

Discussion Questions

Old Testament

1. Chapter 30 of Numbers set out the law by which the father of an unmarried woman, or the husband of a woman could void her legal obligations. Is the purpose of this law to protect women from undertaking foolish obligations?
2. Why did Moses command that the male children and women (other than virgins) from the Midianite captives be killed? Do we know if this order was carried out?

New Testament

1. Are Jesus' actions in this matter a blanket endorsement for us to associate with unsavory people in unsavory places? Luke 5:29-32
2. What does Jesus mean in Luke 6:5 when he says, "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath?"

Notes and Commentary

Old Testament

Chapter 30 of Numbers set out the law by which the father of an unmarried woman, or the husband of a woman could void her legal obligations. Is the purpose of this law to protect women from undertaking foolish obligations? In this chapter, certain women were relieved from legal obligations, when certain men timely denounced the obligation. The man (either father or husband) had to revoke the obligation as soon as he learned of it.¹ Silence, upon hearing of the obligation was deemed to be approval, or ratification of the vow.²

Women in the time of Moses had few legal rights apart from the men with whom they were legally associated—the father or husband. These rules survived until the modern era, and were incorporated in the British Common

¹Numbers 30:5, 8

²Numbers 30:4, 7. *Qui tacet, consentire videtur*—Silence gives consent.

Woman	Man	Action
Unmarried woman, "in her youth"	Father	Could void the obligation. Numbers 30:5.
Married woman	Husband	Could void the obligation. Numbers 30:8.
A widow or divorced woman	<i>None</i>	Bound by obligation. No man to revoke it. ³

Table 1: When an interested man could void the woman's obligation. Numbers 30.

Law, and the early laws of the United States. These laws are often presented as paternalistic, to protect the interests of the affected woman. Consider the following situations:

1. If the unmarried woman "*in her youth*"⁴ makes an imprudent vow, she may be rescued by her father. Yet the rule must not be just to protect *young* women for two reasons:
 - (a) The reference to being young, describes many women who are unmarried. Yet the rule apparently applies to even older unmarried women (e.g. the spinsters).
 - (b) In the next situation, both young and old married woman were protected by their husbands. That is, age is not the determining factor.
2. So, since married women were also under the "protection" of their significant male (the husband),⁵ maybe the law was intended to protect women in general.
 - (a) However, two other categories of women (widows and divorced women) were unprotected by any man.⁶

⁴Numbers 30:3

⁵Numbers 30:8.

⁶Numbers 30:9.

- (b) One could argue this is the “punishment” for being divorced, except that divorce was generally the option of the husband. Also, there is no “fault” with a widow for her husband having died.
3. The common element of a woman being protected by her significant man (either father or husband) appears to be the existence of a significant man. Since an unmarried daughter or wife was part of the family unit, her imprudent legal obligations would invariably be a burden on that family unit, and by extension the father or husband. The law provided a means by which the man could protect himself and his family from the foolish actions of a woman. So one may conclude the law was not at all designed to protect women. **In fact, the law was to protect men.**

[Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible] Two cases of vows are determined. The case of a daughter in her father’s house. When her vow comes to his knowledge, it is in his power either to confirm it or do it away. The law is plain in the case of a wife. If her husband allows her vow, though only by silence, it stands. If he disallows it, her obligation to her husband takes place of it; for to him she ought to be in subjection, as unto the Lord. The Divine law consults the good order of families. It is fit that every man should bear rule in his own house, and have his wife and children in subjection; rather than that this great rule should be broken, or any encouragement be given to inferior relations to break those bonds asunder, God releases the obligation even of a solemn vow. So much does religion secure the welfare of all societies; and in it the families of the earth have a blessing.

[Matthew Henry’s Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible] Now here it is very observable how carefully the divine law consults the good order of families, and preserves the power of superior relations, and the duty and reverence of inferiors. It is fit that every man should bear rule in his own house, and have his wife and children in subjection with all gravity; and rather than this great rule should be broken, or any encouragement given to inferior relations to break those bonds asunder, God himself would quit his right, and release

the obligations even of a solemn vow; so much does religion strengthen the ties of all relations, and secure the welfare of all societies, that in it the families of the earth are blessed.

When the Israelites defeated the Midianite army, the military commanders killed all of the enemy men and burned their towns. This sounds harsh, by modern standards, though common in the ancient world. Also common was the military commanders' decision to take the women and children as slaves.⁷ Why did Moses command that the male children and women (other than virgins) from the Midianite captives be killed? Do we know if this order was carried out?

