

Joshua 11:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And all the spoil of these cities, and the cattle, the children of Israel took for a prey unto themselves; but every man they smote with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them, neither left they any to breathe.

Analysis

And all the spoil of these cities, and the cattle, the children of Israel took for a prey unto themselves—The verb **took for a prey** (בָּזְזוּ, bazzu) means to plunder or take as booty. Unlike Jericho (6:18-19) where all spoil was devoted to God, or Ai (8:2) where spoil was permitted, this verse establishes the general conquest policy: **every man they smote with the edge of the sword** (הִחָרִימוּ, hecherímu, devoted to destruction), but property and livestock became Israel's inheritance.

The phrase **neither left they any to breathe** (כֹּל-נֶשְׁמָה, kol-neshamah) echoes Deuteronomy 20:16's command regarding Canaanite nations. The Hebrew neshamah (נֶשְׁמָה, breath/living being) appears in Genesis 2:7 when God breathed life into Adam—its use here emphasizes total removal of Canaanite life from the land. This harsh reality must be understood within herem theology: Canaanite civilization's pervasive wickedness (child sacrifice, cultic prostitution, extreme idolatry) demanded radical surgery lest Israel be infected. The permission to take spoil shows God's provision—conquest served both judgment on wickedness and inheritance for His people.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern warfare customarily permitted soldiers to plunder conquered cities—booty motivated armies and enriched victors. The distinction in Israel's conquest between herem cities (like Jericho, where all spoil went to God's treasury) and cities where plunder was permitted served theological purposes. Jericho, as firstfruits of conquest, belonged entirely to God. Subsequent cities provided for Israel's material needs. The livestock mentioned—cattle, sheep, goats—were crucial for agricultural settlement. Taking these animals as plunder gave incoming Israelite families the capital needed to establish farms and herds. The complete destruction of human populations while preserving material goods parallels God's judgment on Egypt (Exodus 12:29-36)—the wicked destroyed, their possessions transferred to God's people. This pattern recurs eschatologically: Revelation describes the wealth of nations flowing into the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:24-26).

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does God's provision through conquest spoils demonstrate His care for practical needs alongside spiritual purposes?
2. What does the total destruction of people but preservation of property teach about the objects of God's judgment versus provision?
3. How should we understand divine commands that seem harsh to modern sensibilities while recognizing God's perfect justice and holiness?

Interlinear Text

וְכָל	שָׁלַל לְ	הָעָרִים	הָאֵלֶּה	וְהַבָּהֶם ה	בָּזָז ו
H3605	And all the spoil	of these cities	H428	and the cattle	took for a prey
	H7998	H5892		H929	H962
לָהֶם	בְּנֵי י	יִשְׂרָאֵל ל	כָּל	אֶת	הָאָדָם
H1992	the children	of Israel	H7535	H853	H3605
	H1121	H3478			unto themselves but every man
					H120
הֵכּוּ ו	לְפִי	חֶרֶב	עַד	הַשְׁמָדָם	אוֹתָם
they smote	with the edge	of the sword	H5704	until they had destroyed	H853
H5221	H6310	H2719		H8045	
לֹא	הִשָּׁא יְרוּ	כָּל	נִשְׁמָה:		
H3808	them neither left	H3605	they any to breathe		
	H7604		H5397		

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org