

Haggai 2:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean.

Analysis

Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? (אִם־יִגַע טִמְא־נֶפֶשׁ בְּכֹל־אֵלֶּה הֲיִטְמָא/vayomer Chaggai imyiga teme-nefesh bekhoholeh hayitma)—The second scenario: someone ceremonially unclean through contact with a corpse (טִמְא־נֶפֶשׁ/teme-nefesh, literally "unclean of soul/person," the most serious defilement—Numbers 19:11-22) touches food. Does uncleanness transfer? **And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean** (וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים וַיֹּאמְרוּ יִטְמָא/vaya'anu hakohanim vayomru yitma).

The asymmetrical principle: holiness doesn't transfer easily, but defilement does. One touch from an unclean person contaminates food, making it unfit. This reflects spiritual reality—sin spreads more readily than holiness. One rotten apple spoils the barrel; one holy apple doesn't sanctify rotten ones. Paul warns, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals'" (1 Corinthians 15:33). James notes that friendship with the world makes one an enemy of God (James 4:4).

This principle exposes human optimism about sin's power. We minimize sin's contagion while overestimating holiness' automatic transfer. The law taught Israel that defilement spreads aggressively while holiness requires intentional consecration. This prepares for verse 14's devastating application.

Historical Context

Corpse defilement was the most severe ritual impurity, requiring seven days of purification (Numbers 19). The post-exilic community knew these regulations well—they had reinstated the sacrificial system and were familiar with purity laws. Haggai uses their theological knowledge to trap them into acknowledging a principle they would then apply to their own spiritual condition.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does the ease with which defilement spreads compared to holiness reveal the reality of sin's power and pervasiveness?
2. In what areas of life do you minimize sin's contagious effect or overestimate your ability to remain unaffected by compromise?
3. What does it mean to pursue holiness actively and intentionally rather than assuming righteousness transfers automatically?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר
Then said Haggai touch If one that is unclean by a dead body
H559 H2292 H518 H5060 H2931 H5315 H3605

אֵל לָהּ וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר
It shall be unclean answered And the priests Then said
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וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר
It shall be unclean
H2930

