

## Deuteronomy Chapter 20

### Verses 1-20

The humanitarian principles applicable in war under Mosaic law are in stark contrast to the brutality and cruelty of other nations.

The fourth subsection relates to war.

### Verses 1-9

In the wars wherein Israel engaged according to the will of God, they might expect Divine assistance.

The LORD was to be their only confidence.

In these respects, they were types of the Christian's warfare.

Those unwilling to fight, must be sent away.

The unwillingness might arise from a man's outward condition.

God would not be served by men forced against their will.

Thy people shall be willing (Psalm 110:3).

In running the Christian race, and fighting the good fight of faith, we must lay aside all that would make us unwilling.

If a man's unwillingness rose from weakness and fear, he had leave to return from the war.

The reason given here is, lest his brethren's heart fail as well as his heart.

We must take heed that we fear not with the fear of them that are afraid (Isa. 8:12).

### Verses 1-4

The chariot was the tank of the ancient Near East.

To “seest horses and chariots” would be most disheartening for the Hebrews going into battle; they needed to know they had greater strength on their side than all the chariots of the world!

God had already shown Himself faithful in bringing the nation “out of the land of Egypt”; His presence would be with them when they were confronted by threatening armies (Exodus 15:3; Joshua 11:6).

**Deuteronomy 20:1 "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, [and] a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God [is] with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."**

“Be not afraid”:

When Israelites went into battle, they were never to fear an enemy’s horses or chariots because the outcome of a battle would never be determined by mere military strength.

The command not to be afraid was based on God’s power and faithfulness, which had already been proved to Israel in their deliverance from Egypt.

Moses often used the deliverance from Egypt to encourage his people to live for God and accomplish His will (4:20; 5:15; 6:12; 8:14; 10:19; 11:2-3; 24:18, 22; 26:5, 8).

This would be unusual teaching for a nation who belonged to God, but they are about to go in and take the Promised Land.

God wants them to have faith in Him, and not fear the military of the countries they are to fight.

Pharaoh had a large army with horses and chariots, and God destroyed them.

They must remember that, and go out in faith to battle.

They must not be overwhelmed by the physical strength of their enemies.

They must have faith that God will fight for them.

Verses 2-9:

Military exemptions were given to:

- (1) Those who had “built a new house” but had not dedicated it;
- (2) Those who had “planted a vineyard” but had not enjoyed its fruit;
- (3) The man who had recently “betrothed a wife;” and
- (4) Those who were “fearful and fainthearted” (literally, “soft of heart”), compare Judges 7:2-3, who posed a threat to the whole army.

Verses 2-4

“The priest ... speak unto the people”:

The role of the priest in battle was to encourage the soldiers by God’s promise, presence, and power to be strong in faith.

A lack of trust in God’s ability to fight for them would affect the strength of their will so that they would become fainthearted.

Victory was linked to their faith in God.

**Deuteronomy 20:2 "And it shall be, when ye are come nigh unto the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people,"**

"The priest shall approach":

The Jews say there was a priest anointed for the purpose, whose office, as we may gather from (Num. 31:6), was to blow with the trumpet when they were preparing for battle.

"And speak to the people":

Probably exhorting them, in the most persuasive manner, to a courageous and undaunted performance of their duty.

Considering their cause as God’s, and relying on his protection and aid.

When the priest speaks to the people, it means this is a holy war.

This is a war God has sent them to.

God will be with them in battle.

**Deuteronomy 20:3 "And shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them;"**

Exciting their attention to what he was about to say, and which, as Jarchi observes, was spoken in the holy tongue, or in the Hebrew language.

"Ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies":

Were marching or ready to march, preparing to engage with them, and a battle seemed near at hand.

"Let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them":

Many words are made use of to animate them against those fears which the strength, number, and appearance of their enemies, would be apt to cause in them.

Jarchi observes, that here are four exhortations, answerable to four things which the kings of the nations do (in order to inject terror into their enemies).

1. They shake their shields, to clash them one against another, that hearing their noise they may be afraid of them and flee;
2. They prance their horses, and make them neigh, to cause the noise of the hoofs of their horses to be heard;
3. They shout with their voices, and blow with their trumpets. and accordingly, these several clauses are so interpreted in the Misnah;"
4. "And let not your hearts faint". At the neighing of the horses, and the brightness of swords. "Fear not"; at the clashing of shields: "And do not tremble"; at the sound of trumpets. "Neither be ye terrified" at the voice of shouting."

