

Deuteronomy 22:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But if this thing be true, and the tokens of virginity be not found for the damsel:

Analysis

But if this thing be true, and the tokens of virginity be not found for the damsel—the law now addresses the alternative scenario where the accusation proves true. Emet (אמת, "true") emphasizes factual reality; biblical justice demands truth, not mere social convenience. The absence of betulim evidence indicates the bride was not a virgin at marriage.

This conditional clause establishes that truth matters supremely in biblical law. The same evidentiary standards that protected the innocent also expose the guilty. God's law doesn't presume innocence or guilt but requires proof. This demonstrates biblical justice's commitment to factual truth over favoritism, sentiment, or ideological precommitments. The law applies equally whether vindicating the innocent (vv. 13-19) or convicting the guilty (vv. 20-21)—truth determines outcomes, not power or prejudice.

Historical Context

This verse acknowledges that not all accusations were false—sexual immorality did occur in ancient Israel despite covenant standards. The law's two-track approach (punishment for false accusers, punishment for actual unchastity) reflects realistic anthropology: humans are capable of both slander and sexual sin. The conditional structure ("if this thing be true") shows Mosaic law's casuistic format, addressing various scenarios systematically. This parallels other ancient Near Eastern law

codes but is unique in grounding justice in God's revealed character rather than royal decree.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does biblical law's commitment to determining truth challenge modern tendencies toward predetermined narratives in accusations?
2. What does the law's equal attention to false accusations and genuine guilt teach about justice requiring fairness to all parties?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵם	אִמָּה תִּהְיֶה	הַדָּבָר	הַזֶּה	לֹא	נִמְצָא וְ	
H518	be true H571	H1961	But if this thing H1697	H2088	H3808	be not found H4672
בְּתוּלֵי יָם			לַנְּעָרָה:			
and the tokens of virginity H1331			for the damsel H5291			

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org