

Deuteronomy 22:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her;

Analysis

If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her—this case addresses consensual sexual relations with a betrothed woman, indicated by the location (בְּעִיר, ba-ir, in the city) where help was available. The verb matsa (מָצָא, to find) combined with the city setting implies opportunity, not force.

Betrothal (me'orasah, מְאֻרָּסָה) in ancient Israel was legally binding, equivalent to marriage except for cohabitation. Sexual relations with a betrothed woman violated both her future husband's rights and the covenant structure protecting family integrity. The assumption of consent (she did not cry out) distinguishes this from verse 25.

Historical Context

Betrothal in ancient Near Eastern culture was a formal contractual arrangement, typically involving bride price (mohar) paid to the father. Unlike modern engagement, betrothal created legal obligations enforceable by death penalty for sexual infidelity. This law protected both the woman's family honor and the stability of covenant marriage.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's design for covenant faithfulness in marriage reflect His own covenant faithfulness to His people?
2. What does this law reveal about the seriousness with which God views sexual purity and covenant commitment?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	יְהִיָּה	נַעֲרָה	בְּתוּלָה	מְאֻכָּשׁ	אִישׁ	וּמָצָא הָ
H3588	H1961	If a damsel	that is a virgin	be betrothed	and a man	find
		H5291	H1330	H781	H376	H4672
אִישׁ	בְּעִיר	וְשָׁכַב	עָמָה:			
and a man	her in the city	and lie	H5973			
H376	H5892	H7901				
