

Deuteronomy 23:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If there be among you any man, that is not clean by reason of uncleanness that chanceth him by night, then shall he go abroad out of the camp, he shall not come within the camp:

Analysis

If there be among you any man, that is not clean by reason of uncleanness that chanceth him by night, then shall he go abroad out of the camp, he shall not come within the camp:

This verse addresses nocturnal emissions and their implications for ritual purity in military contexts. The euphemistic Hebrew phrase mikreh-laylah (מִקְרֵה לְלֵילָה), 'that which chanceth by night') refers to involuntary seminal emissions during sleep. According to Leviticus 15:16, such occurrences rendered a man ceremonially unclean until evening, requiring washing and temporary isolation. This law applied those purity regulations specifically to military encampments.

The requirement to leave the camp temporarily served both practical and theological purposes. Practically, it maintained hygiene in close military quarters. Theologically, it reinforced that God's presence dwelt within Israel's camp (v. 14), demanding holiness even in unconscious bodily functions. Modern readers may find such detailed regulation intrusive, but it taught Israel that no aspect of human existence—even involuntary physiological processes—fell outside divine concern or covenant obligation.

This law also countered pagan military practices. Canaanite and Mesopotamian armies regularly engaged prostitutes before battles, believing sexual activity enhanced martial prowess or pleased war deities. Israel's standard required sexual

purity, teaching that military success came from God's presence, not ritual sex or sympathetic magic. The Christian application extends beyond ceremonial law to the principle that holiness encompasses every area of life, including sexuality. Believers are 'temples of the Holy Spirit' (1 Corinthians 6:19), requiring purity in all circumstances, recognizing God's presence in every aspect of life.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern military practices often included ritual sexual activity before battles. Mesopotamian soldiers visited temple prostitutes to secure divine favor, and Canaanite warriors engaged in fertility rites honoring Baal and Asherah. These practices reflected pagan beliefs that sexual potency correlated with military strength and that gods required sexual offerings. Archaeological evidence from temples throughout the ancient Near East confirms the prevalence of cultic prostitution integrated with warfare.

Israel's regulations stood in stark contrast. Rather than encouraging pre-battle sexual activity, the law mandated temporary exclusion for even involuntary emissions. This counter-cultural standard emphasized that Yahweh's presence, not sexual power or fertility magic, determined military outcomes. The three-day period of consecration before receiving the law at Sinai included abstaining from sexual relations (Exodus 19:14-15), establishing the pattern that approaching God's presence required sexual purity.

David's interaction with Ahimelech the priest (1 Samuel 21:4-5) confirms these regulations' practical application. When requesting consecrated bread, David assured the priest that his men had been kept from women and their vessels were holy, even on ordinary missions. This demonstrates that military purity regulations were actually practiced in Israel's history, distinguishing their warfare from surrounding nations' practices and maintaining the principle that all of life—including unavoidable bodily functions—came under covenant regulation, pointing toward comprehensive sanctification.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does this detailed regulation challenge modern compartmentalization that separates 'spiritual' and 'physical' aspects of life?
2. What does God's concern for ritual purity even in involuntary bodily functions teach about His holiness and our comprehensive consecration?
3. How should Christians understand ceremonial laws like this in relation to New Testament teaching about purity and holiness?

Interlinear Text

וְהַיִּה בְּךָ בָּנִי הָאָשָׁר אֲשֶׁר לֹא יְהִי בְּךָ בָּנִי הָאָשָׁר

H3588 H1961 H0 If there be among you any man H834 H3808 H1961

וְרַטְבָּה

that is not clean H2889 by reason of uncleanness that chanceth H7137

לִלְכָה

him by night H3915

וְיֵצֵא

then shall he go H3318 abroad H413

אֶל

מַחֲזִיקָה:

מִמִּפְנֵה:

לֹא

יָבֹא

אֶל

he shall not come H935

וְתַּחֲנֹן: וְתַּחֲנֹן: הַמִּפְנֵה: הַמִּפְנֵה:

within H8432 out of the camp H4264

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 15:16 (Parallel theme): And if any man's seed of copulation go out from him, then he shall wash all his flesh in water, and be unclean until the even.

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