

Deuteronomy 22:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And, lo, he hath given occasions of speech against her, saying, I found not thy daughter a maid; and yet these are the tokens of my daughter's virginity. And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city.

Analysis

Lo, he hath given occasions of speech against her—the father reiterates that the charges are 'alilot devarim (fabrications). **These are the tokens of my daughter's virginity** (ve-'eleh betulei bitti, וְאֵלֶּה בְּתוּלַי בִּתִּי)—the father presents physical evidence. **They shall spread the cloth before the elders** (paras ha-simlah, פָּרַשׁ הַשְּׂמָלָה)—the bloodstained cloth from the wedding night is publicly displayed as irrefutable proof.

This vivid detail underscores ancient Israel's legal realism—justice requires evidence, not mere assertions. The public display of intimate evidence, while culturally uncomfortable to modern sensibilities, served crucial functions:

1. preventing false accusations through material proof
2. vindicating the innocent publicly as their accusation was public
3. establishing precedent that slanderers would face exposure and punishment.

The law balances privacy concerns with justice requirements, protecting the wrongly accused from life-destroying slander.

Historical Context

The preservation of the consummation cloth was standard practice in ancient Near Eastern marriages. Families anticipated potential disputes and maintained evidence accordingly. The elders' examination of physical evidence parallels modern forensic investigation—ancient Israel's law required material proof for serious charges. This evidential requirement protected against false testimony, which the Ninth Commandment explicitly prohibits. The public nature of proceedings ensured transparency and community awareness, deterring future false accusations through reputational consequences.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does biblical law's requirement for concrete evidence challenge contemporary tendencies toward accusation-based justice?
2. What does the public vindication of the innocent woman teach about restoration of reputation being as important as initial protection?

Interlinear Text

וְהִנֵּה	הּ וְאֵל	שָׁם	עֲלִילֹת	דִּבְרֵי	לְאִמָּהּ
H2009	H1931	And lo he hath given	occasions	of speech	against her saying
		H7760	H5949	H1697	H559
לֹא	מָצָא אֶתִּי	בֵּתִי		בְּתוּלָה	וְאֵלָּהּ
H3808	I found	and yet these are the tokens of my daughter's		a maid	H428
	H4672	H1323		H1331	
בְּתוּלָה		בֵּתִי		וּפָרְשׁוּ	
a maid	and yet these are the tokens of my daughter's			And they shall spread	
H1331		H1323		H6566	
הַשְּׂמֹלֶה	לִפְנֵי	זִקְנֵי	הָעִיר:		
the cloth	before	the elders	of the city		
H8071	H6440	H2205	H5892		

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