

THEOLOGY OF ḤĒREM CONCEPT: AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF
DEUTERONOMY 7:1-11

BY

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit.

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the young Christian men and women who, because they have taken their faith seriously, they have been confronted with ethical concerns raised by war passages in the Old Testament.

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ABSTRACT

The concept of *ḥērem* has narrowly been interpreted within context of warfare and its operationalization limited to the conquest period. Through exegesis of Deuteronomy 7 and other related scripture, this research examined *ḥērem* as a salvific concept that as divinely prescribed in the Torah with its purpose being the extermination of evil and purification of Yahweh's worship. The research looked at how *ḥērem* is conceptualized in the Torah; how *ḥērem* concept is developed in the rest of the Hebrew Scripture; and it proposed how contemporary Christians should apply the *ḥērem* concept. This research used Social Scientific criticism and grammatical-historical criticism method to examine the main text. Chapter One focus on the background to the study, problem statement, objectives of the research, significance of the research and theoretical method. Chapter Two looks at the literature relating to the *ḥērem* concept; Chapter Three discusses the cultural and historical context of the book of Deuteronomy focusing mainly on a general historical background of Deuteronomy; Chapter Four discusses the analysis of Deuteronomy 7:1-11 and the synthesis of the Biblical data; Chapter Five gives conclusion and recommendations.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

DEUT:	Deuteronomy
NASB:	New American Standard Bible
Gen:	Genesis
Lev.	Leviticus
Ps.	Psalms
Rom.	Romans
Cor.	Corinthians

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

This is an introductory chapter that seeks to highlight various positions held about the Hebrew concept of *hērem* and why the concept needs further study. This chapter examines the background of the study, the statement problem, the significance of the study, the objectives of the study and the research questions. The chapter also highlights the methodology of the research.

Background of the Study

The Hebrew term *hērem* which has been interpreted as ‘devote’ or ‘exterminate’, ‘dedicate’ ‘ban’ (Brown, Driver, & Briggs, 1979), is perhaps one of the most misunderstood terms in the Bible. *Hērem*, being a divine command that was initiated in the Old Testament can be seen as one of the “chief objections to the view that the God of the Old Testament is a God of love” (Kaiser, Jr., Davids, Bruce, & Brauch, 1996). Indeed, superficial reading of the Yahweh-war passages in the Old Testament such as Numbers 21:1-3, Deuteronomy 7:1-16; 20:1-20; 13:12-18; Joshua 6:1-27; 8:1-29; 10-11; 1 Samuel 15:1-23, seems to be contradicted by Jesus’s sermon on the mount as stated in Mathew chapter 5 to chapter 7, where it espoused peaceful coexistence through loving one’s enemies.

This perceived notion of contradiction tends to encourage a dichotomous view of the Scripture where some Christians would ascribe more authority to the New Testament and de-canonized the Old Testament. Due to the misunderstanding of various Old Testament concepts such as *hērem*, a low view of the Old Testament has been developed. For instance, Levine (2017) points out Marcionism that concluded that the Torah is obsolete, irrelevant, or impossible to follow. According to Levine

(2017), Marcionism erroneously contrasted a Jewish/Old Testament God of wrath with a Christian/New Testament God of love.

Among the various Old Testament concepts, *hērem* is perhaps the most misunderstood and sometimes misused concepts. According to Anderson (2003), ‘of the many tensions rising from a careful reading of the Bible, none of them is as striking or problematic as God’s commanding genocide in the conquest, indeed, the extermination of the Canaanites’. Anderson (2003, pg. 31) further asserts that

“this divine sanction of violence is perhaps the greatest theological and hermeneutical problem in the Bible. It is theological in that Jesus claims to represent the will and reign of God, while at the same time God is portrayed starkly in the Hebrew Bible as the one commanding the lethal conquest”.

This notion is also supported by Cowles (2003) who stated that ‘to attribute such atrocities to actual intention and will of God poses insuperable difficulties for Christian theology, ethics, and praxis’. Trimm (2012) wrote that ‘ethically, the killing of the Canaanites in holy war horrifies modern readers of the Old Testament and cries out for either explanation or condemnation’.

For many Christians, *hērem* is too cruel to be ascribed to the loving and merciful God portrayed in the New Testament. Longman III (2003) pointed out that ‘many Christians have disowned the Old Testament in order to avoid embracing the bloody acts of God that may be found in its pages’. Longman III (2003) argued that many Christians “note the tremendous difference between the God of Joshua on the one hand and Jesus Christ on the other, who instructed us to love our enemies and to turn the other cheek”. One of the many questions that could be asked would include, how should modern reader harmonize such a vast difference in the Biblical

interpretation? Evidently, the genocidal nature of YAHWEH-war texts in light of a good and loving God is indeed not palatable to the modern minds and temptation to tone down their harshness down is inevitable. Questions such as, did the LORD really command the killing of the Canaanites people? Or could it be that Moses and Joshua who misunderstood Yahweh's command?

The “attempts to tone down the command or to mitigate its stark reality, have failed from the start since God's instruction are too clear, and too many texts speak of consigning whole populations to destruction as seen in Exodus 23:32-33;34:11-16; Deuteronomy 7:1-5; 20:16-18”. (Kaiser, Jr. W.C.; Davids, P.H.; Bruce, F.F.; Brauch, M.T., 1996). Also, any attempt to explain away the reality of *hērem* by either selectively rejecting some portion of the Old Testament or by ascribing it to human instigation has a potential of de-canonizing Old Testament and by extension challenging the foundation of the New Testament canon. The argument here is that *hērem* should not be associated with the loving and merciful God of the Bible, represented by Jesus and His teachings. With this assumption, *hērem* is hence incorrectly portrayed as an unpalatable concept to the modern mind for it is clearly inconsistent with the nature of God revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus.

This researcher argues for the view that *hērem* was indeed Yahweh's command. This command, however, is to be understood within the context of the salvific program by Yahweh and through the community of Israel. Appreciating *hērem* within the overall salvific program would uphold the consistency of Yahweh's character throughout the Scripture, His current dealings with the Church, and His future dealings with all creations. This is due to the fact that salvation motif runs throughout the Scripture.

