

Deuteronomy 23:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever.

Analysis

Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever.

This verse mandates perpetual non-alliance with Ammon and Moab. The Hebrew phrase *lo tidrosh shalom vetov* (לֹא-תִדְרֹשׁ שְׁלָמָם וְטוֹבָתָם) literally means 'do not seek their peace and their good.' This wasn't mere passive avoidance but active prohibition against pursuing treaties, trade agreements, or alliances that would promote Ammonite or Moabite interests. The dual temporal markers 'all thy days' and 'for ever' emphasize permanent application across all generations.

This command appears harsh by modern standards but must be understood theologically. Nations that actively oppose God's redemptive purposes cannot be treated as neutral parties. Ammon and Moab's hiring of Balaam to curse Israel (v. 4) revealed fundamental hostility toward divine purposes that disqualified them from covenant friendship. God's people were forbidden from advancing interests of those who sought Israel's destruction. This principle protected Israel from compromising alliances that would corrupt their worship and undermine covenant fidelity.

The Reformed tradition recognizes this principle's abiding relevance: believers must not promote or advance causes fundamentally opposed to God's kingdom. Yet this law's severity makes God's grace toward individuals like Ruth more astonishing. While the nations remained under judgment, individuals who renounced their heritage and embraced Yahweh found welcome. This paradox—

corporate judgment with individual mercy—runs throughout Scripture, finding fullness in Christ who judges nations while welcoming individual believers from every tribe and tongue (Revelation 7:9).

Historical Context

This prohibition had significant geopolitical implications for Israel's foreign policy throughout their history in Canaan. Ammon and Moab controlled valuable territory and trade routes east of the Jordan, making them economically important neighbors. The command to avoid alliances meant foregoing potential economic and military advantages, requiring trust in Yahweh's provision and protection.

Israel's compliance with this command was mixed. Jephthah fought against Ammon (Judges 11), and Saul, David, and later kings engaged in recurring conflicts with both nations (1 Samuel 11, 2 Samuel 10-12, 2 Chronicles 20). However, some Israelites disobeyed: Solomon's foreign wives included Ammonite and Moabite women who turned his heart toward their gods (1 Kings 11:1-8), validating the wisdom of this prohibition. After the exile, Nehemiah confronted Jews who had married Ammonite and Moabite women (Nehemiah 13:23-27), citing this very law.

Archaeological evidence from Iron Age Ammon and Moab reveals sophisticated kingdoms with distinctive religious and cultural practices centered on child sacrifice to Chemosh and Molech. Inscriptions and temples excavated at sites like Rabbath-Ammon demonstrate religious systems incompatible with Yahweh worship. The historical record confirms that close association with these nations inevitably led to religious syncretism, justifying God's protective prohibition against seeking their peace or prosperity.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How should Christians discern which causes and movements to support or oppose based on their alignment with God's purposes?
2. What does this command teach about the importance of not compromising with ideologies fundamentally hostile to biblical faith?
3. How do we balance this principle with Jesus's command to love enemies and pray for persecutors (Matthew 5:44)?

Interlinear Text

לֹא	תִּדְרֹשׁ	שְׁלָמָם	וְטוֹבָתָם	כָּל	יְמֵי יָרְךָ
H3808	Thou shalt not seek	their peace	nor their prosperity	H3605	all thy days
	H1875	H7965	H2896		H3117

לְעוֹלָם:
for ever
H5769

Additional Cross-References

Ezra 9:12 (Peace): Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever.

2 Samuel 12:31 (Parallel theme): And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brickkiln: and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon. So David and all the people returned unto Jerusalem.

2 Samuel 8:2 (Parallel theme): And he smote Moab, and measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground; even with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive. And so the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts.

