

# 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** (מַאֲכָל, ma'akal) and shouldn't be destroyed militarily. The prohibition against **forcing an axe** (נִדְחָתָהֶם גַּרְזֵן, 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	תִּצּוּר	אֶל	עִיר	יָמִים	רַב־יָמִים	לְהִלָּחֵם
H3588	When thou shalt besiege	H413	a city	time	a long	in making war
	H6696		H5892	H3117	H7227	H3898
עַל יָדָהּ	לְתִפְּשָׁהּ	לֹא	תִשְׁחָדֵת	אֶת	עֵץ	
H5921	against it to take	H3808	it thou shalt not destroy	H853	for the tree	
	H8610		H7843		H6086	
לְנִדְּחָם	עַלֵּיוֹ	גִּרְזָן	כִּי	מִמֶּנּוּ	תֹאכַל	
thereof by forcing	H5921	an axe	H3588	H4480	against them for thou mayest eat	
H5080		H1631			H398	
וְאֵת זֶה		תִּכְרֹת		כִּי	הָאָדָם	
H853	H3808	of them and thou shalt not cut them down		H3588	is man's	
		H3772			H120	
עֵץ	הַשָּׂדֶה	לְבִיא	מִפְּנֵי יָבֵם	בְּמִצּוֹר:		
for the tree	of the field	life to employ	them in the siege	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.