

Joshua 7:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.

Analysis

God explains why Israel cannot stand before enemies: 'they were accursed' because 'there is an accursed thing in the midst of thee.' The Hebrew מְרָמָה (cherem—devoted thing, ban) refers to items devoted to God for destruction, forbidden for personal use. Taking devoted things placed Israel under the same ban intended for Canaanites. This illustrates corporate responsibility—one person's sin affects the entire community. The phrase 'I will not be with you anymore' is devastating. God's presence is Israel's only advantage; without it, they're just another small nation. This conditional presence depends on covenant faithfulness. The ultimatum 'except ye destroy the accursed from among you' makes clear: fellowship with God requires removing sin. This prefigures church discipline—corporate purity matters because the church is Christ's body. Paul later commands: 'purge out therefore the old leaven' (1 Corinthians 5:7). The vertical relationship (with God) depends on horizontal relationships (with covenant community) being governed by holiness.

Historical Context

The concept of cherem was central to holy war in Israel. Items devoted to destruction couldn't be repurposed for personal use without desecrating what God had claimed. This wasn't arbitrary; it represented God's absolute sovereignty—He determines what belongs to Him. Ancient Near Eastern peoples recognized divine

claims on war spoils, but Israel's theology was unique in its comprehensiveness and moral grounding. God's withdrawal of presence meant Israel fought alone—catastrophic given their military situation. The phrase 'in the midst of thee' indicates the devoted thing remained within the camp, polluting the entire community. This spatial imagery reflects ancient purity concepts where contamination spread from a central source. Until removed, the entire camp remained unclean before God. Church history shows this principle continues: tolerance of known, unrepentant sin in the church compromises corporate witness and blocks God's blessing.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does this passage challenge modern individualism that assumes sin affects only the sinner?
2. What does God's conditional presence ('I will not be with you anymore') teach about the cost of tolerating sin?
3. In what ways should the church practice discipline to maintain corporate holiness?

Interlinear Text

לֹפֶנְתִּי לְקָרְבָּן יִשְׁרָאֵל אַל־בָּנִים יְצַלָּמָה בָּנִים

except could Therefore the children of Israel not stand before

H3808

H3201

Therefore the children

H1121

וְיִשְׁרָאֵל

of Israel

H3478

לֹא־יִשְׁכַּן

not stand

H6965

before

H6440

עַד־אַבְיבָּה מִפְנָן אַבְיבָּה מִפְנָן לֹפֶנְתִּי לְקָרְבָּן

their enemies their backs but turned before their enemies

H341

H6203

H6437

H6440

וְאַבְיבָּה מִפְנָן

their enemies

H341

H1961

לֹא־בְּמַמְּנָה אָסִיף לֹא־וְתַהֲרִי

because they were accursed except neither will I be with you any more

H2764

H3808

H3254

H1961

מִקְרָבְכֶם: בְּמַמְּנָה לֹא־אָמַת עַמְּךָ מִתְשַׁמֵּדְךָ

H5973

H518

except

H3808

לֹא־אָמַת עַמְּךָ

ye destroy

H8045

בְּמַמְּנָה

because they were accursed

H2764

from among

H7130

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 59:2 (Parallel theme): But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

Numbers 14:45 (Parallel theme): Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah.

Judges 2:14 (References Israel): And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

Deuteronomy 7:26 (Curse): Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing like it: but thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it; for it is a cursed thing.

Joshua 6:18 (Curse): And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it.

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