

Deuteronomy 13:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people.

Analysis

The judgment: 'But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people.' The Hebrew doubling *harog taharog* (הָרֹגֵת תָּהֲרֹג, 'kill, you shall kill') emphasizes certainty. Shockingly, the family member discovering apostasy must initiate execution—'thine hand shall be first.' This prevents false accusations (you wouldn't casually accuse family to death) while demanding ultimate covenant loyalty. The 'hand of all the people' indicates community participation, distributing responsibility and preventing vendetta. This corporate execution maintained covenant purity and deterred apostasy. The severity reflects spiritual death's horror exceeding physical death.

Historical Context

Old Testament records few cases of this law's application, possibly because threat deterred apostasy or because enforcement was lax. Achan's family died with him for covenant violation (Joshua 7:24-25). Under theocracy, civil authorities enforced religious law. New Testament separation of church and state means church discipline, not civil execution, addresses apostasy (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:11-13). However, divine judgment on Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) shows God still takes covenant violation seriously, executing judgment directly when appropriate.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 – Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 2:1 – Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How do we understand Old Testament capital punishment for religious crimes in relation to New Testament church discipline?
2. What does the severity of this command teach about how seriously God views idolatry?
3. How should churches handle members who abandon core doctrines or lead others astray?

Interlinear Text

בָּאָה H3588	תִּהְרֹג־ But thou shalt surely	תִּהְרֹג־ But thou shalt surely	תִּהְרֹג־ him thine hand	בָּאָה H1961	בָּאָה H0
	H2026	H2026	H3027		

בְּאַחֲרָנָה: