

Deuteronomy 22:29

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away all his days.

Analysis

Then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away all his days. This verse addresses the case of rape in Israelite society, providing both justice and protection for the victim. The Hebrew verb shakab (שָׁכַב, "lay with") combined with taphas (שָׁפַח, "seize") in verse 28 indicates forcible violation, not consensual relations.

The fifty-shekel penalty represents substantial compensation—roughly fifty months' wages for a laborer. This monetary payment went to the father, recognizing that the assault damaged the family's honor and the daughter's marriageability in that culture. The requirement that the rapist marry his victim (if she had no betrothal) may seem harsh to modern readers, but in ancient Near Eastern society, this law provided crucial economic security and social protection for the woman, who might otherwise face destitution and stigma.

The perpetual marriage prohibition ("he may not put her away all his days") protected the woman from further abandonment. Unlike other marriages where divorce was permitted (Deuteronomy 24:1), this law bound the offender to lifelong responsibility. The legislation demonstrates God's concern for protecting the vulnerable, establishing accountability for sexual violence, and maintaining social order while addressing the harsh realities of ancient patriarchal culture.

Historical Context

This law functioned within ancient Israelite society (circa 1400-1200 BC), where a woman's marriageability determined her economic survival and social standing. Unlike surrounding nations where rape victims often faced death or permanent ostracism, Mosaic Law provided legal protection and economic provision for violated women.

The fifty-shekel payment significantly exceeded the typical bride price (mohar), which averaged thirty to forty shekels. This premium served as both punishment and deterrent. The amount was substantial enough that it would impact the offender's economic standing while providing the victim's family compensation for their daughter's trauma and diminished marriage prospects.

Compared to other ancient Near Eastern law codes like Hammurabi's Code (circa 1750 BC), which sometimes prescribed death for rape but offered no ongoing protection for victims, Deuteronomy's approach emphasized restitution and long-term care. The perpetual marriage bond, while troubling to modern sensibilities, ensured the woman would not become destitute. Understanding this law requires recognizing both God's compassion for victims within ancient cultural constraints and the complete transformation Jesus brings to male-female relationships in the New Covenant (Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 5:25-33).

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does this law reveal God's concern for protecting vulnerable women in ancient patriarchal society?
2. What does the substantial fifty-shekel penalty teach us about the seriousness of sexual violence in God's eyes?

3. How do we reconcile Old Testament civil laws designed for ancient Israel with New Testament principles for the church today?
4. In what ways does this legislation establish accountability and consequences for sexual assault while providing for victims?
5. How does Christ's teaching on marriage, dignity, and human worth transform and fulfill the protective intent behind this law?

Interlinear Text

לְאַבָּי	נָתַן	בְּאָישׁ	בְּשַׁחַק	הַשְׁחָקָה	בְּנִינָה
with her shall give	Then the man	that lay	H5973	father	unto the damsel's
H5414	H376	H7901		H1	H5291
סֵמֶשׁ יְמִין	כֵּסֶף	וְלֹא	תַּהֲבֵה	הַנְּשָׁאָה	כְּפָתָח
fifty	shekels of silver	H0	H1961	and she shall be his wife	H8478
H2572	H3701			H802	
אָשָׁר	עָבֵה	לֹא	יָכַל	שְׁלַחַת	כָּל
because he hath humbled	H6031	H3808	H3201	H7971	H3605
H834					
וְיֻמְיָה:					
all his days					
H3117					

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 21:14 (Parallel theme): And it shall be, if thou have no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go whither she will; but thou shalt not sell her at all for money, thou shalt not make merchandise of her, because thou hast humbled her.

Deuteronomy 22:24 (Parallel theme): Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you.

Deuteronomy 22:19 (Parallel theme): And they shall amerce him in an hundred shekels of silver, and give them unto the father of the damsel, because he hath brought up an evil name upon a virgin of Israel: and she shall be his wife; he may not put her away all his days.

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