- **Read Numbers 31:7-18**

This is a difficult passage for Christians to understand. Some of the common Christian commentaries, are quoted. But if you expand your search to include opinions of those outside the faith, be prepared for a vigorous attack. You will find atheists, and others, who say there is no rational basis for Moses' directions. In fact, this story is the foundation for numerous attacks on Christianity, Judaism and/or God Himself. Some of the allegations compare Moses and Hitler in an unfavorable manner. There are allegations of genocide,⁸ infanticide,⁹ child rape,¹⁰ and "war crimes."¹¹ These points are not raised as the "devil's advocate" (he needs no advocate); but to point out careful consideration is necessary to reconcile the following:

1. The Bible is the true, inspired word of God (no errors);

⁷Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown, Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible (1871)

⁸Definition of Genocide: "The systematic killing of a racial or cultural group; as, the Nazi genocide of Jews left few in Germany or Poland after World War II." (*The Collaborative International Dictionary of English*, v.0.48) Note that the male Midianites (even children) were to be killed so that they could not reestablish as a people

⁹Definition of Infanticide: "The murder of an infant born alive; the murder or killing of a newly born or young child; child murder. " [1913 Webster] Certainly, the young boys would have been included in Moses' orders.

¹⁰Numbers 31:18 (ESV) says, "But all the young girls who have not known man by lying with him keep alive for yourselves." The argument presented is that "keep alive for yourselves," implies concubinage, or other sexual purposes.

¹¹Newborn baby boys and pregnant women were to be killed.

2. There is only one God. The God of the Old Testament and the New Testament is the same God;
3. God is a loving God. Consider the following commentaries:

[KEIL AND DELITZSCH¹²] Treatment of the Prisoners. - When Moses went out to the front of the camp with Eleazar and the princes of the congregation to meet the returning warriors, he was angry with the commanders, because they had left all the women alive, since it was they who had been the cause, at Balaam's instigation, of the falling away of the Israelites from Jehovah to worship Peor; and he commanded all the male children to be slain, and every woman who had lain with a man, and only the young girls who had hitherto had no connection with a man to be left alive... On the fact itself, see Num 25:6. The object of the command to put all the male children to death, was to exterminate the whole nation, as it could not be perpetuated in the women. Of the female sex, all were to be put to death who had known the lying with a man, and therefore might possibly have been engaged in the licentious worship of Peor (Num 25:2), to preserve the congregation from all contamination from that abominable idolatry.

[MATTHEW HENRY¹³] They were severely reprov'd for saving the women alive. It is very probable that Moses had commanded them to kill the women, at least this was implied in the general order to avenge Israel of the Midianites; the execution having reference to that crime, their drawing them in to the worship of Peor, it was easy to conclude that the women, who were the principal criminals, must not be spared.

[JAMIESON¹⁴] No order had been given for the slaughter of the women, and in ancient war they were commonly reserved for slaves. By their antecedent conduct, however, the Midianitish women had forfeited all claims to mild or merciful treatment;

¹²Keil and Delitzsch Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, 1864

¹³Matthew Henry's Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible

¹⁴Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible (1871)

and the sacred character, the avowed object of the war (Numbers 31:2, 3), made their slaughter necessary without any special order. But why "kill every male among the little ones"? It was designed to be a war of extermination, such as God Himself had ordered against the people of Canaan, whom the Midianites equalled in the enormity of their wickedness.

[CALVIN¹⁵] The anger of Moses might appear to us inhumane, when he severely reproves his soldiers because they had not treated the female sex with the greatest cruelty; but it is not our business to canvass the judgments of God, before whose tribunal we must all hereafter stand. Although, therefore, they may be repugnant to our own feelings, still we must rest assured that, even where they may seem to be excessive, He nevertheless tempers the most severe punishments with the most perfect equity; yea, that although He may for a time overlook, or at any rate not so severely punish, the same sin in the Moabites which He sorely avenged upon the Midianites, there is still a most just cause for this distinction, although it may be hidden in His own breast. It is not our part to murmur against Him, lest He should absolve Himself by condemning our blasphemous audacity and temerity.

New Testament

Most of us were taught as children to stay away from the "wrong crowd." So why was it OK for Jesus to associate with sinners. **Are Jesus' actions in this matter a blanket endorsement for us to associate with unsavory people in unsavory places?**

Luke 5:29-32 (RSV). [29] *Levi made a great feast for him in his house. There was a great crowd of tax collectors and others who were reclining with them.* [30] *Their scribes and the Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?"* [31] *Jesus answered them, "Those who are healthy have no need for a physician, but*

¹⁵John Calvin's commentaries on many books of the Bible, collected into a single volume from material found at Christian Classics Ethereal Library

those who are sick do. [32] I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

[GILL¹⁶] [Those] who are in good health, who are free from all diseases, wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores, stand in no need of the advice and assistance of a physician, or surgeon, but such who have either distempers or sores on their bodies; so they, the Scribes and Pharisees, who, in their own opinion, were free from the disease of sin, original and actual, and touching the righteousness of the law, were blameless, stood not in any need of him, the physician, who came to cure the maladies of the souls, as well as of the bodies of men; but such persons, who not only are sick with sin, but sick of it, who are sensible of it, and desire healing: and therefore this was the reason of his conduct, why he conversed with sinners, and not with the Scribes and Pharisees; his business, as a physician, lying among the one, and not the other;

What does Jesus mean in Luke 6:5 when he says, "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath?"