Through exegetical work on Deuteronomy 7 as the primary text and argument from other related Scripture, this research examined *ḥērem* as a salvific concept. Block, (2012) points out that ‘Deuteronomy 7 presents one of the most problematic, if not offensive, texts in all Scripture’. This is because of the *ḥērem* concept directed towards the Canaanite nations. Block (2012) continued that ‘while early church fathers tended to interpret Yahweh’s charge to eliminate the Canaanites allegorically, today many treat the policies prescribed here and in Deuteronomy chapter 20 as textual fossils from primitive time, when ethical and religious ideas had not risen to the level of later prophets and certainly inferior to the ethics espoused in the New Testament by Jesus (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35)’. This view clearly suggests that the *ḥērem* policy in Deuteronomy 7 and 20 are archaic and cannot be said to be inspired. Stern (1991) appealed to the existence of similar policies in the ancient Near East and argued that ‘God apparently adapts prevailing practices to his own sacred agenda, though never with the intention of this becoming permanent or universal policy nor of this being the ultimate ideal’. Here, Stern (1991)’s view suggests that in God’s progressive revelation, the Deuteronomy *ḥērem* policy was for a specific period of time for a specific divine purpose. However, whether archaic or limited to a particular time in history, the genocidal perception attributed to *ḥērem* policy is not addressed.

Moberly (1999) proposed that “*ḥērem* ordinance was never intended to be applied literally, but rather functions as a metaphor for absolute religious fidelity”. He argued that “Deut. 7 is not primarily concerned with the practice of *ḥērem* but it focuses on Israel’s status as the people of the LORD (7:6, 9-10)”. Nevertheless, the metaphorical interpretation of this text would deny the historicity of conquest narratives (Joshua 6)

where *ḥērem* was indeed actualized. This is because conquest narratives in Joshua chapter 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11 would have to be explained metaphorically. For instance, the destruction of Jericho would then be metaphorical hence denying the historical factuality of the event.

Statement of the Problem

The concept of *ḥērem* has largely been interpreted within the context of warfare in the Old Testament and its operationalization has been limited to the conquest period. As a warfare motif, *ḥērem* is modernly seen as a divine genocide where the LORD presided over ethnic cleansing in a manner that is inappropriate to a loving God revealed in the New Testament. This understanding of *ḥērem* clearly cast doubt on Yahweh's consistent character and set a stage for de-canonization of the Old Testament. It is the observation of the researcher that a narrow view of salvation by the modern Bible readers that has largely contributed to *ḥērem* being interpreted as divine genocide. The theme of salvation in which *ḥērem* is one of its integrative motifs, runs throughout the whole Scripture. Therefore, by understanding *ḥērem* as a salvific concept that runs throughout the whole Scripture, any possible de-canonization of Old Testament on the ground of the perceived inconsistency of Yahweh's character, would be mitigated.

The researcher proposes that *ḥērem* concept is an integrative motif that was divinely prescribed and executed in the Torah with its purpose being the extermination of evil and purification of Yahweh's worship. Essentially, he holds that *ḥērem* was prescribed in the Torah, was operationalized throughout the rest of Old Testament books, implemented in the New Testament period, is operational in every Christian today and will be culminated in the Day of the Lord when all evil

would be obliterated. This study, therefore, seeks to expound the *ḥērem* concept which has been narrowly understood within warfare context and has been limited to the conquest period.

The significance of the Study

It is the submission of the researcher that *ḥērem* needs to be understood within the overall context of Yahweh's salvific program and not limiting it to the context of warfare in the Old Testament. In this way, *the ḥērem* concept would not be interpreted through the modern understanding of genocide where Yahweh-war passages in Old Testament have been skeptically read and literary applied in instances such as the crusades and Rwanda genocides. Indeed, there have been instances where *the ḥērem* concept has been abused due to a literal application. Cowles (2003) rightly observed that 'the issue of divinely initiated and sanctioned violence is no more academic matter was tragically demonstrated in the self-destructive insanity that decimated Rwanda, the most Christianized nation in Africa when the dominant Hutus set out to exterminate the minority Tutsis'.

Interpreting *ḥērem* as a salvific concept will refocus the modern reader from seeing the heinousness of *ḥērem* on an ethnic group to looking inward and appreciating the repugnant nature of sin in light of the holiness of God. This will address the modern prevailing thinking that seeks to segment God into two; the God of the Old Testament, who was ruthless and the God of the New Testament who is a Father and will not dare destroy His own people created in His image and likeness. It will also lead to an appreciation of God's grace on people, especially by those who believe they live in the dispensation of grace.

This research will be a tool to the body of Jesus Christ as she responds to the skeptics who, on the basis of the LORD war texts, have continued to attack religion in General and Christian faith in particular. It will also be helpful in evangelizing the modern man who seems to underrate sin and undermine the holiness of God due to prevailing relativistic thinking. It will indeed challenge the narrow view of salvation which is characterized by the language that is void of the terms such as holiness, sin, grace, justification, sanctification heaven and, hell but full of terms such as happiness, niceness, and an earned heavenly reward' (White, 2006).

Objectives of the Study

This study will seek to achieve the following objectives;

1. To examine how *ḥērem* concept was prescribed in the Torah
2. To explore how *ḥērem* concept has been operationalized in the rest of the Hebrew Scripture
3. To propose how contemporary Christians should apply *ḥērem* concept

Research Questions

This research will seek to answer the following questions;

- 1) How is *ḥērem* concept conceptualized in Torah?
- 2) How has *ḥērem* concept developed in the rest of Hebrew Scripture?
- 3) How should contemporary Christians apply the *ḥērem* concept?

Research Methodology

This research is primarily exegetical hence exegetical tools will be utilized. The researcher employed grammatical-historical method and social scientific method in conducting this research.

Using the social scientific criticism, the researcher sought to determine how *ḥērem* was practice in the ancient Near East societies. This method enabled the researcher to look at some aspect of *ḥērem* concept within the warfare framework in ancient Near East societies. According to Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard (1993), ‘Deuteronomy is best understood as a covenant document akin to ancient treaties. It must be interpreted against this treaty background’. Klein, et al further argues that Deuteronomy should be read in light of one crucial datum of historical background: the potential, corrupting influence of the Canaanite religion on Israel”. According to Elliot (2011, pg. 3),

“Social-scientific criticism of the Bible ‘is that phase of the exegetical task which analyses the social and cultural dimensions of the text and of its environmental context through the utilization of the perspectives, theory, models, and research of the social sciences. As a component of the historical-critical method of exegesis, Social-Scientific Criticism investigates biblical texts as meaningful configurations of language intended to communicate between composers and audiences”.

Yee (1995) also stated that social scientific criticism helps provide “knowledge of the social structures and institutions in order to fully comprehend the world depicted in the Hebrew Bible”. Social- scientific criticism enabled the researcher to examine the concept of *ḥērem* by interrogating the categories of the ancient social world as far as *ḥērem* concept is concerned.

