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Interpreting the Silences (Deut. 24:1-4)

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Deuteronomy 24:1-4 has traditionally been regarded as the key divorce text of the older testament. It is quoted as an authoritative word on divorce by Jeremiah (3:1); it serves the Pharisees as their basic text on the subject (cf. Matt. 19:3-8).

The text on divorce points, once the silences are explained, to qualifications of leaders.

Christian interpreters have struggled to reconstruct a realistic story behind the text. Heth and Wenham (106-111) identify five currently defended interpretations of Deuteronomy 24:14. Luck proposes a sixth (57-67). Each creates an hypothesis regarding the nature of the issue which this text addresses and reconstructs as lifelike a scene as possible to account for the various elements of the law. The issues the text is thought to address include reducing divorce, prohibiting remarriage, preventing incest, and protecting the woman from an uncaring husband. The key or clue leading to the interpretation is rooted in a hypothesis concerning Israelite culture, marriage practices, or psychology. I wish to propose an alternative hypothesis, drawing on linguistic, literary, sociological and anthropological clues to recreate the “crime(s)” and the court proceedings.

IDENTIFYING THE SILENCES

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 contains at least twelve silences, any one of which might be the key to its {42} interpretation. At a minimum, we should explore these silences before we claim to have interpreted the text with respect to what it meant. The text is silent in that it does *not*

- Contain a description or picture of marriage, the wedding, the dynamics of marital life, children, the social and economic exchanges which develop as a result of marriages. . . . nor
- explicitly say that the woman was guilty, or, if she was, identify the degree of her complicity, nor
- explain the semantic puzzle expressed in the phrase, the “nakedness of a thing,” nor

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- supply us with information as to whether the woman’s dishonorable act involved another person, and if it did, who that person was and what sanctions were taken against him, nor
- explain why the first husband is referred to as her *ba‘al* (master, husband) and the second as her *ish* (man, husband), or hint as to whether it matters, nor
- offer any comment on the divorce(s), whether in evaluation or prohibition or in explanation as to why the procedure is given in detail twice, nor
- indicate the relative weight and character of the different reasons given for the two divorces, nor
- give us a picture of what the implications of divorce would be and how release from one marriage would affect either or both in society and in the second marriage, nor
- offer even a clue as to why the two optional conditions regarding the woman’s release from the second marriage (divorce or death of her husband) should be equally significant in the final disposition of the case, nor
- help us to understand why the prohibition is directed only at the former husband but not at his wife nor at the second husband, nor
- elaborate on what defiled the woman, nor
- provide content for the word and explanation for the stigmas implied in “an abominable thing” and “defile the land.”

The text is silent on these issues. Indeed, the question may well be raised as to whether what is *not* said here or what *is* said elsewhere might offer the key to *our* understanding of the text. This is particularly important for those literary genres of a more technical nature, such as legal and cultic literature. I proceed with the assumption that it is my responsibility as an interpreter to address these silences with the linguistic, literary, cultural, psychological, and imaginative resources at my disposal.

RECONSTRUCTING THE STORY

Suppose a man “enters into marriage” with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her. . . .

Most commentators agree that grammatically, this law has a string of conditions (vv. 1-3) and ends in a single conclusion (v. 4). The law addresses the intended or possible action of the first husband. The purpose of the law is to prevent an action that would defile the land.

This is case law. Case laws begin with social and cultural realities (a man marries a woman and masters her) and function to correct practices {43} or spell out restraints or limit excesses (if. . . . then he may not

remarry her. . . .); they are not expressions of the ideal. The translation, “when,” more accurately captures the element of certainty present in the Hebrew conjunction *ki* than “suppose.” There is nothing hypothetical about this lawsuit. Cases are recorded because they represent significant, typical, everyday concerns in maintaining the social order. Case law is casuistic (if . . . then) inasmuch as it applies only to concrete and limited conditions which need to be spelled out and must obtain for the law to be applicable. The series of verbs headed by an imperfect, followed by consecutive perfects, identifies an ordered logical or temporal sequence (Waltke and O’Connor, 526-7). In legal literature, all unnecessary details have been excised. These features characterize our text.

Only the imagination can put names to the faces and fill in the story of a young man and woman betrothed, of negotiations between the two families, song and dance, learning to love, of children, conflict, and reconciliation. The text identifies only two significant moments in the life of this marriage. The data is sparse; it even feels cold. That’s because we are standing before judges in the city gate surrounded by witnesses, family, onlookers. Here love has gone cold and is replaced by defensiveness, anger, fear, frustration, disappointment, and possibly even thoughts of revenge.

