

## More Instances of Theft – Deuteronomy 24:1-7

**Introduction** – Moses concludes his exposition of the eighth commandment with more case laws and proverbial principles. We will look at them all first and then spend the majority of our time on the one that has produced the most tangles and twisting of the Scriptures even to our day.

**Overview** – The first four verses deal with a very specific set of circumstances involving divorce and remarriage. The eighth commandment may be involved because these sins bring forth sin and cursing upon the land “*which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance.*” Marriage and divorce do not simply affect two individuals; the whole community and its blessings or curses under God are affected.

**Verse 5** gives an honorable discharge to those in military service or other public service for one year at the time of marriage in order to “*bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken.*”

**Verse 6** establishes that the rights of a creditor are not absolute, and a debtor could not have his livelihood taken from him as a pledge. This teaching also brought forth the end of debtor’s-prisons.

**Verse 7** describes kidnapping as “man-stealing” and prohibits it, calling for the death penalty upon those who would steal those made in the image of God. This teaching also brought forth the end of slave trading.

**Divorce-Theft** (vv1-4) – This case law is very specific and we must therefore examine it carefully to avoid what has often led to poor applications. First, a man gives his wife a certificate of divorce because of some uncleanness (a broad term referring to shameful sexual exposure). Second, the divorced woman remarries (v2). Third, the second husband “detests” her, apparently without moral cause, or dies (v3). Under those conditions, the first husband may not remarry her.

**Words of Jesus** (Matt 19:3-9) – It is helpful to consider this passage in light of Christ’s words on the topic. Because of varied interpretations of this passage amongst the Pharisees, they come and test Jesus on the question of divorce and remarriage. Jesus first points to Eden and not Sinai for what is the ideal teaching on marriage (vv4-6). He then corrects their misunderstanding that in some way Deut 4:1-4 commanded divorce (vv7-8). What it was commanding was that if there was a divorce, the woman must be given a certificate to establish her legally in a particular way (especially with regard to property rights). He approves of the permission to divorce in certain circumstances, but He makes clear that this only occurs because of (at least one) hard heart (vv8-9). God hates divorce (Mal 2:13-16) because it robs the land of godly families, godly raising of offspring, and the passing on of the treasures of the covenant to successive generations.

**Marriage-Theft** – Back in Deuteronomy, we now can see what is being addressed in the law in the context of the eighth commandment. When the first husband divorces his wife for “uncleanness” which was a just cause, he incurred no financial loss. When the second husband divorced his wife in some kind of “no-fault” way, he had to provide her with a financial settlement. Or, if the second husband died, the wife would have all of his assets. This law (vv1-4) is therefore a prohibition of the first husband profiting twice from the same woman.

**From the Beginning It Was Not So** – It is important to note both the ideal teaching and the reality of the messy world in which we live. God is remaking, rebuilding, and restoring a new paradise from the wreckage of fallen Adam and He is doing so over the course of years and generations and centuries. What does this mean?

**Crimes and Sins** – Just because it is legally permitted, does not mean that it is morally approved. God is far more concerned about our hearts than He is about making sure we have all the paperwork completed correctly. There is adultery in the heart, and there are remarriages that are really marriages with all the civil and legal implications.

**Marriage and Divorce are not Private Affairs** – These relationships are the backbone and foundation of society and culture. How we court, how we keep ourselves sexually pure, how we marry, and when and how we allow divorce (and with what kind of attitude) all affect the culture we are building, living in, and passing on to our children. Because we have become a nation that wants to treat all of these as private matters, we are destroying the spiritual, emotional, and financial makeup of our people. This is the breach of the eighth commandment. This is not just a problem in this individual home and that individual home. Unlawful divorce and remarriage defiles the land; it steals the blessing of the Lord’s inheritance which the land is to enjoy.

**Power of Faithful Marriage** – Marriage is a covenant relationship established by God to pass on the blessings of His covenant and build upon those blessings for generation after generation. As a covenant, we must also see and receive by faith that faithfulness to that covenant brings forth far more blessings upon families, their land, and their culture, than could ever be measured. Among other things this means that your marriage is *always* worth cultivating.