The Scripture is the primary data. Therefore, the data will be collected and analysed using the grammatical-historical method (exegesis). According to Fee

(2002) exegesis refers to a historical investigation into the meaning of the biblical text. Fee (2002) argues that the presupposition lying behind this task is that biblical books had “authors” and “readers” and that authors intended that the readers understand what they wrote’. Grammatical-historical method looked at the following aspects of the investigation into the meaning of the selected text; setting, structure, syntax, semantics, summation, and significance. The primary text being examined will be Deuteronomy 7:1-11. Other related texts that have the idea of *ḥērem* will be explored.

Assumptions of the Study

This study is done on the assumption that, although God has revealed Himself to man through various actions in the Scripture, all of His actions are consistent with His eternal character and geared towards His redemptive plans for man. This means that the underlying principle of *ḥērem* concept runs through the whole Scripture into the eschatological reality and is embedded in the salvation motif.

The Scope of the Study

Although the researcher asserts that *ḥērem* is an integrative motif that runs throughout the whole Scripture, this research will be limited to examining how the *ḥērem* concept was prescribed in the Torah and how it is operationalized in the rest of the Hebrew Scripture. The study, therefore, will seek to examine the concept of *ḥērem* in the Old Testament. It will also examine its application by the contemporary Christians without an in-depth analysis of any New Testament text.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter explores how various scholars have understood the concept of *ḥērem*. It discusses the meaning and purpose of *ḥērem*. It highlights *ḥērem* in Ancient near East communities. It also discusses the relationship between *ḥērem* and holy war. Finally, a focus on the *ḥērem* in the book of Deuteronomy is discussed.

Concept of *Ḥērem*

Without a doubt, the *ḥērem* concept has attracted various perspectives from scholars. Attributing the origination of *ḥērem* to the LORD is perhaps one of the main reasons this concept has attracted such interest. The main concern relates the question, how could a good God command a total extermination of entire communities? Merrill (2003) stated that the “basic to the problem of the LORD war in Old Testament, with its corollary application of *ḥērem* or genocide, is the nature of God, for it is he, according to the sacred text, who conceived, instigated, implemented, and benefited from it”.

Whereas *ḥērem* made clear sense to the ancient Israelites, this concept elicits negative feelings from the modern readers of the Bible, especially those who have not subscribed to the faith in Yahweh. This could be attributed to the fact that “modern international law has been formulated with clear stipulation aimed at protecting the noncombatant and also the horrendous tragedy of holocaust reported in our world” (Guillemette, 1995). And even if the Canaanites were combatant, the destruction of children and women, who are considered vulnerable groups, raises concern to the skeptics of the Bible. Genocide is highly condemned globally as

evidenced in the establishment of the highest court (International Criminal Court) to execute genocides propagators (Arsanjani, 1999). Also, religious wars that have been done in the past such as the one by crusaders, who according to (Riley-Smith, 2008) “deserve their poor reputation” Violence being advanced by Islamic fundamentalists currently could also be cited as the contributors of the negative view of the *ḥērem* concept. This is because in most cases the skeptic of Christianity and the Bible do not see the fundamental differences among world religions.

Majority of the modern readers read the LORD war passages through the modern definition of the genocide and the emotions that come with it. Ethically, without appreciating the purpose of *the ḥērem* concept, one is bound to negatively criticize it. The view that there was a gruesome application of *the ḥērem* concept is definitely unpalatable to the 21st-century readers. But also, the existence of the concept within the pages of the Scripture presents a moral issue for believers to wrestle with. Anderson (2003, pg. 31) captures this notion when he stated that;

“If God is the one commanding either murder or nonviolence, such a presentation has moral implications for those seeking to follow the will of God. If indeed God commands both actions, God seems contradictory, or at least inconsistent, and the struggle then becomes how to decide which of those directives should be followed. What results from these considerations is that the Bible is often interpreted variously, and it ceases to speak with a clear and authoritative voice on a historically important matter, especially with relation to the Bible's role in supporting or resisting violence”.

This confirms that *ḥērem* concept is arguably one of the most complex concepts in the Old Testament that have troubled many readers. As opposed to drawing people to saving grace of God, this concept has tended to push skeptics away on the ethical ground. Copan (2011) argues that “probably the most difficult Old

Testament ethical issue is the divine command to kill Canaanites'. He continues that 'Theologian-turned-atheist Gerd Ludemann wrote; 'the command to exterminate the Canaanites is extremely offensive '– a far cry from the merciful God frequently proclaimed in Scripture''. According to Gerd, a merciful God and a wrathful God cannot be the same God at the same time. Walzer (1992) stated that "for the modern reader, the conquest of Canaan, with all its attendant slaughter, is the most problematic moment in the history of ancient Israel". These comments further highlight the clear misunderstanding of *ḥērem*. In fact, it seems that the more the world advance and becomes a global village the more the concept of *ḥērem* is viewed as problematic and a threat to any community. It is surely possible that in the future, the Scripture could be banned on the ground that it inspires violence and pose a threat to the global community.

Different positions have been espoused to explain *ḥērem*. For instance, the *ḥērem* has been explained within the context of holy war as detailed by Rad (1991) who argued that *ḥērem* was an integral part of the Holy War. Others have argued, "For a metaphorical understanding of the *ḥērem*, a reading that suggests *ḥērem* is a metaphor for religious fidelity" (Moberly, 1999). Others such as (Cowles, 2003) tries to absolve God from *ḥērem* execution by attributing *ḥērem* to Moses and Joshua and overemphasizing the love nature of God. Merrill (2003) argues that "Holy War was divinely sanctioned in the Old Testament but cannot be justified in the church except in term of spiritual conflict". Longman III, (2003) attempted to trace *ḥērem* from "God fighting Israel's enemies (Deuteronomy 28:7), God fighting Israel (Deuteronomy 28:25, God fighting in the future as a warrior (Daniel 7:15-28), Jesus fighting against spiritual powers and authorities (Mathew 11:4-6) and God

fighting in the final battle (Revelation 19:11-21)". On the other hand, Lohr (2009) comforts himself that "while I may object to the idea that God would command such a thing, I am encouraged that it is not to be reenacted".

