

The Doctrine of Devoting to God or The Chêrem; or Placing Under the Ban

These studies are designed for believers in Jesus Christ only. If you have exercised faith in Christ, then you are in the right place. If you have not, then you need to heed the words of our Lord, Who said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son, so that every [one] believing [or, trusting] in Him shall not perish, but shall be have eternal life! For God did not send His Son into the world so that He should judge the world, but so that the world shall be saved through Him. The one believing [or, trusting] in Him is not judged, but the one not believing has already been judged, because he has not believed in the Name of the only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son of God.” (John 3:16–18). “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life! No one comes to the Father except through [or, by means of] Me!” (John 14:6).

Every study of the Word of God ought to be preceded by a naming of your sins to God. This restores you to fellowship with God (1John 1:8–10). **If we acknowledge our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness** (1John 1:9). If there are people around, you would name these sins silently. If there is no one around, then it does not matter if you name them silently or whether you speak aloud.

Preface: The idea was, that which was placed under the ban (or was devoted entirely to God) was destroyed completely. Generally speaking, this was often a recalcitrant city of people completely and totally in opposition to the God of Israel.

Topics		
Vocabulary	Law of Devotion	Examples
	Rationalization	
Charts, Maps and Short Doctrines		
Peter Pett on the Destruction of all Sihon's People	Coffman's 3 Degrees of the Ban	The Abbreviated Doctrine of Devoting to God

1. The related verb is *châram* (כָּרַם) [pronounced *khaw-RAHM*], 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).
2. The related noun is *chêrem* (כֶּרֶם) [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 | 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 Micah 1:2 and Habbak. 1:15–17, where it is translated *net*. Strong's #2764 BDB #356.

- 1) Barnes: *Devoted thing* – *The primary meaning of the Heb. word חֵרֵם chêrem is something cut off, or shut up. Its specific meaning in the Law is, that which is cut off from common use and given up in some sense to Yahweh, without the right of recall or commutation. It is applied to a field wholly appropriated to the sanctuary Lev. 27:21, and to whatever was doomed to destruction 1Sam. 15:21; 1Kings 20:42. Our translators have often rendered the word by “cursed,” or “a curse,” which in some places may convey the right sense, but it should be remembered that the terms are not identical in their compass of meaning (Deut. 7:26; Joshua 6:17–18; Joshua 7:1; Isa. 34:5; Isa. 43:28, etc. Compare Gal. 3:13).*¹
- 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. God has complete possession of this person or thing.
3. A related word is *qorbân* (קֹרְבָן) [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). More than likely, there was some kind of payment or some kind of legal promise made to the local synagogue for their property. In other words, this was a godly concept which was later abused by the people of Israel. Strong #7133 BDB #898.
4. We first learn of devoting something to God in Lev. 27:28–29 **But any devoted thing [chêrem] which a man devotes [châram] to Jehovah from all which belongs to him, of man or of animal, or of the field of his possession, it shall not be sold nor redeemed. Every devoted thing to Jehovah is most holy. No devoted thing which is dedicated by man shall be ransomed, dying it shall die.** (Green's literal translation)
 - 1) Keil & Delitzsch: *The vow of banning could only be made in connection with persons who obstinately resisted that sanctification of life which was binding upon them; and that an individual was not at liberty to devote a human being to the ban simply at his own will and pleasure, otherwise the ban might have been abused to purposes of ungodliness, and have amounted to a breach of the law, which prohibited the killing of any man, even though he were a slave (Ex. 21:20). In a manner analogous to this, too, the owner of cattle and fields was only allowed to put them under the ban when they had been either desecrated by idolatry or abused to unholy purposes. For there can be no doubt that the idea which lay at the foundation of the ban was that of a compulsory dedication of something which resisted or impeded sanctification; so that in all cases in which it was carried into execution by the*

¹ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the Old Testament*; from e-Sword, Lev. 27:28.

