

# Deuteronomy 20:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in the siege:

## Analysis

**When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them**—Even in warfare, God requires environmental stewardship. Fruit trees provide **food** (מְאַקָּל, ma'akal) and shouldn't be destroyed militarily. The prohibition against **forcing an axe** (נִזְחַת עַלֵּיכֶם גָּרֶזֶן, nidachta alehem garzen, 'wielding an axe against them') forbids scorched-earth tactics unnecessarily harming creation.

This reveals God's comprehensive covenant: redemption includes creation care. Paul declares: **The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God** (Romans 8:19)—creation groans for humanity's restoration. Jesus multiplied food (feeding thousands) rather than waste it. The tree law taught Israel: dominion (Genesis 1:28) means stewardship, not exploitation. Even urgent military needs don't justify needless destruction.

## Historical Context

Ancient warfare commonly destroyed agricultural resources (Judges 9:45—Abimelech sowed Shechem with salt). God's prohibition distinguished Israel

morally—showing concern for future generations' sustenance and creation's intrinsic value beyond human utility.

## Related Passages

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**1 Corinthians 13:4** — Characteristics of love

**1 John 4:8** — God is love

## Study Questions

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1. How does warfare's tree-preservation law challenge Christian approaches to creation care and environmental stewardship?
2. What modern 'scorched-earth' practices (exploiting resources without replenishing, environmental degradation) violate this principle?
3. How does viewing creation as groaning for redemption (Romans 8:19) motivate responsible dominion rather than destructive exploitation?

## Interlinear Text

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כִּי	תִּצְּרֹעַ וְ	אֵל	עִיר	רַבְּ יָמִים	לְהַלְּמָן
H3588	<b>When thou shalt besiege</b>	H413	<b>a city</b>	H3117	<b>a long</b>
	H6696		H5892		H3898
עַל יַם	לְתִפְשַׁר הַ	לֹא	תִּשְׁחַת יְתָ	אַתָּה	עַל יָם
H5921	<b>against it to take</b>	H3808	<b>it thou shalt not destroy</b>	H853	<b>for the tree</b>
	H8610		H7843		H6086
לְנַדְּבָּה	עַלְיוֹן	מִמְּכָה	כִּי	תִּאֲכַל	תִּאֲכַל
<b>thereof by forcing</b>	H5921	<b>an axe</b>	H3588	<b>against them for thou mayest eat</b>	H398
H5080		H1631			
לֹא וְאַתָּה	תִּכְרֹת	כִּי	כִּי	כִּי	כִּי
H853	H3808	<b>of them and thou shalt not cut them down</b>	H3772	H3588	<b>is man's</b>
					H120
עַל יָם	בְּשָׂדֶה	לְבָבָא	מִפְּנֵי יְמִים	בְּמִצּוֹרָה	בְּמִצּוֹרָה
<b>for the tree</b>	<b>of the field</b>	<b>life to employ</b>	<b>them in the siege</b>	H4692	
H6086	H7704	H935	H6440		

## Additional Cross-References

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**Deuteronomy 26:6** (Parallel theme): And the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage:

**Matthew 3:10** (Parallel theme): And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

**Matthew 21:19** (Parallel theme): And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.