It is the submission of the researcher that whereas these positions contain some valid support from the Scripture, the fundamental goal of *ḥērem* concept, which is the extermination of evil/sin so as to have purified worship of the LORD is not properly emphasized in such positions. The holiness of the LORD and the holiness of the Israelites, which are key factors to understand *ḥērem* is kept at a periphery. Perhaps appreciating the meaning and the purpose of *ḥērem* would shade more light on the researcher's position.

Meaning and Purpose of *Ḥērem*

Different English words have been used as the equivalence of the Hebrew word *ḥērem* seen in Deuteronomy 7:2. Such words include 'devoted to destruction' 'ban' 'totally destroy' 'devoted things' and 'dedicated' (Baker & Carpenter, 2003). According to Baker and Carpenter (2003) *ḥērem* is "a masculine noun meaning devoted things, devoted to destruction, devotion, things under the ban, cursed". Baker and Carpenter (2003) further points out that "the term *ḥērem* occurs 29 times in the OT and has been variously translated 'ban', 'excommunication', 'taboo', 'a consecrated or contaminated object/person'. Ambiguity in the translation of the concept is seen in how the various words could be used. Lilley (1993, pg.169) in commenting on the problem of translating *ḥērem* noted that;

"Devoted' has acquired a connotation of personal loyalty; 'devoted to destruction' is periphrastic and not accurate in all contexts. 'Ban' has to be given a technical meaning, and in many places, it would be awkward or difficult to use. 'Dedicated' is too

wide a term and fails to convey the idea of destruction which is often required. The RSV and NIV prefer ‘devoted thing’ for the noun and ‘totally destroy’ for the verb, which is accurate but leads to many marginal notes’. The Greek translators experienced similar difficulty; the Septuagint is almost equally divided between ἀνάθημα and ὄλεθρον (counting verbal forms and cognates in both cases). Certainly, there is a derived meaning of *haharîm* in which the element of ‘devotion’ is weakened or perhaps non-existent, but it is not always easy to identify, and arguably the Septuagint adopts it too readily”.

Despite the highlighted ambiguity of the various words used, one cannot fail to observe that being ‘set apart’ or ‘remove from common use’ and being ‘destroyed’ are ideas that describe *hērem*. There is both a religious and militaristic connotation in each of the equivalence word used. Lilley (1993) chose to “re-examine the biblical uses of *hērem* without reference to the idea of ‘holy war’; noting first that the meaning is not necessarily, or perhaps primarily, military”. He concludes that ‘where the word *hērem* is used with its full religious force (and always, in its nominal form), it means uncompromising consecration without a possibility of recall or redemption’. Walton and Walton (2017) tend to concur with Lilley (1993) when he contended that “the common English translations of the Hebrew word *hērem* (ASV ‘Utterly destroy’; NIV ‘Destroy totally’; CEB “place under the ban”; NET “Utterly annihilate”; are misleading because they imply the word specifies something that happens to the object that it is destroyed”. This argument tends to limit *hērem* within Israel’s sacrificial system as discussed in the book of Leviticus where persons, land, animal, cities would be dedicated for the use of Yahweh’s worship. In other words, this argument fails to appreciate the usage of *hērem* in the context of addressing sins or evil as seen in texts such as Deuteronomy chapter 7, 13 and 20 but limits the meaning of *hērem* only to ‘devotion’ which emphasize consecration hence leaving out the retributive aspect of the word such ‘devoted to destruction’ or ‘utterly destroy’.

According to Walton and Walton (2017) the word *ḥērem* actually refers to the removal of something from human use. The emphasis is not on the object but on everyone around the object; ‘no one shall make use of this’. Actually, Walton and Walton (2017), categorically denies any other meaning of *ḥērem* apart from the ‘removal from human use’. For Walton and Walton (2017) “there are three primary targets for *ḥērem* in the Old Testament: the territory of the land itself, the identities of communities within the land but outside the covenant, and the identities of smaller communities of Israelites within the larger community of the people of the covenant”. Whereas this idea of ‘removal from human use’ is included in the definition of *ḥērem*, it is not be seen as the only definition of *ḥērem*. The policy of *ḥērem* has both negative connotations of utterly destroying as rendered in NIV and positive connotation of setting apart for divine use only.

Glick (2007) is perhaps correct in categorizing *ḥērem* legal text into “sacred *ḥērem* and ‘sin *ḥērem*’. He argues that ‘sacred *ḥērem* as indicated in Leviticus 27 denotes ‘voluntary, irreversible gifts that transfer items to God’s exclusive ownership’. This also includes the spoils of war such as silver, gold, iron, animals, and bronze that would be set aside for religious use only. On the other hand, continues Glick, ‘sin *ḥērem*’ as seen in the apostate city in Deuteronomy 13, and the *ḥērem* against the Canaanite nations in Deuteronomy 7 & 20, addresses sin either punitively or proactively, and they demand total eradication which parallels punishment for treason in the ancient Near Eastern’. This categorization by Glick (2007) is an attempt to capture the meaning of *ḥērem* both as the consecration of gifts or persons to God and destruction of the enemies that pose danger to the integrity of God’s people. Glick submits that ‘in both types of *ḥērem*, the required completeness

express the theological insistence on God's exclusivity'. Indeed, a proper understanding of *ḥērem* must factor in the idea of Yahweh's exclusivity in relations to other Ancient Near Eastern gods. This exclusivity is mainly captured in that fact that the LORD is holy and whatever would near him must be holy. Israel, therefore, needed to be holy and be kept holy. This is because Israel had the privilege of being a 'kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exodus 19:6) and a people were chosen from the all the earth to be Yahweh's possession. Lohr (2009, pg. 162) rightly stated that;

“The people are set apart as something treasured, as a king treasures something above his other possessions; because Israel belongs to Yahweh, the people must remain holy and pure. It is here that we can better understand the purpose of the *ḥērem*. Just as the *ḥērem* is closely connected with the idea of Israel's holiness, it also functions to preserve that holiness. Through the '*ḥērem*', Israel is able to be what God intended Israel to be: a people set apart and devoted to him”.

Lohr (2009) correctly points out the relationship between *ḥērem* and holiness. The community of Israel was subjected to 'sacred *ḥērem*' hence were a holy community. They were also to subject the Canaanites to 'sin '*ḥērem*' and not mixed with them because they are holy people.

