

Deuteronomy 22:13-21

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Moses described the steps to be taken when a husband falsely accused his wife of not having been a virgin at the time of marriage. He also described what to do if these accusations were true.

Verses 13 – 30 contain cases that concern the marriage relationship. They describe various situations in which marriage is involved. These cases are best understood with their backdrop being the frequent comparison of the LORD's covenant with Israel and the marriage relationship, which also is a covenant.

Verses 13 – 21 describe the first case. It is presented in the form of a conditional statement (“if,” and “then”) and has two subsections. The first describes the procedures to be followed when a husband wants to get rid of his wife by making false accusations against her (vv. 13-19). The second subsection prescribes the rules to be followed if the accusation leveled against the married woman is true (vv. 20-21).

The situation here was *if a man takes a wife and goes in to her and then turns against her*, (v. 13). This described a situation where at some time after the consummation of the marriage, the husband began to dislike his wife and wanted to get rid of her. So, in order to preserve his innocence and justify his disposing of his wife, he *charges her with shameful deeds and publicly defames her* (v. 14).

Moses described the situation as follows:

- *If a man takes a wife* (v. 13)
- *The husband goes in to her*. This of course means that they sexually consummated their marriage.
- Then, at some point, the husband *turns against her*. The phrase *turn against* is literally “to hate” (Heb. “šānē”), which can also mean to “reject.”
- He *charges her with shameful deeds* (v. 14). The reference to *shameful deeds* is literally “deeds of things” in the Hebrew text.
- He also *publicly defames her*. The Hebrew reads “brings against her a bad name,” where “name” refers to one’s reputation. The husband here

seems intent upon ruining his wife's reputation and thus justifying his rejection of her.

The shocking statement the man used to *publicly defame* his wife was *I took this woman, but when I came to her, I did not find her a virgin*. The phrase *came to her* is another euphemism for sexual relations.

The accusation was that the husband rightly expected his bride to be a virgin and she was not. In Old Testament times in Israel, a girl would remain in her father's house and under her father's care until the day of her wedding ceremony where her father would give her in marriage. But prior to giving his daughter in marriage, the father received a bride-price from the prospective husband at the betrothal ceremony ([Genesis 34:12](#); [Exodus 22:15](#)). The money given to the girl's father was regarded as a form of compensation for the loss of his daughter, a custom still practiced today in some parts of the world.

Since a girl was to remain in her father's house until she got married, she was expected to remain a *virgin* to be honored by her husband. Not only was the virginity of the new bride necessary for her honor, it was also important to protect the integrity of the family. In fact, a husband who found out that his wife was not a *virgin* at the time of marriage could easily expose her and the community would stone her to death for sexual misconduct (vv. 21-23).

Once the accusation was made, *the girl's father and her mother were to take and bring out the evidence of the girl's virginity to the elders of the city at the gate* (v. 15). The *gate* was the place where civil matters would be taken under consideration by the *elders* (or rulers) of the city. It was here that *the girl's father shall say to the elders, 'I gave my daughter to this man for a wife, but he turned against her* (v. 16). As seen in v. 13, the Hebrew word translated *turned against* literally means "to hate." He was to continue the accusation against his daughter by telling them that the husband *has charged her with shameful deeds, saying, "I did not find your daughter a virgin"* (v. 17).

To counter this accusation, the parents said that *"this is the evidence of my daughter's virginity."* Then they were to *spread the garment before the elders of the city*. The *garment* was that which was used on the wedding night. If there was blood on the garment, this would prove that the woman's hymen was perforated at that time, proving the woman's virginity.