The Husband (*ba’al*) and Wife (*be’ulah*)

The fundamental conditions are two-fold: a man marries (takes a wife) and masters her (verb, *ba’al*). The text differentiates in both verb and noun between the first and second marriages. The first man (*’ish*) takes a woman and *ba’als* her, the second merely takes her as his wife. Even after divorce and remarriage the first husband continues to be known as her *ba’al* (lord), while the second one is her *’ish* (man, husband). The change and difference are hardly coincidental or inconsequential.

The verb *ba’al* is usually translated, “to master, take control of” and, hence, to assume the responsibility over something or someone. The object can be as varied as an ox, a chariot, an arrow, or a wife. In Biblical Hebrew it appears in connection with the act or the consequences of marrying. Contrary to some analyses, I find no evidence that the verb is used of the sexual act of intercourse (which is *yada’*, to know, or *’anah*, to afflict). The verb *ba’al* appears sixteen times in the OT, of which five take the form of the feminine passive participle, *be’ulah*, meaning, a “ba’aled woman.” Given the meaning of the verb as “gaining power over, control over,” the woman is a “mastered woman.” That could mean that she is under her husband’s domination or that she has herself become a {44} mistress, a privileged person in the home or community. The latter seems more likely, since in the Bible the reference to *be’ulah* is consistently a positive one and reflects an assignment of honor (e.g., Isa. 62:5; “your land will be *ba’aled*”) or an elevation in public status and role (Gen. 20:3; Prov. 30:21-23).

The noun *ba'al* refers to a competent person or an expert in a certain domain. Politically, *ba'alim* are those who supervise the affairs of state (Judges 10; the lords of Shechem = the *ba'alim* of Shechem). In Exodus 24:14 the term *ba'al* describes the man who might bring litigation against another. The terminology remains intact even though the *ba'al* may fall on hard times (Exod. 21:3). Other texts containing the reference to the husband as a *ba'al* (Isa. 54:1-5 (2x) and 62:1-5 (4x)) emphasize the youthfulness at the time they marry, suggesting a first marriage which involved the coming together in marriage of representatives of two families (Isa. 54:4,6).

When the marriage is described with the verb *ba'al*, that act makes the husband a *ba'al* (noun) and his wife a *be'ulat—ba'al* (a mistress of a master; cf. Gen. 20:3; Deut. 22:22). As head of the household he would likely be elevated to become one of the decision-makers in the city's civic and military affairs (Judges 9; 1 Sam. 23:11; 2 Sam. 21:12). His wife becomes the mistress of the household, a person of considerable responsibility and influence. Since a person only becomes head of a household once, that would account for the fact that the word (verb and noun) is never used of second or subsequent marriages. Furthermore, its use regarding Sarah before the birth of Isaac (Gen. 20:3) rules out the begetting and bearing of children as a necessary condition to be known as a *ba'al* or *be'ulah*.

In this context, picture the mature, virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 whose husband serves on the town council and in the local judiciary (*ba'al*, vv. 11, 23, 28). Her responsibilities include managing the family business. She acquires property, engages in commerce, conducts an export-import business, and instructs others with wisdom and grace. She engages her community in what is generally a man's domain. That places the *be'ulah* into the public arena. This text, like that of Deut. 22:22, is designed, then, to protect the *be'ulah* of a *ba'al* in fulfilling her functions so that her husband can serve, without interruption and distraction, in civic affairs and affairs of state.

To summarize: the law of Deuteronomy addresses a citizen in good standing whose bride has become the mistress of the household and a woman of standing in her community. The law of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is designed to place a restriction on this first husband, the *ba'al*, regarding the wife with whom he achieved this status. {45}

THE REASON FOR THE FIRST DIVORCE

but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her

A Matter of Choice. The husband feels he cannot continue to live with this woman. What she has done is too distasteful, too vile to endure. There is, however, no suggestion that her act necessitates divorce nor

that the law nor community mores require him to do so. He chooses to divorce his wife.

A Matter of Significance. Some have argued that the Hebrew expression, “*she does not find favor in his eyes because. . .*” represents an inadequate cause for divorce. To find disfavor, it is argued, is equivalent to incompatibility or mundaneness in the marital relationship. A study of the phrase leads to the conclusion that to “find favor” (lit., “it is good in someone’s eyes”) is life-giving; here is no casual circumstance or act (cf. Ruth 2:10). The opposite, to find disfavor in someone’s eyes is life-threatening (Num. 11:11). To find disfavor may be due to the fact that a fault exists in the person (cf. 1 Sam. 29:6,8). But in the case before us, it is precisely the integrity of the man which is at stake; this law is fashioned to prevent an even worse sin.

