

Deuteronomy 20:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? (מִי־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־אָרַשׁ אֲשֶׁר)—The fourth exemption involves aras (betrothed)—legally bound but not yet consummated in marriage. The betrothal period could last a year, during which the couple were legally married but living separately. To die in battle before the wedding night would leave the woman in legal limbo and deny the man his anticipated joy.

This law appears verbatim in the curse of Deuteronomy 28:30: "Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her." What God graciously exempts in chapter 20, He threatens as covenant curse in chapter 28—underscoring that these aren't arbitrary rules but expressions of God's desire for His people's flourishing.

Historical Context

Betrothal in ancient Israel was legally binding—breaking it required divorce (as with Mary and Joseph, Matthew 1:18-19). These exemptions show God's law regulated warfare humanely, unlike surrounding nations that conscripted without regard for personal circumstances. Gideon later applied this principle by reducing his army from 32,000 to 300 (Judges 7:2-7).

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 – Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does God's concern for completing life transitions before taking on spiritual battles inform your sense of calling and timing?
2. In what ways might God be calling you to "reduce your army" by releasing those not fully committed rather than pressuring reluctant service?

Interlinear Text

וְמִי אָשָׁר אָבָשׁ אָבָה וְלֹא

לְבִית וְיִשְׁבֶּה יְלִי וְיִקְרְבֶּה:
and hath not taken H1980 and return unto his house H6435 lest he die
H3947 H7725 H1004 H4191

בְּמָלֹתָם הָיָה אֶתְרָא אֶתְרָא וְאֶתְרָא
in the battle And what man and another and hath not taken
H4421 H376 H312 H3947

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 24:5 (Parallel theme): 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 28:30 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her: thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof.