Holiness is seen as key in the execution of '*ḥērem*'. Deuteronomy 7: 6 begins with the conjunction 'for' hence linking the reason for carrying out *ḥērem* as discussed in the previous verses. Because Israel is a holy people to the LORD, they were not to adopt the evil practices of their neighbors. On the contrary, they were to subject them to 'sin *ḥērem*' failure to which the LORD will destroy them (vs. 2, 4). One can, therefore, see that *ḥērem* was not necessarily carried out for the sake of Israel but for the sake of Yahweh's holiness and Israel were chosen to express that holiness. In other words, as Lohr (2009) puts it, *ḥērem* both "functions to preserve that

holiness and enabling Israel to be what the LORD intended for her to be”. The question then would be, what did the LORD intend for Israel to be? For a start, it is clear that whatever state the Israel community was to be, that state must showcase the holiness of God for ‘you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy’(Leviticus 20:26).

Wood (2002) argues that “*ḥērem* is among the social maintenance mechanisms in Israel society that were intended to keep her holy by fencing out negative influences from the surrounding neighbor”. This is well seen in Deuteronomy 7:4; 20:18 that shows that the neighboring communities “will turn their sons away from following Me to serve other gods” or “teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods” (NASB). The purpose of *ḥērem* in these texts was, therefore, to proactively protect the children of Israel from being influenced by the neighboring communities. This purpose implies that the neighboring communities had evil practices that could easily be adopted by Israel.

The moral depravity of the Canaanites nations is clearly attested in the Scripture. Various prohibitions outlined in the book of Leviticus are directly connected with the ways and patterns of the Canaanites that Israelites were expected to avoid. Holdcroft (1996) in defending *ḥērem* directed to the Canaanites stated that “God was not fierce and ruthless, but their depravity and moral rebellion demanded His action. Their perverted so-called “worship” appears to have consisted, at least in part, of sex acts, including degraded aberrations, along with cruel and brutal human sacrifices”. Therefore, the command to destroy was basically meant to insulate Israel from any corruption practiced by her neighbors. This being the case, one would raise some questions here; what was at stake if Israel adopted the evil practices of their

surrounding that would necessitate such an extreme judgment on the neighboring people? Why would the LORD prescribe such tough measures in dealing with these communities? Or was this concept a common practice among the ancient Near Eastern communities? A clear explanation of these questions would revolve around the holiness of God and the worship to be rendered to Him by all creation in the context of His salvific agenda to all nations.

It is clear also that by fencing out evil influence over Israel community, *ḥērem* carries the “idea of separation and transfer to an outside sphere” (Baker & Carpenter, 2003). This is seen in the sense that the chosen community was to be separated from anything that is profane and anything or anyone devoted to Yahweh was to be considered out of the common usage. The Land, being considered Yahweh’s property, was also holy and anything or anyone profaning it must be gotten rid of. It is on the ground of profaning the Land belonging to Yahweh’s sphere were the Canaanites subjected to *ḥērem*. According (Baker & Carpenter, 2003) “in the Old Testament, the concept of *ḥērem* has three applications: *ḥērem* of an entire community, *ḥērem* of an individual, and *ḥērem* as excommunication or ostracizing’. All of these applications are “derived from the basic idea of separation and transfer to an outside sphere”. Walton and Walton (2017) rightly highlighted four distinct categories of things that can be *ḥērem* in the Old Testament. These include “inanimate objects, including plots of land; living individuals (people or animals); abstractions representing communities of people; and cities”.

This idea of *ḥērem* as excommunication or ostracizing is quite instructive in capturing the implicit usage of the concept of *ḥērem* in the rest of Hebrew scripture other than the Torah. This usage according to (Baker & Carpenter, 2003) also

called *niddûy* in the Talmud from the verb *niddâ* is attested also in the Old Testament in the meaning ‘to remove, expel’ as seen in Isa 66:5 and Amos 6:3. Baker et al argued that this usage is ‘believed to be a late development from the Second Temple period (Ezra 10:8) and is fully attested in rabbinical literature and later sources’.

In fact, the exile of children of Israel by Babylonians and Assyrians is to be seen as operationalization of *ḥērem*. According to Leviticus 18:28-29, ‘if Israel defiled the land, it will spew them out just as it spewed out the nation which has been before them. And anyone who will do any abominations shall be cut off from among their people’. This language is indeed a language of *ḥērem* and the threat therein was finally fulfilled when Israel was taken into exile. The prophets made reference to the idea of exile warning Israel of idolatry and disobedience. Because Israel failed to keep up the holiness of Yahweh, God devoted them to *ḥērem*.

Ḥērem in warfare by the Ancient near East Societies

It has been argued that *ḥērem* was not new to Israel and that Israel just adopted it from the Ancient Near east communities. Collins (2003) mentioned that “the practice was not peculiar to Israel”. He makes reference to the “parallel provided by the Moabite Stone, erected by the ninth century king Mesha that stated and Chemosh said to me, "Go, and take Nebo from Israel. So I went by night and fought against it from the break of dawn until noon, taking it and slaying all, seven thousand men, boys, women, girls, and maid-servants, for I had devoted them to destruction for (the god) Ashtar Chemosh”. However, Hubbard (2009) rightly observed that one crucial qualification concerning the practice in Israel was that “the Old Testament does not understand every Israelite destruction of a city or people as an act of religious *ḥērem*”.

Hubbard (2009) further states that “no Israelite leader can on his own decision to impose *ḥērem* on an enemy –only the LORD himself can designate what is *ḥērem*”.

Stern (1990) argues that ‘Holy War was an Israelite inheritance, not an Israelite invention, and its main practitioner and Israel's major model in the period of the monarchy was Assyria’. Trimm (2012) argues that “in the pre-monarchic stage, Israel believed in the LORD as a divine warrior, and they believed in divine initiative during warfare”.

Trimm further argued that “Israel acquired the concept of *ḥērem* from other nations but changed the meaning during the time of the conquest from not taking prisoners to a complete destruction of an enemy as a punishment for idolatry”. Now, although there were nations such as Moabites and Assyrians who carried out holy war, it is clear that none could be equated to the one carried out by the Israelites. Most of the Ancient near East communities were polytheistic while Israel was monotheistic. Therefore, the modification of *ḥērem* to include “complete destruction of an enemy as a punishment for idolatry”, as suggested by Trimm, shows that Israel’s *ḥērem* was both internal and external. In other words, idolatry is a threat to the holiness of God, was punishable both among Israel as seen in Deuteronomy 13 and among other nations. This speaks of the exclusive nature of the LORD over all any territorial gods.

