

Deuteronomy 20:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when the LORD thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword:

Analysis

And when the LORD thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword—Victory belongs to **the LORD**—human effort doesn't produce conquest; divine intervention does. The herem (הֶרֶם, 'devotion to destruction') applied to Canaanite cities involved executing combatants (**every male**, זְכָר, zakhar), removing military threat and judgment on persistent idolatry.

Modern readers recoil at divine violence, yet God's holiness demands judgment. **The soul that sinneth, it shall die** (Ezekiel 18:20). Canaan's destruction foreshadows hell's reality: **The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God** (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). Israel's warfare enacted God's judicial prerogative. We can't command such wars (lacking divine authority), but we acknowledge God's right to judge.

Historical Context

Canaanite civilization practiced child sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21), cultic prostitution, and extreme violence. God's judgment through Israel removed cultural cancer after 400+ years of patience (Genesis 15:16—'the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full'). Archaeological evidence confirms Canaanite depravity's extent.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How do you reconcile God's love with His commanded destruction of Canaanites—is judgment inconsistent with grace?
2. What does Canaan's destruction teach about hell's reality and God's holy intolerance of persistent evil?
3. Why can't modern Christians invoke 'holy war' while ancient Israel could—what authority distinction exists?

Interlinear Text

הָכִימָה	בְּנֵי	בְּנֵי	אֱלֹהִים	יְהִי	וְנִתְנַתָּה	הָכִימָה
hath delivered	And when the LORD	thy God	it into thine hands	thou shalt smite		
H5414	H3068	H430	H3027			H5221
אַתָּה	כָּל	לְפִי	צְרָבָה:			
H853	H3605	H2138	H6310	every male	thereof with the edge	of the sword
						H2719

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