

## RESPONSIBLE UNFAIRNESS

### A Devotional Meditation on Mattot (Tribes) and Massei (Stages)

Numbers 30:2-36:13; Jeremiah 2:4-28, 3:1-16, 31:31-34; Genesis 2:15-16; Isaiah 28:14-18; Hosea 13:12-14; Ephesians 5:21-33; 1 Corinthians 15:51-57

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One of the joys of responsible parenthood is educating our children about money. For us, that meant helping our daughters learn about bank accounts, balancing checkbooks, managing credit cards, and taking out loans. When our oldest went to Europe as a high school student, we got her a credit card designed for young people. We could set limits on her spending and keep watch over her account to see that she used her money properly. Both she and her sister needed student loans to finish college. We gladly cosigned those



*Angry mother and daughter. Photo: verkeorg, February 19, 2016, via Flickr.*

loans, taking on the responsibility to repay if our daughters could not. When they began working and earning their own income, I helped them with their tax returns. Their responsibility was to keep proper records, and I would make sure their returns were done correctly. That also gave me oversight of my daughters' financial situations.

I don't recall seeing anything questionable in their accounts, but if I had, I would have asked them about it. If, for example, they had acquired a new credit card at an exorbitant rate, or taken out a disadvantageous loan, then my wife and I would have looked into the matter and, if necessary, intervened to keep them from getting into serious financial trouble. That's what loving, responsible parents are supposed to do.

At some point, parental oversight must come to an end. If it doesn't, children never truly become adults responsible for their own actions. I am confident that, had our girls remained single, my wife and I would have stepped away from the oversight role and let them take charge of their own affairs. That's also would have happened if we had raised sons. It's part of the process of preparing our children to run their own households and, hopefully, unite in marriage with a godly spouse and raise children of their own to be responsible, godly adults.

Our daughters were already at the point of responsible independence when they got married. Each had her own career, and they really didn't need much help getting along in life. Their unions with their husbands marked the logical point at which our responsibility ended as they entered new relationships where they and their husbands began managing their own affairs. In our biblical worldview, that meant our daughters changed their names and established new homes with their husbands. Those young men became the heads of their new households, and with our daughters navigated the process of integrating their

separate identities into a new shared identity. In financial terms, that meant taking charge of debts and obligations like student loans and credit cards. Both couples did well in this, much to the joy of all their parents.

But why did our daughters have to change their names and subordinate their identities to their husbands? To our modern ears, that sounds like an antiquated, patriarchal concept. It may have worked in ancient societies, but what has it really done for humanity other than provide justification for male domination of women?

We have to ask that question because the hurt is real. I know godly women who have suffered in silence because their church culture had interpreted male headship as male domination and female subordination. It's a gaping wound in our spiritual communities that must be addressed so that healing may come to the whole Body, and so the Body can extend that healing to a hurting world.

Maybe we can start with those places in the Bible where male domination seems to be justified. Here's one from the book of Numbers. After explaining that any vow a man utters is a binding obligation, the Almighty then says,

Suppose a woman in her youth vows to *ADONAI* or obligates herself by a pledge in her father's house. If her father should hear her vow or her pledge with which she obligated herself and her father says nothing to her, all her vows and every pledge by which she has obligated herself will stand. But if her father should forbid it on the day of his hearing it, none of her vows or pledges by which she has obligated herself will stand. *ADONAI* will forgive her because her father has forbidden her.

Suppose she should marry, after her vow or a rash promise of her lips by which she obligated herself. Now if her husband hears about it but says nothing to her on the day he hears about it, her vows will stand and her pledges by which she has obligated herself will stand. But if her husband should hear about it and on the day he hears it he forbids it, he thereby nullifies her vow and her rash promise by which her lips have obligated her, and *ADONAI* will forgive her.

Numbers 30:3-8 TLV

This passage seems to indicate that God's ways are unfair to women. A daughter and a wife apparently have lesser status than a son and a husband, not even having authority to incur obligations on their own behalf. Is that really the case?

Not really. This Torah provision doesn't prevent daughters and wives from making vows, but rather adds a degree of protection for them. This is a picture of our God's relationship with His people. He is the Bridegroom to His Covenant Nation of Israel, and that relationship is depicted in holy covenant of marriage between a man and a woman. That is why Scripture names the father and the husband as the head of the household, just as the Almighty is Head of His creation.

Husbands are supposed to work in partnership with their wives, not act as totalitarian lords over them. Any oath or vow or obligation that impacts the household should be undertaken by mutual agreement. However, the husband has the last word, and may overrule any commitment by the wife or the daughter – or the minor son, by the way – which could have a negative impact on the household. The responsible man will do so in love so that those in his house will understand in time. It is the foolish man who lets his

family run amok, running up debts, bringing in uninvited guests, filling up the calendar with events that hinder family togetherness, and other obligations that fracture the family unit and rob it of its strength. In time the family dies, and as families die, the nation dies.

This is the teaching point regarding the Law of Vows. The Bride of Almighty God has uttered a vow and incurred a debt against His will. The conditions of that vow were set at the beginning, when God told the first humans that eating from the forbidden tree would bring certain death. Our ancestors disobeyed this instruction. In their disobedience they made a vow, concluding a covenant with Death.

The Creator did take action on the day He heard of this covenant, promising to deal with it in time. His solution was to establish a Nation that would become His Bride. We know the Nation's name: it is Israel. We know also that Israel continued to court Death, and many times renewed that covenant. That was why the Bridegroom-King exiled His Bridal-Nation, using language that sounded like the writ of divorce a man would give an adulterous wife. Yet the story does not end there. The Bridegroom, Messiah Yeshua, incurred the penalty of death on behalf of His Bride, making it possible for her to return to Him in renewed matrimony. That is what the Wedding Feast of the Lamb is all about. On that day when our King returns and consummates His marriage with His people, He will hear officially of this covenant we have made with Death, and He will deal with it. That is when our covenant with Death will be annulled, the sting of Death removed, and the victory of the grave overturned.

Is the Bible really unfair to women? No, not when we understand it in proper context. It's our imperfect understanding and application of God's principles that can be unfair, to women and to anyone, actually. Yet that, too, is the fruit of the unwise vows we've made in the web of our covenants with Death. The wise and responsible course is to do what we can to heal the damage of those unwise vows as we await the day when our Bridegroom puts them to rest.