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GROUP STUDY GUIDE

Answering Atheists: Does the Bible View Women as “Property”?

TEACHING SUMMARY

This teaching examines objections that the Bible treats women as possessions rather than persons. It begins with the command not to covet, where a neighbor’s wife appears alongside a house, servants, and animals. The teaching argues that the list must be read with the rest of Torah rather than assumed to assign the same status to everyone and everything named.

The command to honor both father and mother is presented as evidence of women’s equal dignity within the household. The teaching also notes that Deuteronomy names the wife before the household in its version of the coveting command. It follows the interpretation that she is a household member worthy of honor, not an item of property that a husband may buy and sell.

Deuteronomy 21:10–14 is then examined as a law governing marriage to a female war captive. The teaching emphasizes the required period of mourning, the responsibilities of marriage, and the prohibition on selling her or treating her as a slave if the marriage ends. It reads these requirements as protections for her personhood and as limits on a soldier’s conduct.

The bride price is explained as a marriage present with family and economic purposes. According to the teaching, it demonstrates serious intentions, strengthens ties between families, and compensates for the daughter’s contribution to her family’s work. It also describes the payment as security held for the bride and her children, with Laban’s conduct toward Rachel and Leah offered as a breach of that trust.

The teaching returns to warfare language in Deuteronomy 20 and insists that it must be interpreted alongside the protections in Deuteronomy 21. It also rejects polygamy as a departure from God’s original design for marriage. In discussing the slandered-bride law, it identifies protection from false accusations as the main concern and distinguishes the offense of deliberate deception from premarital sex alone.

Finally, the teaching rejects the claim that rape victims were required to marry their attackers. It interprets the disputed marriage provision as addressing consensual premarital sex and financial responsibility, while affirming that the Bible condemns rape. Its conclusion is that women share equal value and purpose with men as God's image bearers and must not be treated as disposable possessions.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The teaching reads the coveting command in the context of Torah as a whole.
- The command to honor father and mother supports the equal dignity of both parents.
- Deuteronomy lists the wife before the household in its coveting command.
- The captive-marriage law is interpreted as restricting exploitation and requiring marital responsibility.
- A female captive is allowed a full month to mourn before the marriage is consummated.
- A husband may not sell the former captive or treat her as a slave when releasing her.
- The bride price is explained as a marriage present and a source of financial protection.
- The teaching rejects polygamy as a departure from the original design of marriage.
- It distinguishes laws about consensual premarital sex from the condemnation of rape.
- The conclusion affirms women's equal value and purpose as God's image bearers.

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK

Basic

1. The Tenth Commandment examined in the teaching forbids people to _____.
2. The Fifth Commandment requires honor for both father and _____.
3. The female captive is given a full _____ to mourn.
4. If the marriage ends, the man may not sell the woman or treat her as a _____.
5. The teaching describes the bride price as a marriage _____.
6. The practice of a man having multiple wives is called _____.

Challenging

1. In the Deuteronomy version of the coveting command, the wife is named _____ the household.

2. The passage governing marriage to a female captive is Deuteronomy _____.
3. The bride price is described as being kept in _____ for the daughter and her children.
4. The man whose treatment of Rachel and Leah's wealth illustrates a breach of trust is _____.
5. In discussing the slandered-bride case, the teaching identifies the element of _____ as what aggravates the offense.
6. The teaching concludes that women and men share value and purpose as God's image _____.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the teaching use the command to honor parents when interpreting the command not to covet?
2. Which requirements in Deuteronomy 21 does the teaching identify as protections for a female captive?
3. What purposes does the teaching assign to the bride price, and how do these differ from purchasing property?
4. Why does the teaching insist on reading Deuteronomy 20 alongside other Torah instructions?
5. How does the teaching distinguish the disputed marriage provision from laws condemning rape?
6. How do the examples discussed support the teaching's conclusion about women's value and personhood?

ANSWER KEY – GROUP GUIDE

Basic

1. covet
2. mother
3. month
4. slave
5. present
6. polygamy

Challenging

1. before
2. 21:10–14
3. trust
4. Laban
5. deceit
6. bearers