The “objectionable thing” (*’erwah*) is not related to the woman’s virginity at marriage, since evidence of premarital sex was treated differently (22:20-21). Nor is the problem one of proven adultery. An earlier law has already addressed that issue, specifically with regard to the wife of a *ba’al* (22:22). Nor does it refer to adultery with an unknown paramour, since that is treated by a different procedure (Num. 5:11-31). Nor would sacred prostitution fit the conditions.

The divorce proceedings are not at issue, since the procedure is outlined in detail and is identical in both instances. The woman’s departure completes the divorce. Both divorces follow what we know of legal divorce proceedings from Israel and the ancient Near East.

A Matter Too Distasteful and Personal to Mention Publicly. What mars the relationship between husband and wife so that the *ba’al* enters divorce proceedings? What is the distasteful, evil thing which has come between them?

The Hebrew term used here is an “*’erwat-of-a-thing.*” Elsewhere the identical phrase, *’erwat—dabar*, appears only in Deut. 23:14 where it refers to human feces lying about in the camp where Yahweh would walk; the imagery needs no further elaboration. Legal language is precise and technical. It must mean the same thing in 24:1. This offense is too delicate to state publicly except with the term, *’erwat-dabar*. We could translate the offense in comparably general terms as “something shitty.”

In a culture in which shame is to be avoided at all costs, *’erwah* must {46} stand for a very serious offense, in sharp contrast with the grounds claimed by the second husband: “because he hates her (v. 3).” In ancient marriage contracts a divorce because of hatred was equivalent to incompatibility; the one divorcing was responsible and paid the divorce penalty. To bring shame on the husband, however, was more than sufficient grounds to divorce. Some Babylonian marriage contracts make the public shaming of a husband punishable by death.

The form of the verb (*hithpolal*) indicates that she was a participant in the sin, but not the prime agent. She is more sinned against than sinner. This agrees with the emphasis in Deuteronomy on the responsibility of the more powerful, while not excusing the sin of the weaker member of society.

Incest. We can be more specific as to the nature of the “unmentionable indiscretion.” The most common use of the term ‘*erwah* is to exposed buttocks and/or genitals (Gen. 9:22,23,23; Exod. 20:26; 28:42), especially in regard to the act of sexual intercourse (Lev. 18, 20 (30x); Ezek. 16;23 (6x)). The densest concentration of ‘*erwah* occurs in the legislative texts which address the subject of incest (Leviticus 18,20; 30x). In these two chapters adultery is not referred to as ‘*erwah*. This sin (‘*erwah*) *defiles the land*, is an *abomination* to Yahweh, and *makes unholy the people whose God is holy* (Lev. 20:22-26; cf. Deut. 24:1-4)).

The ‘*erwah*-of-a-thing is the family secret. The young wife has been seduced by or entered into a liaison with a family member. Was it with her father-in-law? If so, the circumstances would fit Amos’s depiction of the sins of Israel: “A man and his father go to the young girl with the result of (or, for the purpose of) profaning my holy name” (2:7b). The order, “a man and his father,” implies that the father-in-law’s acts followed those of the young husband. The identity of the male participant does not emerge from the available data nor is there any indication of action taken toward him. The sin which mars this marriage relationship is that of incest.

Partners in sexual sin should both receive the same punishment unless the act is established as rape. The law of Deuteronomy 22:23-29 distinguishes between consent and rape. If it occurred in a city, the claim of rape would be sustained only if the woman had cried out in protest or for help (Deut. 22:23-29). But incest tends to be treated as a family secret (cf. 2 Sam. 13), to be borne in silence by the woman. The case of Tamar and Amnon demonstrates that the attitude toward male sexual aberrations is more forgiving than toward those of the female. Even David would not confront Amnon, because he was firstborn (2 Sam. 13:21).

So, why is the woman punished? Because she consented. Whether a willing, seduced, reluctant or resistant participant, she is identified as {47} being guilty at least in part, though the verbal form accents what was done to her. Incest is compounded with additional sins; among them one or more of the following.

