

Deuteronomy 17:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him—witnesses who testified must initiate execution, ensuring they stake their own integrity on their testimony. False witnesses thus risked exposure (Deuteronomy 19:16-19 prescribes reciprocal punishment). This deters perjury and frivolous accusations.

Afterward the hands of all the people—communal participation maintains covenant solidarity. The entire community, not professional executioners, bears responsibility. **Put the evil away from among you** (בְּעָרָת הַבָּעֵר, bi'arta hara)—'burn out' or 'purge' the evil—like removing diseased tissue. This phrase appears repeatedly in Deuteronomy (13:5, 17:12, 19:19, 21:21, 22:21-24) for capital offenses threatening covenant purity. New Testament equivalent: church discipline removes unrepentant sin (1 Corinthians 5:1-13).

Historical Context

Requiring witnesses to execute first prevented casual accusations—if you testified, you had to be willing to personally kill the accused, ensuring serious commitment to truth. Achan's execution (Joshua 7:25) and Naboth's false execution (1 Kings 21:13) illustrate this law in practice. Later Judaism developed such stringent evidentiary standards that capital punishment became rare.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does requiring witnesses to participate in consequences affect the integrity of testimony today?
2. What does 'purging evil from among you' look like in the church age without physical execution?

Interlinear Text

בְּרִאשָׁנָה	בְּ	וְ	תְּהִיא	פָּעֵד יְמִינְךָ	יְמִינְךָ	בְּ	רִאשָׁנָה	בְּ	רִאשָׁנָה
The hands	of the witnesses		H1961	H0	shall be first				
H3027	H5707				H7223				
לְמִיתָה	וְ	לְמִתָּה		כָּל	כָּל	כָּל	בְּ	כָּל	בְּ
upon him to put him to death		The hands	H3605	of all the people	H5971	and afterward			
H4191		H3027			H314				
מִקְרָבְךָ	בְּ	עִמָּךָ		בְּ	עִמָּךָ	בְּ	עִמָּךָ		
So thou shalt put	the evil	from among							
H1197	H7451	H7130							

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 13:9 (Parallel theme): 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.

1 Corinthians 5:13 (Evil): But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

Deuteronomy 17:12 (Evil): 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.

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.

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