

Joshua 9:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

This we will do to them; we will even let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we sware unto them.

Analysis

This we will do to them; we will even let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we sware unto them—The phrase **lest wrath be upon us** (וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה אֵלֵינוּ קֶצֶף, v'lo-yihyeh aleinu qetzef) reveals Israel's fear of divine judgment for oath-breaking. The word **wrath** (qetzef) describes God's fierce anger against covenant violation, not mere human displeasure.

The decision to **let them live** (נָחֵיָה, nechayeh) as servants (v. 21) balanced covenant faithfulness with practical wisdom. Rather than execute them (breaking the oath) or fully integrate them (violating herem separation), Israel created a servant class for sacred duties. This compromise protected God's name while limiting Canaanite influence. When Saul later violated this oath by killing Gibeonites (2 Samuel 21:1), God sent three-year famine—proving the wrath Israel feared was real.

Historical Context

The fear of divine wrath for oath-breaking was well-founded in Torah—Numbers 30:2 commands: 'If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word.' Ancient Near Eastern cultures took oaths with utmost seriousness, as violating deity-sworn treaties invited supernatural punishment. Israel's decision demonstrated mature covenant theology: God's honor trumps human convenience.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How seriously do you take promises made in God's name, even when circumstances change?
2. What creative solutions honor both God's holiness and practical realities when facing dilemmas?
3. How does fear of God's discipline function as wise reverence rather than servile terror?

Interlinear Text

זֶאת	נַעֲשֶׂה	לָהֶם	וְהָיָה	אֲנִי	לֹא
H2063	This we will do	H0	to them we will even let them live	H853	H3808
	H6213		H2421		
וְהָיָה	עַל יְנוּ	לִי אֵף	עַל	הַשְּׁבוּעָה	אֲשֶׁר
H1961	H5921	lest wrath	H5921	be upon us because of the oath	H834
		H7110		H7621	
נִשְׁבַּעְנוּ	לָהֶם:				
which we swore	H0				
H7650					

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 20:25 (Parallel theme): It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy, and after vows to make enquiry.

Malachi 3:5 (Judgment): And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false

swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.

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