

The Doctrine of Devoting to God

[From Joshua 6:17] Lev. 27:28 Deut. 20:17

1. The related verb is *châram* (חָרַם) [pronounced *khaw-RAM*], which means ❶ *to shut in, to draw in*; ❷ *to contract the nose, to depress the nose*; ❸ *to prohibit [something being used for common use], to consecrate [to God], to devote [to God]*; ❹ *to completely and utterly destroy, to extirpate*. The connection between the latter two is that whatever is devoted to God is completely removed, either from man's use or from the planet earth. Strong's #2763 BDB #355 (& #356). The related noun is *chêrem* (חֵרֵם) [pronounced *KHĀ-rem*], which means ❶ *a net* (Habak. 1:16–17); ❷ *something devoted entirely to God (implying that it is to be completely destroyed)* (Lev. 27:21 Deut. 7:26); ❸ *the act of completely devoting something to God* (Zech. 14:11 Mal. 3:24). Some things that were taken in battle were designated *chêrem*—they were not to be taken or used or sold by the Jews—these things were destroyed or burned. They completely belonged to God. When used in a negative sense, this word is often rendered *cursed thing*. (Deut. 7:26 13:17 Joshua 6:17–18 I Sam. 15:21). In Lev. 27:21, 28–29 Num. 18:14, *chêrem* is used in the good sense of something which has been set aside for God's exclusive ownership. If memory serves, this was later called *corban* and some would place their possessions under *corban* so that they would not have to share them with their needy parents. The corresponding verb means *to utterly destroy* (see above). It appears to have a completely different meaning in Mic. 1:2 and Hab. 1:15–17, where it is translated *net*. Strong's #2764 BDB #356. Also see Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Lev. 27:28–29.
2. Something which has been devoted to God has been irrevocably given over to God, with no chance of getting it back. That means, if it was a material object, it was burned with fire and if it was a living thing, it was killed. In this way, it had been irrevocably devoted to God.
3. A related word is *qorbân* (קָרְבָּן) [pronounced *kor-BAWN*], which means *that which is brought near*. This word is found almost exclusively in Leviticus and Numbers (the conspicuous exceptions being Ezek. 20:28 40:43). This appears to refer to an animal brought to be offered to God as a blood sacrifice or as a burn offering. This is the animal before it is sacrificed (Lev. 1:3, 10 3:7, 12 Num. 4:28, 32). We could get away with rendering this [*animal*] *offering* most of the time and be safe. Although used very little in the Old Testament, this word was taken by the Jews, changed somewhat, and used as a gimmick in New Testament times. It came to mean *given to God* and certain personal items could be declared *corban*, meaning that they did not have to be shared with anyone else. Some errant adult children would not help support their parents because the things that they owned were declared *corban* and therefore could not be given away to just anybody (which included their parents). BDB #898 Strong #7133.
4. Joshua 6:17: “And it will come to pass the city, it [is] devoted—and all in it—to Y^ehowah; only Rahab the prostitute will live—she and all who [are] with her in the house for she hid the messengers which we sent.” Barnes: *In other cases the inhabitants only of the towns were slain; their cattle and property became the booty of the victors. But Jericho, as the first Canaanitish city that was captured, was devoted by Israel as first-fruits to God, as a token that Israel received all the land from Him. Every living thing was put to death (Rahab and her household excepted) as a sacrifice to God, and the indestructible goods (v. 19) brought into the treasury of the Sanctuary.*¹
5. The NIV Study Bible comments: *The ban placed all of Jericho's inhabitants under the curse of death and all of the city's treasures that could not be destroyed under consignment to the Lord's house (v. 19). According to the law of Moses this ban could be applied to animals for sacrifice, to property given to God, or to any person found worth of death (Lev. 27:28–29). It was Moses himself who ruled that all the inhabitants of Canaan be “devoted” by execution for the idolatry and all its accompanying moral corruption (Dt. 20:16–18).*²
6. Scofield gives us one of the most succinct explanations, but one which fully explains the concept: *Joshua meant that it was the will of God that the whole city be put to the sword and its riches devoted to Him. To take anything for oneself, as Achan did, was to bring a curse. Compare the similar severity with which God judged the sin of Ananias (Acts 5:1–11).*³

¹ Barnes' Notes, Baker Books, ©1996; Vol. II, p. 364.

² The NIV Study Bible; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; pp. 295–296.

³ The New Scofield Reference Bible; Dr. C.I. Scofield; ©1967 New York-Oxford University Press; p. 264.

7. The idea of something belonging completely to God is based upon the fact that all that is in the world belongs to God and this is simply human recognition of that fact. Under no circumstances could these things under the ban be sold, taken and used by man, given away, traded, or even redeemed with something of equal value. They were completely and totally God's possessions.
8. That which is under a ban cannot be redeemed (Lev. 27:28).
9. The inhabitants and the artifacts of Jericho were placed under this ban (Joshua 6:21); the inhabitants of Ai were placed under the ban (Joshua 8:26); all of Makkedah (Joshua 10:28), and all of Hazor (Joshua 11:11). It appears as though the latter three were placed there under Joshua's initiative.
10. Interestingly enough, the very last word in the English arrangement of the canon of Scripture is chêrem. "And he [Elijah] will restore the hearts of the fathers to children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, or else I will come and strike the land with a curse (or, ban)." (Mal. 4:6).