

Deuteronomy 13:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword.

Analysis

The judgment: 'Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword.' This is cherem (חֶרֶם, devoted to destruction)—complete annihilation reserved for Canaanite cities. The phrase 'destroying it utterly' (חֲרָם תַּחַרֵּם, hacharem tacharim, intensive absolute + verb) means total consecration to God through destruction—no survivors, no spoil. Even livestock dies. This equals treating apostate Israelite city as Canaanite enemy, showing apostasy forfeits covenant protection. The severity demonstrates idolatry's gravity and corruption's contagious nature. Radical surgery prevents gangrene's spread.

Historical Context

Jericho received cherem judgment (Joshua 6:17-21). Achan's violation brought divine discipline (Joshua 7). This total destruction never applied to apostate Israelite cities in recorded history, possibly because wholesale civic apostasy didn't occur (or wasn't prosecuted). Theocratic law operated differently than modern civil law—covenant community under direct divine rule enforced God's exclusive worship. Church age lacks civil authority for such judgment, but Revelation 2-3 shows Christ judges apostate churches, 'removing lampstands' and bringing spiritual death.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does treating apostate covenant people as pagan enemies illuminate New Testament warnings about falling away?
2. What does total destruction teach about sin's contagious nature requiring radical removal?
3. How should churches respond when entire congregations abandon core biblical doctrines?

Interlinear Text

תָּכֶּה הַ	תָּכֶּה הַ	אֶת	יֹשְׁבֵי י	הָעִיר	הַ וְאֵלֶּה
Thou shalt surely	Thou shalt surely	H853	the inhabitants	of that city	H1931
H5221	H5221		H3427	H5892	
לְפִי	חֶרֶב:	הַחֶרֶם	אֶת הַ	וְאֶת הַ	כָּל
thereof with the edge	of the sword	destroying it utterly	H853	H853	H3605
H6310	H2719	H2763			
אֲשֶׁר	בָּ הַ	וְאֶת	בְּהֵמָתָהּ	לְפִי	
H834	H0	H853	and all that is therein and the cattle	thereof with the edge	
			H929	H6310	
חֶרֶב:					
of the sword					
H2719					

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 22:20 (Parallel theme): He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed.

Deuteronomy 7:2 (Parallel theme): And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them:

Leviticus 27:28 (Parallel theme): Notwithstanding no devoted thing, that a man shall devote unto the LORD of all that he hath, both of man and beast, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed: every devoted thing is most holy unto the LORD.

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