The woman's virginity having been proven, *the elders of that city shall take the man* (v. 18) and perform the following on the lying husband:

- First, they were to *chastise him*. The Hebrew word for *chastise* (Heb. “yāsar”) includes the idea of rebuking the person and instructing him concerning the covenant with the LORD.
- Second, *they shall fine him a hundred shekelsof silver and give it to the girl’s father* (v. 19). A *hundred shekels of silver* is about two and one-half pounds, making it payment of great value. Notice also that the husband was to give it directly *to the girl’s father*, which would add to the solemn nature of this. The lying husband was to pay this heavy price *because he publicly defamed a virgin of Israel*. Doing this would also restore the woman’s (and her family’s) honor and integrity within the community.
- Finally, *she shall remain his wife*. Even if the husband wanted to get rid of his wife, the law stipulated that *he cannot divorce her all his days*. This also protected the sacredness of the marriage relationship. Marriage, like the Mosaic Law, is a covenant, and both needed to be preserved.

Verses 20 – 21 deal with the second part of this case. They specify what was to be done *if this charge was true* (v. 20), meaning that *the girl was not found a virgin*, then they were to *bring out the girl to the doorway of her father’s house* (v. 21). It was here that *the men of her city shall stone her to death*. In Old Testament times, stoning was the most common form of capital punishment ([Leviticus 24:14](#); [Numbers 15:35](#); [Deuteronomy 21:21](#)), because it allowed the community of Israel to actively participate in the process of killing the guilty person.

The idea for this to take place *at the doorway of her father’s house* was to bring shame and dishonor to her family. The reason for stoning the woman was *because she had committed an act of folly in Israel by playing the harlot in her father’s house*. The phrase translated as “an act of folly” is used elsewhere in the Bible for sexual misconduct ([Genesis 34:7](#); [Judges 20:6](#)). Here, it underscores the immoral action committed by the girl while under her father’s roof. This is further emphasized by the term “harlot,” which, in this context, means “fornication.”

Not only did the woman commit fornication before her marriage, she also deceived her husband and others concerning her virginity. For these reasons, she would get the same punishment as the rebellious son, with the men of the city doing the execution ([Deuteronomy 21:21](#)). Doing so would also *purge the evil from among* Israel. That means that removing the woman from the Israelite community prevented contamination of the community and maintained the purity of the covenant with the LORD.

Some two thousand years later, a devout young Jewish man named Joseph will discover that his betrothed Mary is pregnant prior to the consummation of their marriage. Matthew records that Joseph “being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly” ([Matthew 1:19](#)). That Joseph chose not to want to disgrace Mary showed that he was “righteous.” He did not seek to invoke his rights under the law set forth here in [Deuteronomy 22:13-21](#). Rather he sought to benefit Mary, and protect her. Such was the man who was Jesus’s earthly father. Joseph followed the general principle Jesus conveyed concerning divorce. The law of Moses was given due to the hardness of men’s hearts ([Matthew 19:8](#)). God’s desire is for justice, mercy, and faith ([Matthew 23:23](#)).

Biblical Text:

¹³ “If any man takes a wife and goes in to her and *then* turns against her, ¹⁴ and charges her with shameful deeds and publicly defames her, and says, ‘I took this woman, *but* when I came near her, I did not find her a virgin,’ ¹⁵ then the girl’s father and her mother shall take and bring out the *evidence* of the girl’s virginity to the elders of the city at the gate. ¹⁶ The girl’s father shall say to the elders, ‘I gave my daughter to this man for a wife, but he turned against her; ¹⁷ and behold, he has charged her with shameful deeds, saying, “I did not find your daughter a virgin.” But this is the evidence of my daughter’s virginity.’ And they shall spread the garment before the elders of the city. ¹⁸ So the elders of that city shall take the man and chastise him, ¹⁹ and they shall fine him a hundred *shekels* of silver and give it to the girl’s father, because he publicly defamed a virgin of Israel. And she shall remain his wife; he cannot divorce her all his days. ²⁰ “But if this charge is true, that the girl was not found a virgin, ²¹ then they shall bring out the girl to the doorway of her father’s house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death because she has committed an act of folly in Israel by playing the harlot in her father’s house; thus you shall purge the evil from among you.”