

Deuteronomy 25:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then shall his brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother's house.

Analysis

Then shall his brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot—the ceremony of chalitzah (חליצה, 'removal') publicly released both parties from levirate obligation. **And spit in his face**—not violent assault but ritualized contempt, probably spitting toward or before his face rather than directly on it. **So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother's house**—the declaration attached public shame to the refusal.

Removing the sandal symbolized relinquishing property rights and authority (see Ruth 4:7-8, where the sandal transaction confirmed the kinsman-redeemer's waiver). The ritual humiliation branded the refuser as prioritizing personal convenience over family duty. While the law permitted refusal, it didn't approve it—the ceremony marked his choice as dishonorable. The public nature prevented private deals and ensured clarity about inheritance rights.

Historical Context

Established circa 1406 BC for implementation in Israelite society. Sandals symbolized ownership and contract in ancient Near Eastern culture—removing and transferring a sandal confirmed business transactions. The public ceremony at

the city gate ensured witnesses and created permanent community memory. Ruth 4:7 notes this custom persisted 'in former times in Israel,' suggesting it eventually fell into disuse as urbanization and exile disrupted tribal land tenure.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. Why does God attach public shame to legally permitted actions when those actions violate community values?
2. How do symbolic actions in ceremonies (like baptism or communion) carry theological and social meaning?
3. What's the difference between legal permission and moral approval, and how should this distinction guide Christians?

Interlinear Text

וְנִגַּשׁ הַ	וּבִמֶּת וְ	אֵלָיו	לְעֵינַי י			
come	Then shall his brother's wife	H413	unto him in the presence			
H5066	H2994		H5869			
הַזִּקְנִים	וְחָלַץ הַ	נָעִלוֹ	מֵעַל לְ	בָּגְלוֹ וְ	וְרָקָה הַ	בְּפָנָיו
of the elders	and loose	his shoe	H5921	from off his foot	and spit	in his face
H2205	H2502	H5275		H7272	H3417	H6440
וְעָנְתָה	וְאָמַרְתָּ הַ	כִּי כֹה	יַעֲשֶׂה הַ	לְאִישׁ יֵשׁ	אֶשְׁרֵךְ	
and shall answer	and say	H3602	So shall it be done	unto that man	H834	
H6030	H559		H6213	H376		
לֹא	יִבְנֶה הַ	אֶת	בֵּית יֵת	אָחִיו:		
H3808	that will not build up	H853	house	his brother's		
	H1129		H1004	H251		

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 12:14 (Parallel theme): And the LORD said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in again.

Isaiah 20:2 (Parallel theme): At the same time spake the LORD by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.

Isaiah 50:6 (Parallel theme): I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

Job 30:10 (Parallel theme): They abhor me, they flee far from me, and spare not to spit in my face.

Mark 10:34 (Parallel theme): And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again.

Mark 1:7 (Parallel theme): And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.

Matthew 27:30 (Parallel theme): And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.

Matthew 26:67 (Parallel theme): Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands,

John 1:27 (Parallel theme): He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.

1 Samuel 2:30 (Parallel theme): Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

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