

Deuteronomy 22:23-27

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Moses described what to do about sexual infidelity committed by a virgin who was engaged to be married.

This case (vv. 23 – 27) deals with a young woman who was a virgin and was engaged to be married. There are two scenarios presented in this case. In the first one, the sexual act occurs in the city where residents live in proximity to one another. In the second case, the sexual act occurs in the field where there are few people passing by, making it more difficult for the young woman to get help.

The first scenario concerns *a girl who is a virgin engaged to a man, and another man finds her in the city and lies with her* (v. 23). In ancient Israel, once a girl was *engaged to a man* and a bride-price was paid by the groom to her father, she was considered her fiancé's wife even though they did not live together or have sexual relations. She was to remain faithful to that man who expected her to be a virgin on the wedding day. To be *in the city* would mean that if the man attacked the woman, it would likely be noticed by someone and she could cry out for help and there would be people nearby to respond. This scenario implies that the woman did not cry for help but was complicit with having a sexual relationship with the man.

Because there was no outcry from the woman, it is to be presumed she consented, so the people were to *bring them both out to the gate of that city and you shall stone them to death* (v. 24). The *girl* would be stoned *because she did not cry out in the city*. This implies that she was a willing partner in the sexual encounter, committing adultery since she was engaged to be married. Such unfaithfulness was not to be tolerated in Israel, so she was put to death. The man also deserved to be stoned to death *because he violated his neighbor's wife* ([Leviticus 20:10](#)).

Both parties needed to be stoned to death in order to *purge the evil from among* Israel. Stoning was the most common form of capital punishment in ancient Israel ([Leviticus 24:14](#); [Numbers 15:35](#); [Deuteronomy 21:21](#)), since it allowed many people to actively participate in the process of killing the condemned. Ideally, such broad participation would indicate broad consent to the guilt of the parties. It would also serve as a grim warning to others.

While both parties would receive the same punishment, the reasons differed. On the one hand, the *girl* would be stoned *because she did not cry out in the city*. Since the setting was *in the city*, where rape would not normally take place without being noticed, the girl had the opportunity to cry out for help and could expect to receive assistance. But since she did not cry out for help, she seemingly agreed to violate her engagement by having sex relations with another man.

On the other hand, the man would be stoned *because he had violated his neighbor's wife*. Since the girl was engaged, she was considered her fiancé's *wife* and any sexual misconduct on her part was thus tantamount to adultery. Thus, both parties involved in the act would be stoned to death *to purge the evil from among Israel*.

Moses then described the second scenario by saying that *if in the field the man finds the girl who is engaged, and the man forces her and lies with her* (v. 25). The main difference in this scenario is that the sexual encounter occurred *in the field*. So, if the woman cried out for help, nobody would be nearby to hear and rescue her. Another difference is that, in this case, the man *forces her* (Heb. "ḥāzāq," "seize" or "grasp") instead of "finding" her in v. 23. The wording in this scenario implies that the man forced himself upon the woman.

In this case, *only the man who lay with her shall die*. The girl could have consented to have sexual relations with the *man in the field*, but the law gave her the benefit of the doubt and assumed she cried out for help. Since there was nobody around, it was assumed that the man forced her to have sexual relations without the girl's consent. So, the Israelites were *to do nothing to the girl; there was no sin in the girl worthy of death* (v. 26).

However, since the *man forced her and lay with her*, he committed a capital crime. This was *just* like that of *a man who rises against his neighbor and murders him*. That means, the girl was a victim, not a consensual partner. *When the man found her in the field, the engaged girl cried out, but there was no one to save her* (v. 27). Therefore, since the girl received no assistance, she was innocent and would be free to marry her prospective husband without incurring any guilt.

Biblical Text:

²³ **If there is a girl who is a virgin engaged to a man, and *another* man finds her in the city and lies with her, ²⁴ then you shall bring them both**

out to the gate of that city and you shall stone them to death; the girl, because she did not cry out in the city, and the man, because he has violated his neighbor's wife. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. ²⁵ "But if in the field the man finds the girl who is engaged, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lies with her shall die. ²⁶ But you shall do nothing to the girl; there is no sin in the girl worthy of death, for just as a man rises against his neighbor and murders him, so is this case. ²⁷ When he found her in the field, the engaged girl cried out, but there was no one to save her.