

Joshua 9:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.

Analysis

Now therefore ye are cursed (וְעַתָּה אַרְוֹרִים אַתֶּם, ve'atah arurim atem)—Joshua pronounced a perpetual curse making the Gibeonites temple servants. The specific tasks—**hewers of wood and drawers of water** (חֹטְבִּים עָצִים וְשָׁאָבִי מִים) chotevei etzim vesho'avei mayim)—were menial labors supporting tabernacle worship. This curse paradoxically became blessing: service in God's house rather than annihilation.

The phrase echoes Deuteronomy 29:11, where such servants were included in covenant assembly. God transformed judicial penalty into gracious incorporation—Canaanites destined for destruction became perpetual temple servants. This prefigures Christ's reversal of Adam's curse, where those condemned become sons who serve joyfully in the Father's house. The Gibeonites' descendants, the Nethinim, faithfully served through Israel's history (Ezra 2:43-58, Nehemiah 3:26).

Historical Context

The Gibeonites' temple service continued for centuries. During Saul's reign, his massacre of Gibeonites violated Joshua's oath, bringing divine judgment requiring atonement (2 Samuel 21:1-14). The Nethinim (temple servants) who returned from Babylonian exile included Gibeonite descendants. Their service demonstrated that proximity to God's presence—even in servitude—surpassed autonomy in pagan darkness.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does the Gibeonites' curse-turned-blessing illustrate God's ability to transform judgment into mercy for those who fear Him?
2. What does their perpetual service in God's house teach about the privilege of worship over worldly freedom?
3. How does this narrative foreshadow the inclusion of Gentiles into God's covenant community through Christ?

Interlinear Text

וְעַתָּה

H6258

אַרְוֹן יְמִ

Now therefore ye are cursed

H779

לֹא אַתָּה

H859

וְחַבְבָּבָ

H3808

וְלֹא תִּפְגַּע

and there shall none of you be freed

H3772

מִבְּנָה

H4480

בָּנָ

H5650

וְחַבְבָּבָ

and hewers

H2404

עֵץ יְמִ

H6086

וְשָׁאָבִי

H7579

מִ יְמִ

H4325

לְבִ יְתָ

H1004

אַלְבָנִי

H430

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 9:21 (Parallel theme): And the princes said unto them, Let them live; but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation; as the princes had promised them.

Joshua 9:27 (Parallel theme): And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the LORD, even unto this day, in the place which he should choose.

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