Merrill E. (2003) rightly stated that “Israel’s role in the implementation of the LORD war needs careful attention because only Israel was authorized to carry it out in Old Testament times”. The reason for this dubious privilege is clear: Israel was the elect of God, chosen not just to mediate the message of salvation to the world but also to serve as his agent in bringing to pass his will on the earth. It should also be noted by implementing the LORD war to the Canaanites, Israel was, in a sense, being

warned. They were being warned that if they would follow the ways of the Canaanites, they would also fall in the same fate. This notion is evidenced in the many judgment oracles given by the prophets that against other nations. Walton and Walton (2017) highlighted this point when he discussed that “the most important thing is to notice about judgment oracles on the nations is that the direct audience is not the nation in question”. Walton and Walton (2017) further discussed that “Israel’s covenant infidelity is based on aspiring to emulate the nations. By condemning the nations that the Israelite audience admires and imitates, the prophet condemns Israel as well”. The execution of *ḥērem* to the Canaanites should indeed be seen as both achieving the judgment to the Canaanites and a warning to Israelites.

Ḥērem as Holy War

Ḥērem has been used as a synonym of the Holy War. The Idea of Holy War was introduced by Rad (Rad, 1991). Christensen (1991) commented that “the command to destroy them without showing mercy is a language that belongs to the sphere of ‘Holy War as celebrated event’ in ancient Israel and is to be read poetically”. Longman III (2003) argues that *ḥērem* is used as a term to describe waging war in Israel, in essence as a synonym for holy war or the LORD war. In actuality, *ḥērem* refers to the climatic aspect of the divine warfare: the offering of the conquered people and their possessions to the Lord’. Therefore, an understanding of Holy War motif is necessary for one to appreciate the concept of *ḥērem*. This is also because as Merrill (2003) pointed out “the term Holy War has found fresh currency with the rise of militant Islam and its claim in some quarters that terrorist activities in its name fall under the rubric of *jihād*”.

Reading Islamic *jihad* into *ḥērem* would fundamentally alter the Biblical concept of *ḥērem*, especially in regards to the holiness motif. As opposed to *ḥērem* where the LORD and Israel were key players with the LORD being the main actor, jihad is more a political ideology not executed on Yahweh's commands. This is because, as has been argued, *ḥērem* is grounded on the holiness of the LORD and holiness of Israel. To put it differently, any sinful act or evil practice is an attack on Yahweh's holiness hence sin/ evil is the fundamentally the object of *ḥērem*. To view Holy War politically or religiously without reference to Yahweh's holiness would be incorrect. It is also important to note that the Holy War carried out by ancient Israelites carries resemblance with the ancient Near Eastern and not modern Jihad.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of Rad's work is his argument for Yahweh-Israel partnership in carrying out the Holy War. He highlighted the human factor in the Holy War as opposed to the earlier emphasis on 'warlike action of the LORD which equated war with absolute miracle' (Rad, 1991). In other words, Israel was to be a consecrated agent through whom the LORD would operationalize *ḥērem* to other nations. This, therefore, means that they needed to be holy people first. This accounts for the elaborate cultic undertaking done prior, during and after the war.

It is noticeable that the preparation of war by Israel was fundamentally cultic and is clearly linked to the fact that God is holy and Israel is called to be holy. In other words, holiness was at the core of Holy War and Israel was to demonstrate it. Actually, Rad (1991) argued that "the armed camp, the cradle of the nation, was also its most ancient holy of holies. There was Israel and there was Yahweh".

The Holy War concept is, however, a bit misleading and tends to create a deeper challenge when defending the faith in the consistency of Yahweh's character. The term Holy War seems to suggest an existence of secular war. This leads to the question as to whether it is holy because it is fought by Yahweh. Though there has been an attempt to correlate the Yahweh war with that of the ancient Near Eastern, such correlation is flawed. Walton and Walton (2017) rightly argued that 'the entire holy war hypothesis is flawed. This is because, according to (Walton & Walton, 2017), in the ancient Near Eastern, 'the gods fought beside the armies because in the ancient world the gods were involved in everything; the idea of war as either holy or secular would have been meaningless in an ancient context'. Walton, and Walton (2017) is, however, careful to point out that "while the form of Israel's war is the same as the form of all ancient Near Eastern warfare, the motivation for Joshua's war and the purpose that the war serves are not the same as most ancient Near Eastern wars". Therefore, to view *ḥērem* in light of the Holy War understanding limits its nature and purpose. This is because *ḥērem* carries both militaristic and sanctification idea. *Hērem*, as commanded by Yahweh, was linked to the extermination of sin and consecration to the service of Yahweh.

The concept of *ḥērem* in Deuteronomy

Various arguments have been proposed regarding the *ḥērem* policy in Deuteronomy 7 which include the fact that it was limited to the conquest period hence cannot be reenacted (Stern, 1991); *ḥērem* policy should be read metaphorically for Deuteronomy 7 focuses on Israel's status as the people of The LORD (Moberly, 1999). Another approach to *ḥērem* policy is to ascribe its origination and execution to Moses and Joshua respectively. In doing so, the consistency of Yahweh's character is

seen to be upheld. This is because one would conveniently argue that the LORD neither originated the *ḥērem* concept nor executed it but was erroneously carried out by Moses and Joshua. However, with the availability of sufficient biblical data, it is difficult to exonerate the LORD as the originator of *ḥērem* and hence it is difficult to water down the reality of this concept within the Scripture. Therefore, one must accept that indeed a good and loving God did command the indiscriminate killing of entire Canaanites nations. Accepting divine origination of *ḥērem* and establishing its purpose in the overall plan of God is necessary for understanding and perhaps the application of the same. How then should this concept of *ḥērem* be interpreted and applied?

Viewing *ḥērem* policy on the ground of a privileged ethnic group (Israel) exterminating another ethnic groups or nations (Canaanites) would definitely attract such perspectives as a possible literal reenactment of *ḥērem* in the modern world, or interpretation that *ḥērem* was limited to the conquest period or that *ḥērem* should be interpreted metaphorically. On the other hand, appreciating *ḥērem* policy in the context of Yahweh's salvation program would nullify any justification of possible literal reenactment of the *ḥērem* on other people or nations, and would address any possible denial of the historicity of the *ḥērem* operationalization in the Scripture as suggested by the metaphorical interpretation approach.

The book of Deuteronomy, according to Rad (1991, pg. 44) 'is by far the richest source concerning the concepts and customs of holy war'. He argues that;

“As a single body of texts, it not only contains a series of detailed normative orders and prescriptions about the behavior and customs in the camp, before the battle, and so forth, but also in striking contrast to the holiness law or the book of the covenant. It is thoroughly saturated from the first to the last

chapter by outspoken war ideology, the origins and theological content which cannot help becoming a problem to us”.

