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MINISTRIES

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Parashah Points: Mattot – Does the Bible Condone Human Trafficking?

Welcome to another episode of Parashah Points—short thoughts from the weekly Torah Portion.

This week’s Parashah Point comes from Mattot, and it goes from Numbers 30:2 to Numbers 32:42.

The following teaching may include subject matter that is not appropriate for younger viewers. We would encourage parents to preview the teaching first and use discretion.

This Torah portion discusses laws concerning vows, the destruction of Midianite towns, and an accounting of war captives and plunder.

There’s a lot we can talk about in this Torah Portion. Today we’re going to address a difficult passage that is often cited to suggest that God condoned an evil act—that is, sex slavery.

We all know that sex slavery is a grave evil. Believers and non-believers alike shudder with horror upon hearing the stories from victims of this abuse. There are entire Christian and secular non-profit organizations solely devoted to rescuing victims of sex slavery and bringing abusers to justice.

The reason we all intuitively know that sex slavery is evil is that God’s moral law has been written on the hearts of mankind. Indeed, by virtue of being humans created in God’s image, our conscience bears witness to the objective reality of good and evil, according to Romans 2:15. Those moral values are also clearly expressed in God’s word, the Scriptures.

That’s why it’s so shocking and troubling when we encounter passages from those very Scriptures that appear, on the surface, to be inconsistent with God’s moral values written on our hearts. One of these troubling passages is found in this week’s Torah Portion:

Numbers 31:15-18

Moses said to them, “Have you let all the women live? Behold, these, on Balaam’s advice, caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against the Lord [YHWH] in the incident of Peor, and so the plague came among the congregation of the Lord [YHWH]. Now therefore, kill every

male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man by lying with him. **But all the young girls who have not known man by lying with him keep alive for yourselves.**

Critics of the Bible will often point to this text as support for their claim that the God of the Bible is evil. They accuse God of condoning things like raping and enslaving female war captives—just as long as they were virgins!

While this passage might seem disturbing and contrary to God’s goodness, a careful reading and consideration of the context mitigates the difficulties significantly.

For a more in depth study on each of the objections that might arise from this passage, we would recommend our teachings, **Does the Bible View Women as “Property”**, [Slavery and the Bible](#), and **Does God Command Genocide?**

In this short teaching, we will be dealing specifically with the claim that God condoned the raping and enslaving of female war captives. Is that what this passage is saying? Critics will claim that when Moses tells the Israelite soldiers to keep the young virgins “for yourselves,” that sex slavery is exactly what was implied. How do we answer this objection?

First, why are the virgins kept alive and non-virgins killed? Is the Bible promoting some misogynistic ideology that women are objects and that non-virgins are worthless? Not at all. This was a judgment upon the Midianites for their role in leading Israel into idolatry and ritual fornication. The reason the virgins were spared from this judgment was that they obviously had not participated in this grave and devious attack upon Israel.

Second, the key to understanding this passage is to realize that it was not written in a vacuum. Moses was not giving the soldiers permission to rape and enslave these Midianite women. How do we know? Because he gave a direct commandment *against* such a thing!

Indeed, according Deuteronomy 21:10-14, soldiers were permitted to *marry* a young woman who was a captive of war, but they could *not* simply treat these women as sexual objects. In fact, even in cases of a broken engagement or divorce, the Israelite men are specifically prohibited from treating these women as slaves. They couldn’t sell them but had to let them go free.

Due to the fact that the Torah takes marriage and sexual morality extremely seriously, in addition to the fact that there is a commandment dealing directly with the fair treatment of female war captives, it simply doesn’t make sense to think this passage condones sex slavery.

All this passage is saying is that the virgin women were spared from God’s judgment because they did not participate in the sins that led to the judgment. And in accordance with the Torah’s regulations about treating female war captives with dignity, the Israelite soldiers were permitted to take them *as wives*, which would actually have led to a much better life for these women.

When we take the time to think clearly and understand the context of this passage, it is not inconsistent with God’s goodness. In fact, it reinforces His utmost compassion and concern for the vulnerable. Other nations’ armies could simply rape female captives of war and throw them away like nothing. Such a thing was not allowed in the nation governed by God’s Torah.

Thank you for joining us for another Parashah Point!

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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