

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The case of a divorced wife, Deuteronomy 24:1-4. No man shall be obliged to undertake any public service for the first year of his marriage, Deuteronomy 24:5. The mill-stones shall not be taken as a pledge, Deuteronomy 24:6. The man-stealer shall be put to death, Deuteronomy 24:7. Concerning cases of leprosy, Deuteronomy 24:8, Deuteronomy 24:9. Of receiving pledges, and returning those of the poor before bed-time, Deuteronomy 24:10-13. Of servants and their hire, Deuteronomy 24:14, Deuteronomy 24:15. Parents and children shall not be put to death for each other, Deuteronomy 24:16. Of humanity to the stranger, fatherless, widow, and bondman, Deuteronomy 24:17, Deuteronomy 24:18. Gleanings of the harvest, etc., to be left for the poor, stranger, widow, fatherless, etc., Deuteronomy 24:19-22.

Verse 1

Some uncleanness - Any cause of dislike, for this great latitude of meaning the fact itself authorizes us to adopt, for it is certain that a Jew might put away his wife for any cause that seemed good to himself; and so hard were their hearts, that Moses suffered this; and we find they continued this practice even to the time of our Lord, who strongly reprehended them on the account, and showed that such license was wholly inconsistent with the original design of marriage; see Matthew 5:31 (note), etc.; Matthew 19:3 (note), etc., and the notes there.

Verse 3

And write her a bill of divorcement - These bills, though varying in expression, are the same in substance among the Jews in all places. The following, collected from Maimonides and others, is a general form, and contains all the particulars of such instruments. The reader who is curious may find a full account of divorces in the Biblioth. Rab. of Bartolocci, and the following form in that work, vol. iv., p. 550.

â€œIn - day of the week, or day - of the month A., in - year from the creation of the world, or from the supputation (of Alexander) after the account that we are accustomed to count by, here, in the place B., I, C., the son of D., of the place B., (or if there be any other name which I have, or my father hath had, or which my place or my fatherâ€™s place hath had), have voluntarily, and with the willingness of my soul, without constraint, dismissed, and left, and put away thee, even thee, E., the daughter of F., of the city G., (or if thou have any other name or surname, thou or thy father, or thy place or thy fatherâ€™s place), who hast been my wife heretofore; but now I dismiss thee, and leave thee, and put thee away, that thou mayest be free, and have power over thy own life, to go away to be married to any man whom thou wilt; and that no man be refused of thine hand, for my name, from this day and for ever. And thus thou art lawful for any man; and this is unto thee, from me, a writing of divorcement, and book (instrument) of dismissal, and an epistle of putting away; according to the Law of Moses and Israel.

A., son of B., witness.

C., son of D., witness.â€•

Verse 4

She is defiled - Does not this refer to her having been divorced, and married in consequence to another? Though God, for the hardness of their hearts, suffered them to put away their wives, yet he considered all after-marriages in that case to be pollution and defilement; and it is on this ground that our Lord argues in the places referred to above, that whoever marries the woman that is put away is an adulterer: now this could not have been the case if God had allowed the divorce to be a legal and proper separation of the man from his wife; but in the sight of God nothing can be a legal cause of separation but adultery on either side. In such a case, according to the law of God, a man may put away his wife, and a wife may put away her husband; (see Matthew 19:9); for it appears that the wife had as much right to put away her husband as the husband had to put away his wife, see Mark 10:12.

Verse 5

When a man hath taken a new wife - Other people made a similar provision for such circumstances. Alexander ordered those of his soldiers who had married that year to spend the winter with their wives, while the army was in winter quarters. See Arrian, lib. i.

Verse 6

The nether or the upper mill-stone - Small hand-mills which can be worked by a single person were formerly in use among the Jews, and are still used in many parts of the East. As therefore the dayâ€™s meal was generally ground for each day, they keeping no stock beforehand, hence they were forbidden to take either of the stones

to pledge, because in such a case the family must be without bread. On this account the text terms the millstone the man's life.

Verse 8-9

The plague of leprosy - See on Leviticus 13 (note), and Leviticus 14 (note).

Verse 12

And if the man be poor, etc. - Did not this law preclude pledging entirely, especially in case of the abjectly poor? For who would take a pledge in the morning which he knew, if not redeemed, he must restore at night? However, he might resume his claim in the morning, and have the pledge daily returned, and thus keep up his property in it till the debt was discharged; see the note on Exodus 22:26. The Jews in several cases did act contrary to this rule, and we find them cuttingly reproved for it by the Prophet Amos, Amos 2:8.

Verse 15

He is poor, and setteth his heart upon it - How exceedingly natural is this! The poor servant who seldom sees money, yet finds from his master's affluence that it procures all the conveniences and comforts of life, longs for the time when he shall receive his wages; should his pay be delayed after the time is expired, he may naturally be expected to cry unto God against him who withholds it. See most of these subjects treated at large on Exodus 22:21-27 (note).

Verse 16

The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, etc. - This law is explained and illustrated in sufficient detail, Ezekiel 18.

Verse 18

Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman - Most people who have affluence rose from comparative penury, for those who are born to estates frequently squander them away; such therefore should remember what their feelings, their fears, and anxieties were, when they were poor and abject. A want of attention to this most wholesome precept is the reason why pride and arrogance are the general characteristics of those who have risen in the world from poverty to affluence; and it is the conduct of those men which gave rise to the rugged proverb, "Set a beggar on horseback, and he will ride to the devil."

Verse 19

When thou cuttest down thine harvest - This is an addition to the law, Leviticus 19:9; Leviticus 23:22. The corners of the field, the gleanings, and the forgotten sheaf, were all the property of the poor. This the Hebrews extended to any part of the fruit or produce of a field, which had been forgotten in the time of general ingathering, as appears from the concluding verses of this chapter.