Deuteronomy clearly seems to portray *hērem* concept in a unique way compared to other Old Testament books. The book highlights the exclusiveness of the LORD as the reason for the execution of *hērem*. Considering that the laws in the Deuteronomy were being given as a reminder to the young Israel nation that needed to live as distinct people in the Promised Land, it is worth noting that the book emphasizes war ideology. Israel was basically being commanded to engage in holy war so as to ensure the land is purified. According to Walzer (1992), “the notion of holy war was a retrospective invention of the last years of the monarchy”. Walzer (1992) continued that holy war “is closely connected to the Deuteronomic conception of a covenantal- kinship community, and it ought to worry political theorists and theologians who find such a community attractive”. Though the idea of Holy War, as discussed above, is to be considered lightly, it is clear that Deuteronomy strongly emphasizes the exclusive nature of the LORD and the special position of Israel.

According to Barrett (2010), “divine violence in the Hebrew Bible is regularly cited as primitive, irrelevant, and possibly unintelligible within a modern context’. Barrett (2010, pg.353) discussed that;

‘Deuteronomy expresses Yahweh's relationship with Israel in ancient Near Eastern suzerainty terms that reflect an unchallengeable demand for the vassal's undiluted loyalty. As in the treaties, this demand is backed with threats of destruction for the disloyal. Such threats are difficult to comprehend within a modern framework where loyalty demands and threats are largely illegitimate’.

The demand of the undiluted loyalty from Israel by the LORD is indeed brought out strongly in Deuteronomy.

The strong language that the book of Deuteronomy has cannot be mistaken. It indeed speaks with such exclusiveness. Pitkanen (2010) rightly argued that “the ideology of Deuteronomy is very exclusive, and its treatment of indigenous peoples is compatible with ideologies that accompany genocides and conquests”. Pitkanen (2010) continued that “mitigating such exclusive thinking can serve as a model for human interactions today, and this would also seem to be compatible with the overall thinking of the New Testament canonical documents”. Such a proposition seems to assume that the New Testament does not contain exclusive language and that exclusive thinking is a threat to any community. It is, however, important to note that Deuteronomy’s exclusivity is premised on the holiness nature of Yahweh, which is essentially exclusive. Therefore, to propose any mitigation of exclusive thinking that is portrayed in the concept of *ḥērem* in Deuteronomy would risk watering down the heinousness of sin that the concept aptly illustrates.

Nelson (2004) argues that “Deuteronomy demands the eradication of anything that would compromise Yahweh’s position as the sole God of Israel. The worship of other gods is a capital offense(Deuteronomy Chap. 13, 17:2-7), idols and rivals religious paraphernalia and practices must be eliminated(7:1-5, 25-26, 12:2-4, 29-31, 16:21-17:1, 18:9-19). The LORD must be Israel’s one and only God (6:4-5)”. The core issue here is Yahweh’s holiness and how Israel and the people surrounding them ought to interact with it. Because of the holiness of God, sin and evil among Israel and among the nations must be exterminated.

Explicitly, the LORD makes an exclusive claim on Israel and implicitly make an exclusive claim over all the nations of the earth. According to Nelson (2004), Yahweh’s exclusive claim on Israel’s worship is based on a history of saving deeds

involving the promise to the patriarchs, redemption through Exodus, wilderness experience, and the gift of the land'. Nelson further stated that 'Yahweh's claim on Israel rests on the special nature of character of the LORD as jealous (4:24; 5:9, 6:15), merciful (4:31), living (5:26), consistent (7:9-10), just (10:17-18) as well as wrathful and terrible (7:4, 21, 29:19, 27). The LORD dwells in heaven (26:15) and is the only true God'. This means that *hērem* execution was justified on the ground that the LORD is jealous, merciful, loving, consistent, just and wrathful. In light of this work, all these terms are indeed salvific terms.

In the execution of *hērem* at Canaan, the Scripture "identify two different accounts of Israel's conquest which are genocidal total war and one of negotiation and limited war" (Walzer, 1992). The main criteria were the proximity of the communities to Israel (Deut. 20). Those who live far needed to be first offered peace but those who live closer needed to be completely destroyed. The idea here is that the nations living close to Israel had the capacity to influence them with their form of worship but those who were living far had the opportunity to observe Israelites' culture and proselytize. This because Israel, if they would follow Yahweh, would demonstrate a just culture that would be admired by other nations hence proselytizing as seen in Deut. 6.

Deut. 7 shows that the ground of *hērem* policy is Yahweh's holiness with Israel being the agent of executing the same. It is important to underscore that Israel community was expected to be holy as the LORD is holy. Nevertheless, their holiness was on the account that they were a covenanted people. In other words, it is not because they were inherently holy such that the LORD gave them the opportunity to be an agent of *hērem* execution. This means that the *hērem* policy was not an ethnic

concept where one ethnic group is destroying another ethnic group in a holy war. On the contrary, *ḥērem* was actually a holiness maintenance mechanism. Block (2012) rightly argued, “in Deuteronomy 7:2-5; 20:18, Moses’s primary concern is not ethnic elimination, but ethical scrupulosity”. This disallows any notion of understanding *ḥērem* as ethnic cleansing or genocidal undertaking as the skeptics of Scripture would want to argue. It indicates that the purpose of *ḥērem* is not limited to the destruction of the Canaanites nations (Deut. 7:2) but is to be understood in the context of removal of sin that would compromise Yahweh’s worship.

Conclusion

The above discussion provides a definition of *ḥērem* and its purpose. *Ḥērem* within the discussion on holy war and within the book of Deuteronomy is highlighted. The literature reviewed indicates that *ḥērem* concept is directly linked with the idea of Yahweh’s holiness and the fact that this holiness was to be exhibited through the community of Israel. Its fundamental goal is the extermination of evil and sin. The seriousness at which *ḥērem* was executed communicates the repugnant nature of evil and sin in relation to Yahweh. And unless this is appreciated, *ḥērem* will be seen as genocide. Lohr (2009) is correct in stating that “just as the *ḥērem* is closely connected with the idea of Israel’s holiness, it also functions to preserve that holiness”.

CHAPTER THREE: HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF DEUTERONOMY

Introduction

This chapter considers the historical context of the book of Deuteronomy in terms of its authorship, its date of writing, its purpose, and its structure. It also highlights the socio-cultural setting of the book in terms of warfare at the Ancient Near East communities.

