FORBIDDEN MIXTURES IN DEUTERONOMY XXII
9-11 AND LEVITICUS XIX 19

by

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Deut. xxii 9-11: "9 Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with two kinds of seed: lest the whole yield be rendered taboo: the seed which thou hast sown and the produce of the vineyard. 10 Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together. 11 Thou shalt not put on ṣa'atnēz, wool and linen together." Lev. xix 9: "Ye shall keep my statutes. Thy cattle thou shalt not breed with two kinds. Thy field thou shalt not sow with two kinds of seed. And a garment of two kinds, ṣa'atnēz shall not come upon thee."

In an article, "Forbidden mixtures", in VT 32 (1982), pp. 394-415, I argued that the Deuteronomic rules about forbidden mixtures (Deut. xxii 9-11) were not to be understood literally but were to be read as commentary, involving figurative language, on sexual matters in the book of Genesis.¹ In that article I claimed that the Priestly writer (P) no longer understood the D rules and was the first interpreter in the long history of Jewish Law to make literal sense of them. I was mistaken. P understood the D rules very well.

I assumed, what critical scholarship in general has assumed, that one compared and contrasted the D and P rules as if D came first and P later, or vice versa; and that P adapted D’s rules (or D adapted P’s) to meet the changing circumstances of Israelite society.² This is too narrow an approach to the relationship between

¹ Carl Steuernagel, Deuteronomium and Josua (Göttingen, 1900), pp. 81, 82, suggests that the rules in Deut. xxii 9-11 had to do at some early stage with sexual and religious matters, possibly to do with nature cults. "These various kinds of hybridization could point back to different spheres of activity and areas of worship of various deities": entry, " уверенă", in G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (ed.), TDOT 2, p. 12 = TWAT 1, col. 529.

² The tendency has been to give priority to P, but the arguments are less than convincing. For example, A.D.H. Mayes states on the basis of the use of a single word, the verb "to sow", that Lev. xix 19 in relation to Deut. xxii 9 "is undoubtedly original, as being more suitable to the verb sow"; Deuteronomy (London, 1979), p. 308. "To sow" is indeed the appropriate term in Deut. xxii 9 because the vineyard is figurative for human reproduction, and a man sows seed in a woman (e.g. Lev. xii 2; Num. v 28; Sir. xxvi 20; cp. Sir. xxv 8a with its

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the two sets of rules. It is an approach, moreover, that is tied to a literal reading of the rules.

The difficulty of giving literal meaning to the rules about mixtures is well brought out by the continuing attempts of modern commentators to do so. They are not bothered by the fact that the ancient Israelites did crossbreed their animals, did sow mixed seeds in their fields, and did wear a mixture of cloths. Jacob’s experiment with Laban’s cattle presupposes the practice of crossbreeding animals (Gen. xxx 25-43). Mules existed (2 Sam. xiii 29, xviii 9; 1 Kgs i 33; xviii 5), so that, in this instance, even different species were mated. Different seeds were planted in the same field (Isa. xxviii 25; cp. Cant. i 14). The Israelite priests wore wool and linen.

Among the views of modern interpreters we find, for example, the claim that the land would be impoverished more quickly if different kinds of seed were sown in the same piece of ground rather than if the crops were rotated, that garments made from two different types of material readily produce static electricity in tropical climates and are consequently uncomfortable to wear. Or, dif-

reference to Deut. xxii 10 about ploughing with an ox and an ass). Michael Fishbane reasons as follows. Originally, the rules in Lev. xix 19 had a rhetorical and formulaic character, but the word ša’ăpēz disrupts the rhythm. So it must be an addition by, he conjectures, legal draftsmen whose task it was to qualify and clarify the rule in question for different times in the history of ancient Israel. Solely on his subjective sense of the use of rhythm in a language from a very distant past, does he build up a complicated history of development for an original “legal model” that first receives explication in P and later, further explication in D; Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel (Oxford, 1985), pp. 58-62.

3 C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch seem to be aware of the problem when they claim that the mules frequently mentioned in the Old Testament were imported from abroad: Biblischer Commentar über das Alte Testament I/2 (Leipzig, 1862), p. 122 = E.tr. Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament II (Edinburgh, 1864), p. 422. The implication is that the rule in Lev. xix 19 was duly observed within Israel.


5 R.K. Harrison, Leviticus (Leicester and Downers Grove, Illinois, 1980), p. 200. Cp. Mayes (n. 2), p. 308, who states that the rule in Deut. xxii 9 about the mixed seed in the vineyard “may have a utilitarian reason in the inappropriate and wasteful use of crops and land”. Fishbane (in [n. 2] pp. 58-62) claims that we are not dealing with “theoretical ritual considerations”, but with an “entirely practical agronomic concern that over-cultivation of a circumscribed area eventually results in the premature exhaustion of arable soil”. Different legal draft-