*community or the magistracy, it was an act of the judicial holiness of God manifesting itself in righteousness and judgment.*²

- 2) This concept did not include human sacrifice, in the pagan sense, as is confirmed in Lev. 18:21 Deut. 18:10. Men had to be redeemed if they were the firstborn; that is, they had to be purchased (which was a ritual). Ex. 13:13 34:20 Num. 18:15. However, redemption is not the same as being devoted to God.
- 3) However, there were times when a people was completely destroyed. Based upon the examples which we have in Scripture, these are people who are steeped in heathen practices and are completely and totally opposed to God.
5. 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.
6. That which is under a ban cannot be redeemed (Lev. 27:28). The idea is, they have made a choice, a choice which they will not go back on. Therefore, they have sealed their own fate with their own volition.
7. The first time that this is applied to a population was against King Arad in Num. 21:1–3 *And King Arad the Canaanite, who lived in the south, heard that Israel had come the Way of Spies; and he fought against Israel, and took some of them captive. And Israel vowed a vow to Jehovah, and said, If giving You give this people into my hand, then I will exterminate their cities. And Jehovah listened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities; and the name of the place was called Hormah.* (Green's literal translation) *Hormah* (actually, *Chormah*) means *devoted*. Interestingly enough, we know much more about Sihon. King Arad was completely devoted to God based upon a vow the Israelites made with God.
8. We have another example of this in Sihon. The people of Israel were led by Moses up to where they will enter into the land and they came face to face with Sihon. The people of Sihon knew the background of Israel. They had to choose whether to ally themselves with Israel or to oppose Israel. Opposition to Israel was opposition to the Living God, and that meant death; that meant complete destruction. This event is both real and illustrative. That is, if you turn against God, your life at some point in time will be in utter destruction. You will have nothing. The last person you want to turn against is God. Sihon and all of his people turned against God, and, as a result, they were all destroyed. Num. 21:21–30 Deut. 2:24–35 3:2, 6 4:46–47a
9. This concept is also illustrated in 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.”*
 - 1) 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.*³
 - 2) 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).*

² Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*; from e-Sword; Lev. 27:28–29.

³ Barnes' Notes, Baker Books, ©1996; Vol. II, p. 364.

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 (Deut. 20:16–18).⁴

- 3) 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).⁵*
 - 4) The exception of Rabah and her family indicates that God knows what He is doing when dealing with destroying large populations. He does not screw up and accidentally destroy people in His plan.
10. The people of the Land of Promise did reach a saturation of degeneracy, and they were supposed to be completely destroyed as well. Deut. 7:1–6 **The LORD your God will bring you to the land you're about to enter and take possession of. He will force many nations out of your way: the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites—seven nations larger and more powerful than you. When the LORD your God gives them to you and you defeat them, destroy every one of them because they have been claimed by the LORD. Don't make any treaties with them or show them any mercy. Never marry any of them. Never let your daughters marry their sons or your sons marry their daughters. These people will turn your children away from me to worship other gods. Then the LORD will get very angry with you and will quickly destroy you. But this is what you must do to these people: Tear down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their poles dedicated to the goddess Asherah, and burn their idols. You are a holy people, who belong to the LORD your God. He chose you to be his own special possession out of all the nations on earth. (God's Word™)** This is reiterated in Deut. 20:16–18. The people of Israel were set apart to God; the Canaanites and Amorites in the land were devoted to false gods. This included child sacrifice and other activities which were absolutely opposed to the laws of God.
 11. Unfortunately, under Joshua, some of the people did not destroy everything that was dedicated to God, in Joshua 7:10–15. The man guilty of this, along with his entire family, was executed; and all of the things which he stole were destroyed with them. The man's family were destroyed because they knew what he had done. Joshua 7:16–25
 12. 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.
 13. The Amalekites were put under the ban by Samuel, but King Saul did not fully carry this out. As a result, God looked for another king of Israel. 1Sam. 15
 14. 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).
 15. Rationalization:
 - 1) This concept of devoting to God is one of the most difficult ones for believers to learn and appreciate.
 - 2) Allow me to make up an example, and see if this helps. Let's say that there is an organization of people who wear white sheets and go around the countryside finding black men and hanging them. Not like the KKK, where they did it once and awhile, but an organization where this was their sole purpose. Let's further state that their families celebrated the killing of black men, when the husband would come home and tell about it. A contemporary devoting would be to find all of these people, their families and their things, and to destroy all of it.

⁴ *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; pp. 295–296.