And no doubt but it takes in everything that has a tendency to cause fear, faintness, and dismay, which they are cautioned against.

This speech of the priest is to encourage the heart of Israel.

They must place their faith in God, not earthly power.

**Deuteronomy 20:4 "For the LORD your God [is] he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you."**

To battle, and therefore they had no reason to fear and be dismayed.

To be fainthearted, terrified, and tremble.

"Fear not, I am with thee" (Isa. 41:10).

This, according to the Misnah, respects the ark, and so Jarchi.

Which was a symbol of the divine Presence, and went with them to battle (see Joshua 6:4).

"To fight for you against your enemies, to save you":

To annoy and destroy the one, and to protect and save the other.

Thus far the anointed priest addressed the people in an oration to this purpose.

The account Maimonides gives of it is, that "when they have set their ranks, and are near to a battle, the anointed of war stands on a high place, and all the ranks before him, and says to them in the holy tongue, "hear, O Israel", etc. unto to save you.

And then another priest under him causes it to be heard by all the people with a high voice.

He repeated what the anointed of war had said, and expressed it with a loud voice, that all might hear.

It is such a shame that many of our later song books have removed the song, Onward Christian Soldiers.

That is exactly what Moses is explaining to them here.

They are not fighting out of hate, but as a soldier of God.

They are carrying out the will of God on the earth.

God is leading the battle.

A good soldier of the cross will follow Him into battle.

Verses 5-8

“let him also go and return unto his house”:

Four exemptions from service in Israel’s volunteer army were cited to illustrate the principle that anyone whose heart was not in the fight should not be there.

Those who had other matters on their minds or were afraid were allowed to leave the army and return to their homes, since they would be useless in battle and even influence others to lose courage (verse 8).

**Deuteronomy 20:5 "And the officers shall speak unto the people, saying, What man [is there] that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it? let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man dedicate it."**

Houses were dedicated by feasting and thanksgiving to God (see Psalm 30:1; Neh. 12:27).

Hebrew:

Hath initiated it; i.e., entered upon it, taken possession of it, and dwelt in it.

"Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle”:

And thereby he be negligent or timorous in the battle, to the scandal and prejudice of others.

"Another man dedicate it”:

And so he should lose and another get the fruit of his labors, which might seem unjust or hard.

And God provides even for men’s infirmities.

But this and the following exceptions are to be understood only of a war allowed by God, not in a war commanded by God.

Not in the approaching war with the Canaanites, from which even the bridegroom was not exempted, as the Jewish writers note.

This is stating that a man who has just built a house could be exempt from the immediate battle, to go and dedicate the home he built.

The officers were the ones who took the roles of the soldiers available, and decided who would fight in each battle.

This exemption is for a short time, so the person could enjoy dedicating his own house.

**Deuteronomy 20:6 "And what man [is he] that hath planted a vineyard, and hath not [yet] eaten of it? let him [also] go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man eat of it."**

Which he has a right to do, and it is hard for him to be deprived of it (1 Cor. 9:7).

Or "hath not made it common"; according to the law in (Lev. 19:23).

Three years the fruit of trees, and so of vines, might not be eaten; in the fourth, they were devoted to the LORD, and might be redeemed from the priest, and so made common.

And on the fifth year were eaten in course.

So the Targums of Jerusalem, Jonathan, and Jarchi, interpret it:

"Let him also go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man eat of it".

Or make it common, according to the above law.

Aben Ezra seems to have another sense of this passage, deriving the word from another, which signifies piping and dancing, and observes, that it was a custom to sing, pipe, and dance in vineyards.

And the Septuagint version is, "hath not been made merry of it"; though that may signify not having drank of the wine of it, to be made merry with it.

This is the same as the house above.

This exemption is for just a short period of time, so he can enjoy his own vineyard.

**Deuteronomy 20:7 "And what man [is there] that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her."**

Home to his house and bedded her.

Has only betrothed her, but is not properly married to her, the nuptials are not completed.

This the Jews understand of anyone betrothed to him, whether a virgin or a widow, or the wife of a deceased brother.

"Let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in battle, and another man take her":

Marry her.

