

Deuteronomy 23:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And thou shalt have a paddle upon thy weapon; and it shall be, when thou wilt ease thyself abroad, thou shalt dig therewith, and shalt turn back and cover that which cometh from thee:

Analysis

And thou shalt have a paddle upon thy weapon; and it shall be, when thou wilt ease thyself abroad, thou shalt dig therewith, and shalt turn back and cover that which cometh from thee:

This verse provides specific instructions for waste disposal in military settings. The Hebrew yated (תַּדְתַּעַת, 'paddle' or 'stake') refers to a digging implement carried as part of the soldier's equipment alongside weapons. The euphemism 'ease thyself' translates yashav (בָּשָׁבֵעַ), literally 'sit down,' a modest reference to defecation. Soldiers were to dig a hole, use it, and cover the waste—basic sanitation that protected health and maintained camp cleanliness.

This detailed instruction reveals God's comprehensive concern for His people's welfare. No detail was too insignificant for divine regulation when it affected community health and holiness. The requirement to carry digging tools alongside weapons elevated sanitation to military necessity, recognizing that disease prevention was as crucial as combat readiness. Modern military organizations recognize this truth: proper field sanitation saves more lives than medical treatment in combat zones.

Theologically, this law illustrates the inseparability of spiritual and physical holiness. God didn't merely demand internal purity or correct theology while

ignoring bodily functions and environmental stewardship. True holiness encompasses all life, including waste management. For Christians, this principle extends to environmental responsibility, public health advocacy, and recognition that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Caring for God's creation, including proper waste disposal and environmental stewardship, becomes an act of worship, demonstrating comprehensive lordship of Christ over all domains of life.

Historical Context

Ancient warfare typically showed little concern for sanitation or environmental impact. Armies moved through territories leaving devastation, including contaminated water sources and diseased campsites. Besieging armies created massive waste problems that often triggered epidemics affecting both attackers and defenders. Archaeological excavations of ancient military sites reveal accumulated refuse, animal carcasses, and human waste, confirming historical accounts of disease-ravaged armies.

Israel's requirement to carry digging implements and bury waste demonstrated practical wisdom validated by modern epidemiology. Proper waste burial interrupts disease vectors, prevents water contamination, reduces insect populations, and minimizes odor. The simplicity of the method—a digging tool and individual responsibility—made it practicable even in active military campaigns. This regulation would have given Israel's armies significant health advantages over enemies, reducing non-combat casualties and maintaining force readiness.

The historical context also included environmental considerations. Deuteronomy 20:19-20 prohibited destroying fruit trees during sieges, demonstrating concern for long-term ecological impact. The military sanitation law similarly showed environmental stewardship, preventing land contamination that would affect future inhabitants. This comprehensive ethical framework governing warfare—combining humanitarian concern for enemies (Deuteronomy 20:10-15), environmental protection, and sanitation—distinguished Israel's divinely regulated warfare from the ecological and humanitarian devastation typical of ancient Near

Eastern military campaigns. God's law promoted both immediate health and sustainable environmental practices.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does this command to carry sanitation equipment challenge modern distinctions between 'sacred' and 'secular' activities?
2. What does God's detailed concern for waste disposal teach about His comprehensive involvement in every aspect of life?
3. How should Christians apply the principle of environmental stewardship implicit in this command to contemporary ecological challenges?

Interlinear Text

בְּנֵית דָּבָר תְּהִלָּה לְבָנָה עַל אֶזְבֶּן בְּנֵית
And thou shalt have a paddle H1961 H0 H5921 upon thy weapon H1961
H3489 H240

בְּשַׁבְּתָךְ כִּי וְהַקְרִיב תְּהִלָּה
and it shall be when thou wilt ease thyself abroad thou shalt dig H0
H3427 H2351 H2658

וְשַׁבְּתָךְ אֶת יְכָסֶת יְתַחַת צָאָתְךָ
therewith and shalt turn back and cover H853 that which cometh H6627
H7725 H3680