

## Deuteronomy 20

Verses 1 – 4

**“When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses, chariots, *and* people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, is with you. <sup>2</sup> When you are approaching the battle, the priest shall come forward and speak to the people. <sup>3</sup> He shall say to them, ‘Hear, Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or be terrified by them, <sup>4</sup> for the Lord your God is the One who is going with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.’**

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

Most of this chapter is about going to war after Israel has settled in Canaan.

The exception to this is in verses 16 thru 18

God told the Israelites not to fear their enemies because He was with them.

God had delivered them from Egypt with a mighty hand.

1. He sent 10 plagues to destroy the will of the King and his people.
2. God provided cover by day and light by night on their way to the Red Sea
3. God split the Red Sea in two and provided dry ground for the Jewish people.
4. He then drowned the army of Egypt as they tried to cross.

**When you are approaching the battle, the priest shall come forward and speak to the people.**

The priest was to repeat the message that Moses had just given.

The point being that God will intervene and make them victorious.

**Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or be terrified by them, <sup>4</sup> for the Lord your God is the One who is going with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.'**

The Jewish people living in Canaan that this is written for (those living after the time of Joshua) had not seen the miracles of the Exodus or the miracles during the takeover of Canaan.

See Joshua 24:31

So this would require some faith on their part.

Verses 5 - 9

**The officers also shall speak to the people, saying, 'Who is the man that has built a new house but has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, otherwise he might die in the battle and another man would dedicate it. <sup>6</sup> And who is the man that has planted a vineyard but has not put it to use? Let him go and return to his house, otherwise he might die in the battle and another man would put it to use. <sup>7</sup> And who is the man that is betrothed to a woman and has not married her? Let him go and return to his house, otherwise he might die in the battle and another man would marry her.' <sup>8</sup> Then the officers shall speak further to the people and say, 'Who is the man that is afraid and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, so that he does not make his brothers' hearts melt like his heart!' <sup>9</sup> And when the officers have finished speaking to the people, they shall appoint commanders of armies at the head of the people.**

**The officers also shall speak to the people**

After the priest speaks to the people the officers have their say.

They were required to give four exemptions for those going to war.

Exemption 1

For a house-builder who has not yet dedicated his house

This exemption probably lasted for 1 year

## Exemption 2

The planter of a vineyard who has not yet put it to use

For the one who had recently planted a vineyard this exemption would have lasted for at least four years.

For the first three years, the fruit of any newly-planted vineyard was considered unfit and the fourth year was counted as first fruits.

## Exemption 3

For the betrothed husband who has not yet taken his wife.

This exemption was also extended to newlyweds and lasted a full year.

See Deuteronomy 24:5

## Exemption 4

For those who were fearful.

Gideon sent men home who were not fit for war because of their lack of awareness or readiness, and this exemption for fear could be seen as a similar rule.

The military of nearly every nation in our time would reject this excuse but this is what God told the nation of Israel.

## Verses 10 - 15

**<sup>10</sup> “When you approach a city to fight against it, you shall offer it terms of peace.**

**<sup>11</sup> And if it agrees to make peace with you and opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall become your forced labor and serve you. <sup>12</sup> However, if it does not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it. <sup>13</sup> When the Lord your God gives it into your hand, you shall strike all the men in it with the edge of the sword. <sup>14</sup> However, the women, the children, the animals, and everything that is in the city, all of its spoils, you shall take as plunder for yourself; and you shall use the spoils of your enemies which the Lord your God has given you. <sup>15</sup> This is what you shall do to all the cities that are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations nearby.**

**When you approach a city to fight against it, you shall offer it terms of peace. And if it agrees to make peace with you and opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall become your forced labor and serve you**

Atheists love to criticize the God of the Bible for not standing against slavery. But they fail to recognize the obvious. God was against slavery.

The Pharisees asked Jesus if a man could divorce his wife for any reason.

Jesus said no.

So the Pharisees asked Jesus “Why, then, did Moses command to give *her* a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.”

What this shows is that God wanted men to love their wife and the two of them would become one. But because of their fallen nature, their hearts were hardened and men found it impossible to follow the will of God. Because mankind is so weak and feeble, God allowed men to divorce their wife so it didn't destroy both of them.

The same is true with slavery. God wanted mankind to treat each other with love and respect but because of our fallen nature we go to war and take our enemies as slaves or we kill them.

God has warned us that slavery is not good and that it will be judged as we can see from the Exodus story. But because mankind is so weak and feeble God has allowed mankind to do something that has always been contrary to his will. Mankind is simply unable to follow the will of God so He allows mankind to enslave one other for a period of time so there can be some peace and stability in the world.

This is a sad commentary on mankind not God.

**However, if it does not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it. <sup>13</sup> When the Lord your God gives it into your hand, you shall strike all the men in it with the edge of the sword**

War is a savage thing, and no one should think that this is caused by anything other than the hardness of mankind's hearts.

Atheists should put the blame where it belongs, on the hearts of men. But it is a lot easier to blame God and say He is the problem.

**However, the women, the children, the animals, and everything that is in the city, all of its spoils, you shall take as plunder for yourself; and you shall use the spoils of your enemies which the Lord your God has given you**

Here we see the darkness of mankind's hearts.

Often mankind is not content with their station in life, and they find the profit of war to be a compelling reason to go to war.

Again, God allows it but only because mankind is unable to follow His good and pure will.

Verse 16 - 18

**<sup>16</sup> Only in the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave anything that breathes alive. <sup>17</sup> Instead, you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the Lord your God has commanded you, <sup>18</sup> so that they will not teach you to do all the same detestable practices of theirs which they have done for their gods, by which you would sin against the Lord your God.**

**Only in the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave anything that breathes alive.**

Up to this point Moses has been instructing Israel what to do in the future after they have settled Canaan and go to war against countries outside of Canaan.

Here Moses is reminding Israel that they are to kill everyone in the land of Canaan because Israel is spiritually immature and they would be influenced by the pagan ways of the Canaanite people.

Verses 19 – 21

**<sup>19</sup> “When you besiege a city for a long time, to make war against it in order to capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them; for you may eat from them, so you shall not cut them down. For is the tree of the field a human, that it should be besieged by you? <sup>20</sup> Only the trees that you know are not fruit trees you shall destroy and cut down, so that you may construct siege works against the city that is making war against you until it falls.**

<sup>19</sup> **“When you besiege a city for a long time, to make war against it in order to capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them; for you may eat from them, so you shall not cut them down.**

Now Moses returns to future times when Israel is well established in Canaan and they go to war against foreign nations.

God forbids Israel to destroy the fruit trees to make siege works because the fruit trees can be used for food. This is common sense since they will be there for a long time and fresh fruit will become scarce. Besides, there is enough wood from other types of trees.

After the city has been captured the fruit trees can help a crushed society recover more quickly which benefits their captors in the long run.