In the case of the wife, he was to be exempt from war for the period of one year.

Deuteronomy 24:5 "When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, neither shall he be charged with any business: [but] he shall be free at home one year, and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken."

**Deuteronomy 20:8 "And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man [is there that is] fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart."**

According to Maimonides, the priest the anointed of war spoke of at the end of (Deut. 20:7), and which the officers repeated after him to the people aloud, as before observed.

And then after that an officer speaks of himself, or in his own words, and not in those of the priest, as follows.

What man that is fearful, etc. And then another officer causes all the people to hear it.

"And they shall say, what man is there that is fearful and fainthearted?"

That has not courage to face his enemies.

To whom the terrors of war, and especially of death, are dreadful.

The Targum of Jonathan adds, "because of his sin;" whose sins stare him in the face, and lie heavy on his conscience.

So that he is afraid he shall die in battle, and in his sins, and suffer divine vengeance.

Both these senses are observed in the Misnah.

According to R. Akiba, a fearful and fainthearted man is one "that cannot stand in battle array, or behold a drawn sword".

But R. Jose the Galilean says, he is one that is afraid of the transgressions he has committed.

"And therefore the law joins to this all those things for which a man may return."

As having built a new house, planted a vineyard, and betrothed a wife.

That so it might be thought it was on account of one or other of these that he returned.

And not through faintheartedness, either because of the terrors of war, or of his own conscience for his sins.

"Let him go and return to his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart":

Lest, by his pale looks and trembling joints, his fainting fits and swoons, he discourages the rest in the company with him.

And by his example make them unfit for war also.

God did not want His army to include the fainthearted or be afraid.

Notice this same situation in the following Scriptures about Gideon.

Judges 7:2-3 "And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that [are] with thee [are] too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me."

"Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever [is] fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead.

And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand."

If we were to read on in this book of judges, we would find that God used only 300 brave men for the battle against the thousands, and the Israelites won.

God and one is a majority.

**Deuteronomy 20:9 "And it shall be, when the officers have made an end of speaking unto the people, that they shall make captains of the armies to lead the people."**

By reciting what the anointed of war said unto them, and by speeches of their own framing, to encourage them to the battle.

And all were dismissed that had leave to depart, and chose to take it.

"That they shall make captains of armies to lead on the people":

On to the battle.

That is, either the officers should do this, which may seem to confirm what has been hinted.

That they might be generals of the army, who constituted captains under them, to lead the people on to battle.

Unless this is to be understood of the princes of Israel, or of the king when they had one, and his ministers.



For it does not appear in any instance that the people choose their own officers over them, to go out before them, and lead them on to battle.

Or "to be at the head of them"; which the Jewish writers understand in a very different sense.

Not to head them, or be at the head of them, to direct and command them, but to keep them from deserting.

Their sense is, that the officers having dismissed persons in the circumstances before described, and set stout men before them, and others behind them (i.e. the army of the people).

With iron hatchets in their hands, and every one that sought to return, they had power to cut off his legs; since flight is the beginning of falling before their enemies.

The officers choose out brave men of each group to lead them in battle.

They are made captains.

#### Verses 10-18

The Israelites were told they should "utterly destroy" the Canaanite cities because of their wickedness, but they were initially to offer peace for cities outside of Canaan (Num. 31:7; Joshua 8:2; 2 Sam. 10:19).

#### Verses 10-15

"Then proclaim peace unto it":

Cities outside of Canaan were not under the judgment of total destruction, so to them Israel was to offer a peace treaty.

If the city agreed to become a vassal to Israel, then the people would become tributary subjects.

However, if the offer of peace was rejected, Israel was to besiege and take the city, killing the men and taking possession of the rest of the people and animals as spoils of war.

Note here the principle that the proclamation of peace preceded judgment (compare Matt. 10:11-15).

#### Verses 10-12

The Israelites are here directed about the nations on whom they made war.

Let this show God's grace in dealing with sinners.

He proclaims peace, and beseeches them to be reconciled.

Let it also show us our duty in dealing with our brethren.

Whoever are for war, we must be for peace.

Of the cities given to Israel, none of their inhabitants must be left.

Since it could not be expected that they should be cured of their idolatry, they would hurt Israel.

These regulations are not the rules of our conduct, but Christ's law of love.