Unequal Access to Justice. Hidden in the antiseptic legal terminology of this case may be the indictment of local law which favors men over women, the powerful over the weak, the civic leaders and judges over the commoner. That is one of the prominent concerns of the Book of Deuteronomy. If this *ba’al*, like those of Shechem (Judges 9),

Gibeah (Judges 20:5), Keilah (1 Sam. 23:11,12), and the husband of the virtuous wife (Prov. 31:23,28), is sitting in the city gate with his colleagues on the bench, what chance does a woman without a powerful male sponsor have in getting a hearing, let alone justice? How much more hopeless is the case of one who has been shamed by divorce, and who has lost her reputation because of incest? She would be more than shunned; she would be the object of children's laughter, the jeers of her neighbors, and possibly even be subject to physical abuse (Isa. 47:1-3; 54:4,6; Lam. 1:8). She would be treated like a prostitute being punished, for whom the ultimate shame is to have her skirts pulled up to expose her genitals, or be stripped naked. Even her partners in sin would turn from her in disgust (Hosea 2:9,10; Ezek. 16:36,37).

But there is more injustice tucked away in the ethos and practices embedding this text. Every Israelite would identify two of these on reflex.

Blaming the "Victim" and Excusing the Perpetrator. Where is the man? Why was he not indicted? We have no way of knowing the identity of the man, nor does it matter. But why lay all the blame on the woman? Here is gross injustice on the part of the husband. Was he protecting his father, brother, uncle, or other family member? The text would imply that the cause was serious enough, signified by the term *'erwah*, though divorce was not required by law. The phrase "because she did not find favor in his eyes" implies that it was an action he chose to take. God's provision for failure was confession, repentance and forgiveness. Indeed, it is even possible that the woman did confess her sin to her husband and he found it impossible to forgive her. That would explain the absence of the mention of the male participant. Since there were no witnesses, the man could not be publicly identified and she alone would be mentioned, since she had been noble enough to confess the event and the extent of her consent.

Greed and Economic Injustice. A Hebrew audience hearing the law publicly expounded or defended would at this point be up in arms and cry out against the deafening silence: "He got the dowry! That's grossly unfair!"

Dowry, we ask? What does dowry have to do with any of this? {48}

Here the Babylonian marriage and inheritance laws and contracts provide background and social context. Roth notes that "the transmission of wealth is the most frequent and probably the most important consideration in the documents we call marriage agreements" (28). She notes as well, that "the transfer of the dowry was the most important feature of the agreements" (26). Westbrook's study of the transfer of property in Old Babylonian marriage agreements leads him to conclude that "upon divorce . . . if the wife were the guilty party her dowry was forfeited to her husband; if she were the innocent victim of her husband's whim, she retained the dowry" [92]. The Babylonian laws

are preoccupied with the contractual details, particularly the dowry, bride price, disposition of the inheritance, and allocation of the husband, father and father-in-law's gifts to the bride and wife. Honor, security, and power come with material wealth. The Hebrew marriage legislation makes no mention of these practices. Why not? Did they not exist in Israel?

Yes, they did. Every marriage involved the transfer, exchange, and redistribution of a significant part of the families' wealth. We may illustrate from the Hebrew Bible. Abraham's servant took ten camels and "all kinds of good things from his master" (Gen. 24:10) in preparation for negotiating for a bride for Isaac. These included gifts for the bride in the form of a nose-ring and bracelets (v. 47) and gold and silver jewelry and articles of clothing (v. 53), as well as "costly gifts to her brother and to her mother" (v. 53). Jacob worked for seven years for each of his wives, since he did not have the bride-price in hand (Gen. 29). David showed his respect for and won Michal's hand in marriage with two hundred Philistine foreskins, twice the asking bride price (1 Sam. 18:20-27).

The transfer of wealth at the marriage of a daughter included the bride-price paid to the relatives of the bride, the dowry (equivalent to the capital invested in a retirement plan and representing from 5-25% of the bride's family's wealth) which is given to the bride by her parents, and gifts given to the bride by her father, husband, and father-in-law. Indeed, the Babylonian legislation describes at least five different types of gifts or exchanges which occur between members of the families being united in marriage.

Failure to Maintain the Marriage Covenant. One is struck by the vivid contrast between the Babylonian, Egyptian, Roman, and Greek marriage legislation and documents and those of Israel. Dowry, money and gifts, terms of dismissal—these are present everywhere except in the Bible. Why is such a prominent matter not a part of the description of the institution of marriage in Israel?

