**Deuteronomy 25:11-12**

[*https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-25/deuteronomy-2511-12/*](https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-25/deuteronomy-2511-12/)

*This law prescribed to cut off the hand of a wife who sought to deliver her husband in a fight by seizing the genitals of his opponent.*

Moses commanded Israel to judge a woman who crushed another man’s genitals while trying to aid her husband in a fight.

This law describes a scenario that stated that*two men, a man and his countryman, are struggling together* (v. 11). This obviously refers to a physical altercation between two Israelites. The word *countryman* is literally “brother.” During the fight, *the wife of one comes near to deliver her husband from the hand of the one who is striking him*. The wife of one man came near to aid her husband, joining in the fray.

In this case, the woman*puts out her hand and seizes his genitals*. In other words, the woman intentionally grasped the sex organs of her husband’s opponent in order to let the husband gain the advantage in the conflict. The inference is that her intent was to crush them.

The punishment for the woman was severe—he was to *cut off her hand* (v. 12). Since the woman used *her* *hand* to grasp the man’s *genitals*, the corresponding punishment was to *cut off her hand* to execute a judgment that fit the offense. Because of the severity of the punishment, the Israelites were commanded to *not* *show* *pity* in executing the judgment. Her action interrupted a fight because of familial connection (to favor her husband) in a manner that could jeopardize the other man’s ability to have children and preserve his family line. This was considered sufficiently severe to merit this terrible result.

There is no instance in scripture where this was applied. It might have been a sufficient deterrent to prevent it from being tested. It appears that amputation was considered as a means of humiliating foes in ancient times ([Judges 1:6-7](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Judges+1.6-7&t=NASB95)). Here the idea seems to be that extreme humiliation is a punishment for extreme humiliation.

As always, justice was to be applied measure for measure, a general principle commonly known as “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” ([Exodus 21:23–25](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+21.23%E2%80%9325&t=NASB95); [Leviticus 24:17–21](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Leviticus+24.17%E2%80%9321&t=NASB95), and [Deuteronomy 19:21](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deuteronomy+19.21&t=NASB95)). The punishment was always to be proportional to the crime. Losing an eye is substantially worse than losing a tooth. A “lose a tooth” punishment should be given for a “lose a tooth” level crime. And more severe punishments for more severe crimes. Here the idea is extreme humiliation for extreme humiliation.

It might be inferred that a woman crushing a male’s genitals was a common means women used to protect themselves from being assaulted by a male. This provision would apply if the woman used this tactic as a means to intervene in a contest between her husband and another male. The woman was not to insist her husband win, and tip the scales using this tactic, but rather to allow the men to work it out among themselves, or pursue other means of resolving the dispute.

This is the only place in the Old Testament where the LORD commanded a literal punishment of physical mutilation (eye for eye, tooth for tooth being illustrative of a principle of proportionality). The severe punishment was meant to be a deterrent to criminal behavior. By the first century, Jewish tradition had made “cut off her hand” into an allegorical phrase that represented monetary compensation for any damage done, as in “put money in the hand.”

**Biblical Text:**

**11If *two* men, a man and his countryman, are struggling together, and the wife of one comes near to deliver her husband from the hand of the one who is striking him, and puts out her hand and seizes his genitals, 12then you shall cut off her hand; you shall not show pity.**