

Deuteronomy 17:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the LORD thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel.

Analysis

And the man that will do presumptuously הַאֲישׁ אֲשֶׁר-בֵּצֶד (ha'ish asher ya'a'seh bezadon)—zadon means deliberate rebellion, arrogant defiance of constituted authority, not mere error. This is contempt of court in its most serious form: rejecting the priestly-judicial verdict rendered at the central sanctuary.

Will not hearken unto the priest who ministers before the LORD establishes the gravity of defying the theocratic judicial system. Refusing the priest's legal decision (based on Torah) or the judge's ruling was tantamount to rebelling against God Himself, since they represented divine authority. The death penalty demonstrates that maintaining judicial integrity and respect for God's appointed authorities was essential to Israel's covenant community. Hebrews 10:28 later applies this principle: despising Moses' law brought death; how much more serious is spurning Christ?

Historical Context

This verse concludes the section on establishing a supreme court at the central sanctuary (Deuteronomy 17:8-13). In ancient Israel's theocracy, legal authority derived from God through His appointed representatives. The priest and judge formed a dual authority structure—priestly expertise in sacred law and judicial

wisdom in civil matters. Archaeological evidence from ancient Near Eastern cultures shows that contempt of court was treated seriously, but Israel's system was unique in grounding judicial authority in covenant relationship with Yahweh. This provision prevented legal chaos and ensured that difficult cases received authoritative resolution.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does God's establishment of authoritative judicial structures reflect His character as a God of order and justice?
2. What is the relationship between submitting to legitimate human authority and submitting to God's authority?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵשׁ יְמַשֵּׁשׁ הַבְּלִתָּה וְשָׁמַעַת
And the man that will do presumptuously and will not hearken
H376 H834 H6213 H2087 H1115 H8085

אֶל כָּהֵן קָעֵם דְּרַת לְשָׁמַע אֶת שָׁמַע
unto the priest that standeth to minister or unto the judge shall die
H413 H3548 H5975 H8334 H8033 H853 H8199 H4191

וְמִתְּהִלָּה בְּשָׁפֵט אֶל אֲלֹהִים יְהִי הַיְהֹוָה
there before the LORD thy God or unto the judge shall die
H3068 H430 H176 H413 H8199 H4191

וְאֵשׁ בְּרִית מִשְׁרָאֵל:
And the man and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel
H376 H1931 H1197 H7451 H3478

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 13:5 (Evil): And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee.

Numbers 15:30 (References Lord): But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

1 Timothy 5:20 (Parallel theme): Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

1 Thessalonians 4:8 (References God): He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.

Deuteronomy 18:7 (References God): Then he shall minister in the name of the LORD his God, as all his brethren the Levites do, which stand there before the LORD.

Deuteronomy 10:8 (References Lord): At that time the LORD separated the tribe of Levi, to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister unto him, and to bless in his name, unto this day.

Deuteronomy 18:5 (References God): For the LORD thy God hath chosen him out of all thy tribes, to stand to minister in the name of the LORD, him and his sons for ever.

Deuteronomy 17:7 (Evil): The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you.

Hosea 4:4 (Parallel theme): Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people are as they that strive with the priest.

Ezra 10:8 (Parallel theme): And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away.