⁵ *The New Scofield Reference Bible*; Dr. C.I. Scofield; ©1967 New York-Oxford University Press; p. 264.

- 3) With regards to those who were put under the ban during the time of ancient Israel, they were guilty of even more heinous activity. They did not just worship another God; they actually burned their own children alive in worship to these gods; and would have sex to the screams of their dying children. Such a people needed to be completely destroyed.
 - 4) We learn from the example of Rahab and her family that God is able to reach into a population of religiously degenerate people and pull out from them the only ones who are worthwhile. God, as the Judge of all mankind, the Judge Who knows all, did not ever allow any innocent people to die. Those who placed their faith in Him would have been likely been saved (unless, of course, they died the sin unto death as did Gen X of the Israelites).
 - 5) Like it or not, God knows what He is doing when He levels judgment against a people or a geographical area.
 - 6) And, like it or not, there are some people who cannot be reasoned with, regardless of what they see or hear.
16. God is not calling any group out to destroy another people. God does not speak in an audible voice telling a United States president, for instance, "Go kill all of the people in Iran." However, it is very possible—particularly if the Iranians obtain nuclear weapons, that we will see nuclear weapons used again—and probably against several cities in Iran.

Topics

Charts, Maps and Short Doctrines

Peter Pett on the Destruction of all Sihon's People

- 1). Had the women been spared they would have led Israel into idolatry, as the women at Baal-peor had done (Numbers 25:1-3).
- 2). Had the children been spared they would have grown up with vengeance in their hearts against those who had destroyed their parents and their nation. And many of them would already have become submerged in idolatry. Furthermore this would have been repeated wherever they went in Canaan. They would have been sitting on a huge time bomb.
- 3). It was Yahweh's purpose to destroy the Canaanites/Amorites as a judgment on them for centuries of evil and sin. He had withheld this judgment for over 400 years (Genesis 15:16) and more, but things had only got worse, not better. As the righteous Judge He had the right to determine what should be done and how it should be done (so as also to teach Israel a lesson about the severity of sin). What would be wrong for us was not wrong for the Judge of all the world. He could have destroyed them by plague or wild beasts or earthquakes or thunderbolts. He chose to do it through Israel. The only question we should ask is how could a holy God allow any sinners to live? Why did He stop at the Canaanites? That is the unanswerable question, for that reveals the depths of sin as it is, until we find the answer in the coming of His Son to save us.
- 4) It should be noted that the corollary of this is that Yahweh was seen as having the right to do what He would with all nations. He was not limited to Israel. The whole world was seen as subject to His judgment, as Abraham had made clear long before (Genesis 18:25).

From <http://www.studydrive.org/com/pet/view.cgi?bk=4&ch=2> accessed December 28, 2013.

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Coffman's 3 Degrees of the Ban

"Utterly destroyed" (Deuteronomy 2:34) has the meaning of "put under the ban." This is the literal meaning of the Hebrew phrase here. There were three degrees of this "war ban," as it came to be called:

1. This was the most severe. Every man, woman, and child was destroyed, and all of their property of every kind was destroyed and none of it was permitted to become spoil or booty for the victors.
2. This second degree of the ban stopped with the destruction of all the people and permitted their property to become the spoil of the conquerors.
3. This third degree issued in the destruction of all the men, the women and children, along with the property becoming the property and slaves of the victors.[34] The Deuteronomic law describing this is in Deuteronomy 20:10-15. It was the second of these bans that was executed against Sihon.

From <http://www.studylight.org/com/bcc/view.cgi?bk=4&ch=2> accessed December 27, 2013; his sources cited there.

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The complete doctrine of Devoting to God ([HTML](#)) ([PDF](#)) ([WPD](#)).

The Abbreviated Doctrine of Devoting to God

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 - 5) Like it or not, God knows what He is doing when He levels judgment against a people or a geographical area.
 - 6) And, like it or not, there are some people who cannot be reasoned with, regardless of what they see or hear.
13. God is not calling any group out to destroy another people. God does not speak in an audible voice telling a United States president, for instance, "Go kill all of the people in Iran." However, it is very possible—particularly if the Iranians obtain nuclear weapons, that we will see nuclear weapons used again—and probably against several cities in Iran.

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