The horrors of war must fill the feeling heart with anguish upon every recollection; and are proofs of the wickedness of man, the power of Satan, and the just vengeance of God, who thus scourges a guilty world.

But how dreadful their case who are engaged in unequal conflict with their Maker, who will not submit to render him the easy tribute of worship and praise!

Certain ruin awaits them.

Let neither the number nor the power of the enemies of our souls dismay us; nor let even our own weakness cause us to tremble or to faint.

The LORD will save us; but in this war let none engage whose hearts are fond of the world, or afraid of the cross and the conflict.

Care is here taken that in besieging cities the fruit-trees should not be destroyed.

God is a better friend to man than he is to himself; and God's law consults our interests and comforts; while our own appetites and passions, which we indulge, are enemies to our welfare.

Many of the Divine precepts restrain us from destroying that which is for our life and food.

The Jews understand this as forbidding all willful waste upon any account whatsoever.

Every creature of God is good; as nothing is to be refused, so nothing is to be abused.

We may live to want what we carelessly waste.

**Deuteronomy 20:10 "When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it."**

This is to be understood of an arbitrary war, as Jarchi observes.

Which they engaged in of themselves, or were provoked to by their enemies.

Which was their own choice, and according to their own will and pleasure.

And their conduct towards their enemies in it was different from that in a war with the seven nations, commanded by the LORD, and distinguished from it (Deut. 20:15).

"Then proclaim peace unto it":

That is, offer them terms of peace.

Which were, that the inhabitants of it should renounce idolatry, and become their tributaries and servants.

The first thing they are to do before they enter a city is offer them a peaceful surrender.

If they will surrender, they will not die.

**Deuteronomy 20:11 "And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, [that] all the people [that is] found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee."**

Comply with the terms of peace offered.

"And open unto thee":

The gates of the city and its garrisons, and deliver all into their hands.

"Then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein":

Some having made their escape before the surrender of the city.

"Shall be tributaries unto thee":

Pay a yearly tax imposed upon them, as the Moabites sometimes did, and which was paid in lambs and rams with the wool (2 Kings 3:4).

"And they shall serve thee":

Not as slaves, or be in continual bondage and servitude.

But upon occasion be called out to any public service, as joining them against their enemies, rebuilding palaces and cities, or repairing walls of cities, and the like.

And in general acknowledge their dominion over them, and their own subjection to them, by paying an annual tribute, or sending gifts unto them.

Thus the Moabites, Syrians, and Edomites, became the servants of David (2 Sam. 8:2).

"Tributaries", in this verse means forced labor.

They will be servants to the Israelites, if they surrender peaceably.

**Deuteronomy 20:12 "And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it:"**

Will not accept of terms of peace offered.

"But will make war against thee":

Come out and fight, or prepare to defend themselves.

Then thou shalt besiege it; surround and block it up on all sides with their forces.

The Jews say only on three sides, leaving one for any to flee and make their escape if they thought fit (see notes on Num. 31:7).

If they do not surrender peaceably, then Israel shall fight against them.

**Deuteronomy 20:13 "And when the LORD thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword:"**

When, what with pressures without, and calamities within, the city is obliged to surrender.

This is not to be imputed to the methods and arts of war used in besieging, or to the courage and skill of the besiegers.

But to the power and providence of God succeeding means used.

And sending famine or pestilence among the besieged, and inclining their hearts to deliver up their city.

"Thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword":

The men in it, grown persons, as distinguished from little ones in the next verse.

Because it was owing to these it was not surrendered at once, when terms of peace were offered.

Since they did not surrender but chose to fight, all the men of the city will be killed, when Israel takes the city.

The LORD God will deliver every one of the cities to Israel.

**Deuteronomy 20:14 "But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, [even] all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the LORD thy God hath given thee."**

These were to be spared.

Women, because of the weakness of their sex, and subjection to their husbands.

And little ones, which take in males as well as females, as Jarchi observes, because of their tender age.

And cattle because of their insensibility.

All these having had no concern in holding out the siege.

"And all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shall thou take unto thyself":

Gold, silver, merchandise, household goods, utensils in trade, and whatever was of any worth and value to be found in their houses.

"And thou shall eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the LORD thy God hath given thee":

That is, enjoy all their wealth and riches, estates and possessions.