Among God's people, marriage was understood to be a *covenant* (Prov. 2:16-17; Mal. 2:13-16). That is, marriage was viewed as a commitment to a relationship rather than to an exchange of goods {49} and services. The marriage *contracts* were prenuptial agreements defining the terms of the marriage and the terms of the divorce, should the marriage end prematurely. Israel's faith affected marriage. The Babylonian marriage contracts, written within a deeply religious culture are strictly legal, but involve what was of paramount importance to that culture: wealth.

Covenants can be violated, resulting in lawsuits, but they are at core relational. Covenantal marriages set economics in their place. When marriage is treated as covenant, it becomes a community-building

practice under the eye of the God who has made covenant with his people. In covenant making, the promise is to love and to honor; the provision for stressed and conflicted marriages lies in the community resources and the means of grace. Every Israelite understood that covenants could be violated but could not be annulled (cf. Rom. 7:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:39; Gal. 3:15) [Guenther, 88]. Breaking covenant faith with another member of the community was serious indeed, since every violation of a covenant meant that a promise made in the presence of God and the witnessing community was being broken. It was an affront to God's name, used in the oath and vow at marriage.

The Remaining Conditions

and if . . . he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house and she then leaves his house and goes off to become another man's wife and either the second man dislikes her, writes her a bill of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or the second man who married her dies. . . .

We reconstruct the scene to this point. The first husband divorced his wife for a legally "just cause"—*erwah*, incest. She takes nothing with her, being stripped of everything except the clothes on her back, unless these too were gifts from her husband (cf. Hosea 2:9-13). She exits from the home of her first husband with no means of livelihood. She has lost dowry, family, reputation, standing in the community, her virginity and purity, and the covenant (marriage) partner of her youth. Laws like Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and court records are antiseptic; they have the pain drained out of them.

The husband, however, has broken faith with his wife and with God by divorcing her. This divorced and rejected *be'ulah* is bent on surviving. She takes the initiative; "she goes and becomes (attaches herself) to another man." In effect, she has nothing to offer except her domestic and sexual services. But this second man accepts her with the status of wife (v. 3b). This implies that she receives gifts and assurances of security from {50} her second husband. He may even have provided her the equivalent of a dowry for sustenance in her old age. She is saved!

The conditions spelled out in the phrase, "if he hates her" represent an unjustified or lesser cause for divorce. When the Babylonian laws describe the reason for divorce in the words, "if he hates her" as the husband's "fault," and where there are no children by the marriage, the divorced woman exits with her dowry as well as with the divorce penalty [Westbrook, 69-75]. The punishments of a guilty wife correspond closely to those mentioned by Yahweh/Hosea in the treatment of faithless Israel/Gomer (Hosea 2:2-13; cf. Ezekiel 16:30-42).

If similar regulations obtain within Israel, the wife, divorced by her second husband because “he hates her,” takes with her the divorce settlement, dowry, and gifts received, depending on the terms of the initial marriage agreement (Deut. 24). Should husband #2 die during their marriage, the law would give the wife her dowry and any gifts received, and possibly a part of the inheritance. She came into this second marriage destitute; she leaves it with ample security for the future. Marriage to such a woman would be desirable indeed.

The Prohibition (v. 4a)

Her ba'al, the first one who sent her away, is not permitted to take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled. . . .

The prohibition itself is directed at the community as the restraining agent. Its interests are not served in permitting its leaders to function in this way. Their life practices are factors in qualifying or disqualifying persons for public service.

The Nature of the Defilement. The preceding conditions are necessary to provide grounds for the conclusion, namely, that the first husband is not permitted to take back his former wife. The question that remains an enigma to us is: What has defiled the woman so that husband #1 is not permitted to remarry his former wife though it did not prevent the woman's marriage to husband #2? Why, the incest! The incestuous relationship occasioning the first divorce occurred between “consenting adults.” Such acts may characterize the original inhabitants but are out of place among God's people. This man and woman have violated sexual proprieties in practicing what was commonplace among the Canaanites whom God expelled from the land. Her complicity in the incestuous relationship caused her to be defiled. His act of divorce has caused her to seek survival and security through remarriage. Again, she had no say in the divorce, but she had an option regarding remarriage. She was defiled by her husband who rejected his wife by covenant and left her destitute; she defiled herself {51} in the act of remarrying, thereby breaking a covenantal relationship with the husband of her youth, her *ba'al*.

So why is husband #1 not permitted to take her back? Surely, reconciliation is at the heart of God's design for his people! Particularly in marriage! And, according to the conditions set forth, she would be freed in the second divorce should her second husband die.