[The New John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible] The Jews so far agree to this, that he that commanded the law of the sabbath, could dispense with it; they say, that "the day on which Jericho was taken was the sabbath day; and that though they slew and burnt on the sabbath day, *'he that commanded the observation of the sabbath, commanded the profanation of it.'*" And since Christ is greater than the temple, and has all the perfections of the divine nature in him, is equal to the Father in power and glory; and even as mediator, has all power in heaven and earth given him; so as he is Lord of all other things, he is of the sabbath, and has a power of dispensing with it, and even of abolishing it; see Col 2:16,17¹⁷ and since the Lord of the sabbath had a power of dispensing with it,

¹⁶The New John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible

¹⁷**Colossians 2:16 (WEB).** [16] *Let no one therefore judge you in eating, or in drinking, or with respect to a feast day or a new moon or a Sabbath day, [17] which are a shadow of the things to come; but the body is Messiah's.*

and made use of it in the cases of David and his men, and of the priests in the temple formerly; the Pharisees ought not to think it strange, that the Son of man, who is equally Lord of the sabbath, dispensed with it in his disciples now.

[Kretzmann Popular Commentary] As the Lord was walking along with His disciples, the latter began to pull out spikes of the ripe grain and to rub the ears between the palms of their hands to extract the kernels. This was permitted according to the Law, Deut. 23, 25. But the Pharisees, some of whom were present as usual in order to spy on the Lord, made this innocent act a sin against the Third Commandment, looking upon the pulling of stalks as harvesting and upon the removing of the hulls as threshing and cooking. Note: This attitude is characteristic also of modern sticklers for the so-called sanctity of the Sabbath, or Sunday. Instead of teaching the proper observance of the New Testament holiday according to the sense of the Bible, which Luther has so beautifully expressed in the explanation of the Third Commandment, they suspect base motives and objects in matters which are left absolutely to the decision of Christian liberty. The Pharisees at once attacked the disciples, but always with the point directed against Jesus. They accused them of profaning the Sabbath. Nothing would have pleased them more than if Jesus would have taken up the challenge and argued concerning the fine points of distinction between the various forms of work permitted on the Sabbath. Instead of that, the Lord turns the tables on them by challenging their knowledge of Scriptures. His words, not unmixed with irony, contain a sharp rebuke: Not even this have ye read what David did; have you so little understanding of the Old Testament? His reference is to 1 Sam. 21, 6. There it is related of David that he did indeed go into the house of the Lord, into the tabernacle, which probably stood on the hill between Gibeon and Nob, and accepted some of the showbread, the bread of the Lord's countenance, which he then ate with his men, although this bread belonged to the priests only. That was a case of emergency, in which the law of love is always the highest law. The Pharisees should now

draw the conclusion from the smaller to the greater. If David had this right and did not sin in taking and eating this bread, then David's Lord must have the right with much greater authority. And if this argument would not be sufficiently strong for them, they should remember that the Son of Man, Christ, the Prophet of Nazareth, is Lord also of the Sabbath. If He chooses to dispense with, or to change, the law with reference to this holiday, it is a matter entirely in His right and power, Col. 2, 16. 17; Rom. 14,5.

[Matthew Henry's Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible] In the kingdom of the Redeemer, the sabbath day is to be turned into a Lord's day; the property of it is, in some respects, to be altered, and it is to be observed chiefly in honour of the Redeemer, as it had been before in honour of the Creator, Jer. xvi. 14, 15. In token of this, it shall not only have a new name, the Lord's day (yet not forgetting the old, for it is a sabbath of rest still) but shall be transferred to a new day, the first day of the week.

Random Quotes

"I used to have an open mind but my brains kept falling out."

— unknown

"I want to stay as close to the edge as I can without going over. Out on the edge you see all kinds of things you can't see from the center."

— Kurt Vonnegut (1922 – 2007)

"I've had a wonderful time, but this wasn't it."

— Groucho Marx (1895-1977)

"If brute force doesn't solve your problems, then you aren't using enough."

— unknown

Notes:

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