For this is not to be restrained to things eatable only.

The women and the children will be spared.

The wealth of the land will go into the hands of Israelite.

All the spoil will belong to them.

**Deuteronomy 20:15 "Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities [which are] very far off from thee, which [are] not of the cities of these nations."**

As all such were reckoned that were without the land of Israel, even all in their neighboring nations, the Moabites, Edomites, Ammonites, Syrians, etc.

For the children of Israel never went to war with any very distant nations, unless they came unto them and invaded them.

Nor did they seek to carry their conquests to any great distance, when the most powerful and victorious, as in the days of David and Solomon.

"Which are not of the cities of these nations":

Of these seven nations, as the Targum of Jonathan, the seven nations of the land of Canaan.

All that were not of them were accounted foreign cities, and at a distance.

Now we see that the sparing of the women and the children, is only if the cities are far away from the place of inheritance of the Israelites.

Perhaps they would be far enough away that the Israelite men would not take them to wife.

Verses 16-18

The Canaanite cities were to be totally destroyed, i.e., nothing was to be spared, in order to destroy their influence toward idolatry (compare 7:22-26).

Canaanite cities had to be utterly destroyed.

The emphasis is provided by a Hebrew construction indicating the thoroughness of their destruction (Joshua 7:21-26; 11:10-15; Judges 7:25; and 1 Sam. chapter 15), proved examples of this injunction being carried out.

**Deuteronomy 20:16 "But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee [for] an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth:"**

The cities of the seven nations, six of which are mentioned by name in the next verse.

"Thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth":

The reason of this severity was because of their wickedness.

The capital crimes and gross abominations they were guilty of, and for which they deserved to die.

And on account whereof they were reserved to this destruction, when the measure of their iniquities was full.

Such as idolatry, incest, witchcraft, soothsaying, necromancy, etc. (see Lev. 18:3).

The purpose in killing every living thing is to wipe out the false religion in this area.

Even the women would bring the worship of false gods to the Israelites, if they were allowed to live.

God wants the land of inheritance to be a holy land.

**Deuteronomy 20:17 "But thou shalt utterly destroy them; [namely], the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee:"**

Men, women, and children.

Some think this is to be understood only of such cities which did not accept of terms of peace.

For they are of opinion that Joshua made proclamation of peace to all the cities of Canaan; which being not complied with, he destroyed them as they fell into his hands.

And they suppose that the Gibeonites had not heard of such a proclamation, and therefore were spared.

And it is certain that there were many who were suffered to live among them.

Who it may be thought were allowed on their becoming proselytes, which was one of the terms of peace.

As Rahab and her household did, and which is the sense of some of the Jewish writers.

Jarchi on the following verse observes, that if they repented, and became proselytes, they might be received.

Namely:

"The Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites":

One of the seven nations is here omitted, the Girgashites, as they are also (in Exodus 23:23).

It is said, that "Joshua sent three letters into the land of Israel before they went into it; in the first, whoever would turn (and flee) might.

In the second, whoever would make peace might.

In the third, whoever would make war might.

The Girgashites, believing God, went to Africa, according to (Isa. 36:17).

The land there is Africa; the Gibeonites made peace and dwelt in the land.

Thirty one kings made war, and fell:"

"As the LORD thy God hath commanded thee"

See Deut. 7:1.

This is a list of the people of the promised land who are to be utterly destroyed.

We see in the next verse, why God commanded them to do this.

**Deuteronomy 20:18 "That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should ye sin against the LORD your God."**

This is another reason why they were to be utterly destroyed, not only because of the abominations which they committed, but to prevent the Israelites being taught by them to do the same.

Wherefore, as before observed from Jarchi, such as became proselytes were suffered to live among them.

Because there was no danger of idolatry from them, which even proselytes of the gate renounced.

And though all other abominations are included, yet this is particularly respected, as appears from the following clause.

"Which they have done unto their gods":

To the honor of whom not only many superstitious rites and ceremonies were performed, and idolatrous actions committed, but acts of lewdness, and even unnatural uncleanness.

"So should ye sin against the LORD your God":

A sin the most provoking to him, as the sin of idolatry was.

And cause his anger to rise to such a degree, as to suffer them to be carried captive from the land he gave them to inherit.

And which afterwards, was the case, and that through learning the manners and customs of these people (see Psalm 106:34).

