

Joshua 9:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But all the princes said unto all the congregation, We have sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them.

Analysis

All the princes said unto all the congregation, We have sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel—The verb **sworn** (נִשְׁבַּעְנוּ, nishba'nu) invokes God's name in oath-making, creating a binding covenant. The phrase **by the LORD God of Israel** (בַּיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, ba-YHWH Elohei Yisra'el) emphasizes that the oath's authority rests on God's character, not the princes' wisdom.

Now therefore we may not touch them (לֹא נוּכַל לִנְגֹעַ בָּהֶם, lo nukhal lingo'a bahem)—Despite being deceived, the leaders recognized that breaking an oath made in God's name would profane His holiness. This decision honors Leviticus 19:12: 'Ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God.' The Gibeonites' deception didn't nullify Israel's obligation—God's reputation was at stake. Centuries later, Saul's violation of this oath brought divine judgment (2 Samuel 21:1-14).

Historical Context

The princes' public declaration protected the Gibeonites from popular vengeance when the congregation discovered the deception (v. 18). Ancient Near Eastern treaties invoked deity names as guarantors—breaking such oaths invited divine curse. Israel's reputation for keeping oaths (even obtained through deception) would have spread throughout Canaan, demonstrating covenant faithfulness.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How do you honor commitments made unwisely or through deception without compromising integrity?
2. What does Israel's oath-keeping teach about God's character and expectations for His people?
3. When has protecting God's reputation required you to keep a costly promise?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר וְ	כָּל	הַנְּשִׂאִים	אֶל	כָּל	הָעֵדָה
said	H3605	But all the princes	H413	H3605	unto all the congregation
H559		H5387			H5712
אֲנִי חָנוּ	נִשְׁבַּע עָנוּ	לָהֶם	בְּיְהוָה	יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל
H587	We have sworn	H0	unto them by the LORD	God	of Israel
	H7650		H3068	H430	H3478
לֹא	נֹכַח ל	לִנְגּוֹ	בָּהֶם:		
H6258	H3808	now therefore we may	not touch	H0	
		H3201	H5060		