

Deuteronomy 23:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother: thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian; because thou wast a stranger in his land.

Analysis

Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother: thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian; because thou wast a stranger in his land.

This verse presents a striking contrast with the prohibition against Ammonites and Moabites (vv. 3-6). Despite Edom's often hostile relationship with Israel, they were to be treated differently because of kinship—'he is thy brother.' Edom descended from Esau, Jacob's twin brother, making Edomites close relatives (Genesis 25-36). The Hebrew *lo te'avev* (לא תתעב, 'thou shalt not abhor') uses a strong term for abomination, commanding Israel to avoid the visceral disgust they might naturally feel toward hostile neighbors.

Even more remarkable is the command concerning Egyptians. Despite Egypt's brutal enslavement of Israel for generations, they were not to be abhorred 'because thou wast a stranger in his land.' This recalls that Egypt initially welcomed Jacob's family during famine, providing refuge and sustenance (Genesis 46-47). God commanded Israel to remember hospitality received, not just oppression endured. This principle of measured response and historical perspective countered the human tendency toward perpetual grudge-holding.

Theologically, this demonstrates that God's judgments are discriminating, not arbitrary. Different sins receive different responses. Edom's kinship and Egypt's initial hospitality warranted more lenient treatment than Moab's cursing and

Ammon's hostility. This nuanced approach reveals God's justice tempered with mercy, His sovereignty in making distinctions, and His concern that His people respond to enemies with proportional rather than indiscriminate hatred. The law cultivated both discernment and restraint in Israel's relationship with surrounding nations.

Historical Context

Edom's relationship with Israel was perpetually conflicted. Despite their shared ancestry through Isaac, Edom refused Israel passage during the Exodus (Numbers 20:14-21), leading to ongoing tensions. Throughout Israel's monarchy, relations alternated between subjugation (2 Samuel 8:14), rebellion (2 Kings 8:20-22), and outright hostility. Edom's celebration of Jerusalem's destruction in 586 BC provoked prophetic condemnation (Obadiah, Psalm 137:7, Lamentations 4:21-22). Yet this law commanded restraint even toward such a troublesome brother.

Egypt's dual role in Israel's history complicated their relationship. The Exodus narrative emphasizes Egyptian oppression and God's judgment through the ten plagues. However, earlier history recorded Egypt's provision during Joseph's administration (Genesis 41-47) and initial welcome of Jacob's family. Archaeological evidence confirms significant Semitic populations in Egypt's Delta region during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, consistent with biblical accounts. Egypt remained a major power throughout Israel's monarchical period, alternately threatening and offering alliance.

The command's historical wisdom became evident in later periods. During various crises, Israel sought Egyptian help (Isaiah 30-31) and Edomite alliances, despite prophetic warnings. The law's nuanced approach—neither unconditional friendship nor perpetual enmity—provided flexibility for necessary diplomatic relations while maintaining distinct covenant identity. This balanced foreign policy recognized the complexity of international relations while upholding theological priorities.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does this command to avoid abhorring Edomites and Egyptians shape a biblical understanding of how to treat hostile groups?
2. What does this law teach about remembering both kindnesses and injustices from our past when relating to others?
3. How do Christians balance legitimate opposition to evil with the command to love enemies and avoid sinful hatred?

Interlinear Text

לֹא תַּהַטֵּע בְּאֶדְםִי כִּי אַחֲ יְהֹוָה אֲנָה אַתָּה
H3808 Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite H3588 for he is thy brother H1931 H3808

לֹא תַּהַטֵּע בְּמִצְרַי מִיכְרָא כִּי רַבְנָה
H8581 an Egyptian H3588 because thou wast a stranger H1961 H1616

בְּאָרֶצָן
in his land
H776

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 22:21 (References Egypt): Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 10:19 (References Egypt): Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Exodus 23:9 (References Egypt): Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Leviticus 19:34 (References Egypt): But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Genesis 25:30 (Parallel theme): And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom.

Numbers 20:14 (Parallel theme): And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom, Thus saith thy brother Israel, Thou knowest all the travail that hath befallen us:

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