

Leviticus 20:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing: he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless.

Analysis

And if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing: he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless.

This verse falls within the section on **Penalties for Disobedience**. Punishments for violations of sexual and religious laws, emphasizing the seriousness of sin in God's holy community.

Ritual purity laws taught Israel to distinguish between clean and unclean, holy and common, training them in discernment and reverence for God's presence. The New Testament reveals that Christ's sacrifice accomplishes what the Levitical system could only symbolize—complete forgiveness and restoration of relationship with God.

Historical Context

Punishments for violations of sexual and religious laws, emphasizing the seriousness of sin in God's holy community. Chapters 17-27, often called the 'Holiness Code,' expand covenant obligations beyond ritual to encompass all of life—sexuality, economics, justice, and relationships. The repeated refrain 'I am the LORD' grounds these laws in God's character and covenant relationship with Israel. Israel received these laws while encamped at Sinai, before entering Canaan. The laws prepared them for life in the promised land, distinguishing them

from Canaanite practices and establishing their identity as God's holy nation. The portable tabernacle, central to Levitical worship, accompanied them through wilderness wanderings and eventually found permanent form in Solomon's temple. Ancient texts like the Code of Hammurabi show that law codes were common in the ancient Near East, but biblical law uniquely grounded ethics in God's character rather than merely social convention.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 – Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 – Judging others

Study Questions

1. How can you develop greater spiritual discernment in distinguishing what honors God from what defiles?
2. How does this verse reveal God's character, and how should that revelation shape your relationship with Him?
3. What practical steps can you take this week to apply the principles taught in this verse?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵשׁ רֵחֶן יְקַר אֶת שְׁתַּיִלְךָ	H834	וְאֵשׁ רֵחֶן יְקַר אֶת שְׁתַּיִלְךָ	H853	וְאֵשׁ רֵחֶן יְקַר אֶת שְׁתַּיִלְךָ	H802	וְאֵשׁ רֵחֶן יְקַר אֶת שְׁתַּיִלְךָ	H251
And if a man		shall take		wife		his brother's	

גָּלַה	נָקָרָת	אֶחָד	עָרֵת	בַּיִת	אֵת	נָקָרָה
it is an unclean thing	H1931	nakedness	his brother's	he hath uncovered		

בָּתָן יְמִינֵךְ עָרֵיךְ יְמִינֵךְ
they shall be childless H1961
H6185

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 18:16 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife: it is thy brother's nakedness.

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