Joshua 19:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

> And Eltolad, and Bethul, and Hormah,

Analysis

And Eltolad, and Bethul, and Hormah,

Eltolad (אֶלְתּוֹלַד) appears also as Eltolad in Judah's allotment (15:30) and as Tolad in 1 Chronicles 4:29, demonstrating the textual variations common with minor settlements. The name's uncertain etymology may derive from tolad (תּוֹלָד, "generations" or "descendants"), though the prefixed El (אֶל, "God") suggests a theophoric element, perhaps meaning "God's generations." The city's obscurity after Joshua suggests Simeon's limited development of inherited settlements.

Bethul (בְּתוּאֵל) is called Bethuel in 1 Chronicles 4:30 and Chesil in Joshua 15:30, showing variant names for the same location. The name Bethuel echoes Rebekah's father (Genesis 22:22-23; 24:15), perhaps commemorating the patriarch's family. The root betulah (בְּתוּלָה, "virgin") may indicate the city's name meant "house of the virgin" or could be toponymic coincidence. Such naming ambiguities were common in ancient settlements with multiple designations.

Hormah (חָרְמָה) carries profound theological weight. The name derives from cherem (חֵרֶם, "devoted to destruction"), referring to total consecration to God through annihilation—the ban requiring destruction of everything in conquered cities (Deuteronomy 7:2; 20:16-17). Originally called Zephath, the city was renamed Hormah after Judah and Simeon utterly destroyed it (Judges 1:17), fulfilling Israel's earlier vow (Numbers 21:2-3). That this city of judgment fell to Simeon connects the tribe to the cherem warfare their ancestor had perverted at Shechem—now redirected to righteous ends.

Historical Context

Hormah's location is debated, with Tel Masos (east of Beer-sheba) and Tel Halif the leading candidates. Both sites show Late Bronze/Early Iron Age destructions consistent with Israelite conquest. Numbers 14:45 and 21:3 record battles at Hormah during the wilderness period—first Israel's presumptuous defeat, then later victory under God's blessing, illustrating the difference between self-willed and divinely-ordained warfare.

The practice of cherem (devoted destruction) appears throughout ancient Near Eastern warfare. The Moabite Stone describes King Mesha devoting Israelite captives to Chemosh, showing the concept's regional prevalence. However, Israel's cherem differed theologically—it wasn't mere brutality but ritual purification of the land from Canaanite abominations (Deuteronomy 20:16-18). Archaeological evidence of destroyed Canaanite cities (Hazor, Lachish, etc.) confirms widespread destructions during the Late Bronze Age collapse, though attribution and dating remain scholarly debates.

Hormah's assignment to Simeon is fitting given the tribe's warrior heritage—though their violence at Shechem was condemned, their martial capacity could be channeled righteously in executing God's judgment on Canaan. This redemptive pattern appears throughout Scripture: sinful human traits can be sanctified when submitted to divine purposes.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does Hormah's meaning ("devoted to destruction") challenge our understanding of God's holiness and His judgment against sin?

2. What does the transformation from Zephath to Hormah teach about how God can redirect sinful human tendencies (like Simeon's violence) toward righteous purposes?
3. In what ways does the concept of cherem (total consecration) apply to the Christian's warfare against sin—what must be utterly destroyed rather than partially reformed in our lives?

Interlinear Text

וְאֶלְתּוֹלַ֖ד	וּבְת֥וּל	וְחָרְמָ֑ה:
And Eltolad	**and Bethul**	**and Hormah**
H513	H1329	H2767