:15**). The sacred prostitutes would the hire of their bodies to their gods, thinking thereby to appease their deities. Anything resembling this is forbidden.

Strabo (Geograph. I. 8. p. 261.) tells us that the temple of Venus at Corinth was so rich, that more than a thousand of those sacred harlots were kept there.

Despite this prohibition, these evils eventually ended up even in the Temple area (**2 Kings 23:7**).

Usury

Deuteronomy 23:19-20 - "Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it."

See **Exodus 22:24; Leviticus 25:36, 37**

Lending with interest was nowhere else forbidden in the ancient world. The usual rate of interest in the Ancient Near East was 20-35 percent or more. The main reason for this prohibition is that it is oppressive to the poor (we can still see this today with "payday

lenders" and rip-off car dealerships.) Even lending to Gentiles, although allowed, could not be oppressive.

The Book of Ezekiel classifies the charging of interest among the worst sins, denouncing it as an abomination and metaphorically portraying usurers as people who have shed the borrower's blood (**Ezekiel 18:13,17**).

One biblical Hebrew term for interest is *neshekh* (Hebrew: נֶשֶׁךְ), literally meaning a snake bite.

The borrower, the lender, the scribe who recorded it and any witnesses were all guilty if involved in lending with interest.

Spiritually, expectations are like borrowing with interest. It involves us in drawing - from the future - satisfaction for the present. But the transaction never fulfills us in the present, and because the process is ongoing, there is nothing left to enjoy once we reach the future.