

Deuteronomy 25:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then thou shalt cut off her hand, thine eye shall not pity her.

Analysis

Then thou shalt cut off her hand, thine eye shall not pity her—the penalty seems harsh, leading some scholars to suggest this is the only biblical amputation law applied literally, while others argue for symbolic interpretation or monetary compensation (as with eye-for-eye laws). The Hebrew qatsotah et-kapah (קָצֹתָה אֶת־קָפָה) literally means 'you shall cut off her palm/hand.' **Thine eye shall not pity** emphasized the law's strict enforcement without emotional mitigation.

If literal, the amputation matched the nature of the crime—the offending hand paid the penalty. The severity protected men's procreative capacity and family dignity. However, the penalty's uniqueness in biblical law (no other amputation for women appears) and the lex talionis principle elsewhere allowing financial restitution (Exodus 21:26-27) suggests judges may have had discretion. Regardless, the law clearly marked genital assault as extraordinarily serious, beyond typical fight injuries.

Historical Context

Established circa 1406 BC as Israel's civil code before entering Canaan. While other ancient Near Eastern law codes (Hammurabi, Middle Assyrian Laws) prescribed amputation for various offenses, Mosaic law generally preferred restitution over mutilation. The singularity of this penalty highlights the perceived severity—attacks threatening procreation struck at covenant community continuity. Whether literally enforced or not, the law's existence deterred the action and communicated unambiguous divine judgment against it.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How do we interpret harsh Old Testament penalties in light of New Testament grace and mercy?
2. What does this law reveal about God's protection of family, procreation, and human dignity?
3. How should Christians think about proportional justice and punishment for serious offenses?

Interlinear Text

עִנְבָּרְתָּ בְּמֵת אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים
Then thou shalt cut off H853 her hand H3808 shall not pity H2347 thine eye H5869

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 19:13 (Parallel theme): Thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shalt put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee.

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