We read of their abominations in the last lessons before this one.

They practiced things that were worse than sin.

The abominations are revolting sins in the sight of God.

Israel must stay pure.

They must not worship false gods.

Verses 19-20

"Thou shalt not destroy the trees":

When besieging a city, armies in the ancient world would cut down the trees to build ramps and weapons, as well as facilities for the long siege.

However, Israel was not to use fruit trees in the siege of a city so they could enjoy the fruit of the Land God had given to them (7:12-13).

**Deuteronomy 20:19 When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field [is] man's [life]) to employ [them] in the siege:"**

Before it will surrender; it holding out the siege a considerable time.



The Hebrew text says, "many days"; which the Targum of Jonathan interprets of all the seven days, to make war against it, in order to subdue it on the Sabbath day.

Jarchi observes, that "days" signify two, and "many" three.

Hence it is said, they do not besiege cities of the Gentiles less than three days before the Sabbath.

And he also says it teaches that peace is opened or proclaimed two or three days first.

"Thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them":

In a protracted siege, wood would be required for various purposes, both for military works and for fuel.

But fruit-bearing trees were to be carefully spared; and, indeed, in warm countries like India, where the people live much more on fruit than we do, the destruction of a fruit tree is considered a sort of sacrilege.

"For thou mayest eat of them":

The fruit of them, which shows them to be fruit trees, and gives a reason for not cutting them down.

Since they would be useful in supplying them with what was agreeable to eat.

"And thou shalt not cut them down":

To employ them in the siege.

In building bulwarks and batteries, and making of machines to cast out stones, and the like.

To the annoyance of the besieged; which might as well or better be made of other trees, as in the next verse.

"To employ them in the siege":

When you shall besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an ax against them.

For you may eat of them, and you shall not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life), to employ them in the siege.

We see in this, that the tree produces food to eat.

The tree that produces food is a friend to man.

To destroy these trees, would not help win the war.

They could certainly be useful to Israel after they have taken the city, and even before they take the city to sustain them.

In that sense, they are the man's life.

**Deuteronomy 20:20 "Only the trees which thou knowest that they [be] not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy and cut them down; and thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee, until it be subdued."**

Which might be known not only by their not having fruit upon them, but by other tokens.

And even at a time of year when there was no fruit on any, which might be sometimes the season of a siege.

"Thou shalt destroy and cut them down":

If so to do was of any disservice to the enemy, or of any service to them, as follows.

They had a liberty to destroy them if they would.

"And thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee, until it be subdued":

Build bulwarks of the trees cut down, and raise batteries with them, or make machines and engines of the wood of them, to cast stones into the city to annoy the inhabitants of it.

In order to make them surrender, and until they do it.

All this may be an emblem of the axe being to be laid to fruitless trees in a moral and spiritual sense.

And of trees of righteousness, laden with the fruits of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, being preserved and never to be cut down or rooted up.

Trees that do not produce fruit or nuts of any kind, could be cut down to build bulwarks against the city they are at war with. "Bulwarks", in this verse, mean hemming in.

This just means they have stopped their way of escape.

## **Deuteronomy Chapter 20 Questions**

1. Why should they not fear?
2. How does it help to remember Egypt?
3. What does it mean, when the priest speaks to the people?
4. The speech of the priest is to \_\_\_\_\_ the people.

5. What does the author believe is a shame about our song books?
6. What special privilege does someone, who has just built a house, have?
7. Who decided who would go into battle?
8. How long is a man exempt from war, who has taken a wife?
9. Who else will the officer send home, and not go to war?
10. How many brave men with Gideon won the battle?
11. God and \_\_\_\_\_ is a majority.
12. Who did the officers set up as leaders?
13. What was the first thing they were to do when they came to a city?
14. What does "tributaries" mean?
15. What is Israel to do, if they do not surrender?
16. Who in the city shall be killed?
17. What is different, if the cities are those of the inheritance?
18. What was the purpose in killing every living thing?
19. Who were some of the people killed?
20. Verse 18 explains why they were utterly destroyed, why was it?
21. Abominations are \_\_\_\_\_.
22. What must they not destroy, when they besiege a city a long time?
23. Why is this true?
24. What will they do with the trees, which do not produce food?
25. What does "bulwarks" mean?