Underlying Reasons For The Prohibition. This type of legislation, Westbrook explains (1986:389), is governed by the legal principle of estoppel. That is, a person is prohibited from benefitting twice from the same set of circumstances, once by declaring the facts true, the next time by declaring them false.

The husband #1 is prohibited from taking his wife back for two reasons. First, because he claimed her defilement as the grounds for

divorce. He received his wife's dowry and acquired her wealth as indemnity. The law prohibits him, once having claimed that her moral failure made it impossible for him to share bed and board with her, from remarrying his former wife, now that she has again become well-to-do. He cannot have it both ways. Either the moral lapse was sufficiently severe to warrant a "justified" divorce or it was a fake. If it was not so severe, why divorce her in the first place?

The divorce constitutes a considered action of separation, which action, once chosen, cannot be reversed. The divorced party may choose to be reconciled, and would then need to take the initiative in restoration. Divorce is not an action which serves a warning function. It is intentional and is regarded as final. Only the divorced person may initiate restoration of the marriage (cf. Jer. 3; Hosea 2,3).

This woman has been twice violated (defiled)—by incest and by the divorce which caused her to remarry, thus violating her earlier covenant. She contributed to both events, yet the husband of the covenant of her youth is primarily accountable for both acts of defilement and consequently is not permitted to benefit a second time from his wife's renewed security (wealth) or her person (emotional, social and sexual fulfillment). For the *ba'al* to initiate remarriage would be an abomination (*to'ebah*) before Yahweh. The term reflects an ethical norm deeply rooted in a people's psyche and tradition.

A MESSAGE TO LEADERS

I conclude that the act which defiled the woman is tucked away in the ethos-charged phrase, *'erwat—dabar*, "something objectionable." The legislation governing incest and consanguinity (Lev. 18,20) speaks loudest on the subject, connecting it to three primary, culturally defined {52} terms also found in this text: *something objectionable*, *it defiles*, and an *abominable practice*. The text pointed us in two directions regarding the source of the defilement, both related to the qualifications for leadership. These are informal qualifications, as much felt as observed, inasmuch as they affect the level of trust generated in the citizens and the degree to which the leader models religious purity and personal maturity.

The occasion for the story is an instance of incest between the first wife of a householder (*ba'al*), the mistress of the household, and some other member of the extended family of a civic leader. The fundamental concern of the text is that the community test its leaders, in view of the power they wield in public affairs. The leaders, in turn, must be particularly sensitive about the way they exercise their power in personal affairs lest they abuse those who depend on them for nurture and justice. How else can they or others encourage the community to emulate the models of maturity among them? Indeed, their marriage constitutes a major witness to the character, love and persistent grace of Yahweh toward his chosen and redeemed people.

Inasmuch as in Israel marriage is a covenant which mirrors God's relationship with his people, a violation of that covenant distorts Israel's perception of the most fundamental of all relationships. Such a violation represents a rejection of the means of reconciliation. It also violates the vow made in God's hearing to the effect that God, as witness, is invited to visit sanctions against the one failing to fulfill the vow (oath of self-imprecation). The man who divorces his wife is failing to represent Yahweh faithfully. He has become unworthy of leading the people of God.

The leader's reputation should be untarnished. Therefore both Testaments indicate the importance of closely scrutinizing potential leaders and of holding those who lead to a high standard of personal and spiritual maturity. In writing to Titus and Timothy, Paul lists the qualifications which the discerning community recognizes as appropriate expectations for leadership. And Paul cares very much about his reputation lest the Gospel be depreciated by lies against him. Leaders can lead well only if they have the trust and respect of those they serve and if they model God well. Only those should be given leadership responsibilities of whom it can be said, "Their life is an imitation and a faithful pointer to our God."

Plutarch, the Roman moralist of the first Christian century, agrees with the Christian teaching and captures both the spirit and the circumstances of this torah:

A man, therefore ought to have his household well harmonized who is going to harmonize State, Forum, and friends. For it is much more likely that the sins of women rather than sins against women will go unnoticed by most people. [Moralia, Advice to Bride and Groom, 43] {53}

Observing and promoting a model of maturity requires that the community mores have become part of the ethos and fabric and self-definition of the members. It consists in part of specific, observable and identifiable character traits. These can serve both to test those presently in office and to qualify or exclude prospective leaders. From this text we could deduce that greed, injustice, domestic violence and abuse do not grace a public official. Instead, a community leader should be patient, forgiving and reconciling, stable and mature, generous with personal possessions, sensitive to the welfare of the socially, economically and morally weaker person, faithful to one's spouse, and able to rule his/her household well.

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