

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 (חֶרֶם, 'devotion to destruction') applied to Canaanite cities involved executing combatants (**every male**, זָכָר, 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

וַיִּתֵּן הָ	יְהוָה הָ	אֱלֹהֶיךָ	בְּיָדְךָ	וְהִכִּיתָ
hath delivered	And when the LORD	thy God	it into thine hands	thou shalt smite
H5414	H3068	H430	H3027	H5221
אֶת כָּל זָכוֹר הָ	לְפִי	חֶרֶב:		
every male	thereof with the edge	of the sword		
H853 H3605	H2138 H6310	H2719		

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