

Deuteronomy 12:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree:

Analysis

The command: 'Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods.' The Hebrew *abad te'abedun* (אָבַד תֵּאַבְדֻּנָּה, intensive absolute + verb) means 'utterly, completely destroy.' No syncretism was allowed—Canaanite worship sites must be eliminated. The locations specified: 'upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree.' These were typical locations for ancient Near Eastern 'high places' (*bamot*, בָּמוֹת)—elevated sites under sacred trees or groves. The command aims to prevent Israel from adopting Canaanite worship practices associated with these sites.

Historical Context

Canaanite religion centered on fertility cults worshiping Baal (storm/fertility god), Asherah (mother goddess), and other deities. High places featured altars, standing stones (*massebot*), and sacred poles (*asherim*). Worship involved ritual prostitution, child sacrifice (to Molech), and divination. God's command for total destruction reflected both spiritual danger (idolatry temptation) and moral abomination (horrific practices). Israel's incomplete obedience to this command led to centuries of syncretism condemned by prophets.

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 7:5 (Parallel theme): But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire.

2 Kings 16:4 (Parallel theme): And he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.

Jeremiah 3:6 (Parallel theme): The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot.

Hosea 4:13 (Parallel theme): They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks and poplars and elms, because the shadow thereof is good: therefore your daughters shall commit whoredom, and your spouses shall commit adultery.

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