

Deuteronomy 12:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place.

Analysis

The destruction must be thorough: 'ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place.' This specifies complete eradication of idolatrous infrastructure. The Hebrew verbs are violent: *natats* (נָתַץ, overthrow/break down), *shabar* (שָׁבַר, shatter), *saraph* (שָׂרַף, burn), *gada* (גָּדַע, cut down), *abad* (אָבַד, destroy). Even the 'names' must be destroyed—eliminating all memory and association. This reflects ancient concept that names carry power and presence. Destroying the name means obliterating the deity's cultural influence.

Historical Context

The 'pillars' (*matsebot*, מַצֵּבֹת) were standing stones marking sacred sites. 'Groves' (*asherim*, אֲשֵׁרִים) were wooden poles or living trees sacred to Asherah. 'Graven images' (*pesilim*, פְּסִילִים) were carved idols. Archaeological excavations at Canaanite sites (Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer) have uncovered such cultic installations. Israel's partial obedience left high places that repeatedly ensnared them (Judges 2:1-3; 1 Kings 14:23). Josiah's reform (2 Kings 23) finally attempted comprehensive purging, but too late to prevent exile.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How thorough must Christians be in removing spiritual influences that could lead to compromise?
2. What does destroying even the 'names' of false gods teach about completely rejecting false ideologies?
3. How do we balance preservation of historical and cultural artifacts with dangers of glorifying false religions?

Interlinear Text

וְנִתְצָתָם	אֶת	מִזְבְּחֵיהֶם	וְשִׁבְרֵתָם	אֶת	מִצְבֵּיהֶם
And ye shall overthrow	H853	their altars	and break	H853	their pillars
H5422		H4196	H7665		H4676
וְאֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם	וְתִשְׂרֹף	בָּאֵשׁ	וּפְסִילֵיהֶם		אֱלֹהֵיהֶם
their groves	and burn	with fire	the graven images		of their gods
H842	H8313	H784	H6456		H430
וְנִגְדַעְתָּם	וְאַבְדָתָם	אֶת	שְׁמֵיהֶם	מִן	הַמָּקוֹם
and ye shall hew down	and destroy	H853	the names	H4480	of them out of that place
H1438	H6		H8034		H4725
הָהוּא:					
H1931					

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 33:52 (Parallel theme): Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places:

Judges 2:2 (Sacrifice): And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?

Psalms 16:4 (Sacrifice): Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips.

Zechariah 13:2 (Parallel theme): And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land.

Exodus 23:13 (References God): And in all things that I have said unto you be circumspect: and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth.

Deuteronomy 7:5 (Sacrifice): 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.