The General Historical Background of Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy is the last book of the Torah. The book mainly comprises the speeches of Moses delivered across the Jordan in the land of Moab (Deut. 1:5).

Date and authorship of Deuteronomy

Date and authorship of the book of Deuteronomy have attracted various positions by the scholars. Hamlin (1995) argues that “the tradition that Moses actually wrote the Book of Deuteronomy is open to question, both because of the style and content of the book and because the book describes Moses’s death”. Hamlin(1995) agrees with most scholars who think that ‘while Moses is the original inspiration for the material, the book was written many centuries later by an unnamed author sometimes referred to as the Deuteronomist, or by the letter ‘D’. Motyer, (1993) points that some scholars “have contended that the book is an attempt to present the leading ideas of Josiah’s Reformation in a literary form, using Moses’s influential name to authenticate its key truths thus making Deuteronomy a product of ‘Deuteronomistic movement’ which developed during the late eighth century and the seventh century BC and came to climax in Josiah’s Reformation”. Motyer (1993) further pointed out that ‘many contemporary Old Testament scholars now prefer to study the variety and development of strands of oral (as opposed to written)

communication which led to the compilation of the book'. These scholars according to Motyer (1993) regard Deuteronomy as a "final product and expression of a long history involving the transmission and constant adaptation of the old traditions of early Israel". The main arguments by scholars relating to the authorship of Deuteronomy are premised on whether the book was a product of the prophetic group, or work of the priests or an attribution to the scribal wisdom sources (Wright, 1996). Wright (1996 pg. 330) summarized the various views of scholars that;

"How one identifies the authors depends on one's view of the content of the book and its purpose in relation to the historical conflicts, trends, and achievements of the late monarchy period. Some see Deuteronomy as the end product of the eighth-century prophetic movement and would associate it particularly with the prophetic circles of northern Israel. Others have linked it with the Levites from the north, who came to Judah after the fall of Israel and preserved their traditions there. Some have noted the similarities with Wisdom tradition and associated Deuteronomy with the royal court circle in Jerusalem, as a book produced by the scribes for the support and education of the kings. Others in contrast, have argued that the book, because of its allegedly northern, covenantal, ethos was radically critical of the Judean style monarchy, and aimed to reform its cultic tradition, or included the 'centralization law' as a concession to buy acceptance in Jerusalem, or that the 'centralization law' was a later addition to the original core of the book".

Wright, 1996) rightly contended that "historically, the arguments for a seventh-century origin of Deuteronomy are outweighed by those that see a much more ancient tradition enshrined in the book". Wright, (1996) further argued that "the historical figure of Moses is clearly so central to the book and, without denying the very obvious likelihood of editorial updating of the material for subsequent generations, there seem to be no compelling reasons why a substantially Mosaic

legacy should not underlie the book i.e. material that owes its origin to his creative and spiritual genius and was profoundly formative in emergent Israel”. Majority of the positions taken by various scholars regarding the authorship and dating of Deuteronomy are speculative and an attempt to reconstruct Israel’s history that is not explicitly seen in the Hebrew scripture. However, in regard to authorship, internal evidence shows that Deuteronomy was written by Moses. This is seen in Deuteronomy 1:5 where we are told ‘Moses undertook to expound this law, saying; and in Deut. 31:9 that states ‘so Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel’; and in Deut. 31:24 that states ‘it came about when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete’(NASB). In other words, the contents of Deuteronomy provide us with an explicit context to conclude on Mosaic authorship and earlier dates of writing rather than the later dates proposed by many scholars. It is, therefore, as Wright, (1996) argued, “hermeneutically more appropriate to interpret and comment on the text of Deuteronomy from the standpoint assumed in the book itself”. This being the case, Deuteronomy influenced the various movements (prophetic, Levitical and scribal) as opposed to being a product of the movements. The futuristic orientation of the book ‘virtually guarantees an ongoing relevance and address to the later generations and centuries’ (Wright, 1996).

The audience of Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy 1:1, 3 shows that the audience of Deuteronomy is ‘all Israel’ and ‘children of Israel’. The text states that; ‘these are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel across Jordan in the wilderness.....in the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the children of Israel, according to all that the

LORD had commanded him to give to them'(NASB). Block (2012) points out that the expressions "all Israel" and "children or descendants of Israel" are scattered throughout the book. The former, argues Block (2012), suggests that Moses speaks to the community of faith; the latter highlights the nation's ethnic cohesion (they are descendants of Jacob/Israel).

The purpose of Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy 1:5 shows that the setting of Moses's speech was at the plains of Moab and it is on the eve of the conquest of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. Moses, who would not be crossing over to the Promised Land with the children of Israel took time to 'reiterate, explicate, and expand the sole covenant between the LORD and Israel'. Sailhamer (1992) argues that "Deuteronomy is an explanation of the Law, not merely a repetition of it". Sailhamer (1992) concludes that Deuteronomy should be seen as a commentary earlier passages of the Pentateuch. According to Dozeman (2017) argues that the teaching of Deuteronomy 'explores the significance of the Exodus and the meaning of the revelation of the law for the second generation of Israelites- the surviving children of the first generation'. Dozeman (2017) rightly observed the difference between the first and the second generation of Israelites is that the first generation experienced the salvation from Egypt and the revelation of the law firsthand but died in the wilderness; the second generation can only know these events through the teaching of Moses. The extent to which the book of Deuteronomy is detailed indeed give credence to this perspective. This second generation needed to have a clear blueprint of how to live in the Promised Land.

According to Hamilton (2005) as Israel enters the Promised Land, 'Moses emphasize the law by recollecting their past (Ch. 1-3) in the indicative mood and

speaking to the present and the future framing it in the imperative mood: “give heed...do...go in...take possession”. In other words, having help Israel community to recollect how God has intervened on their behalf in the past and how they had frequently disobeyed God (Chap. 1-4:43), Moses then gives them commands to execute when they will enter Canaan (Chap. 4:44-11:32). This past recollection of Israel’s history and the exhortation to obey the LORD in the future gives the book of Deuteronomy a unique position in the Hebrew canon. According to Christensen (1991), “the book of Deuteronomy forms a bridge between the Tetrateuch (Genesis through Numbers) and the Former Prophets (Joshua through 2 Kings in the Hebrew canon), which are sometimes called the Deuteronomic (or Deuteronomistic) History”. In essence, the book of Deuteronomy serves to remind Israel their history and the law that they were to keep if they would remain as Yahweh’s people. According to Block (2012), Deuteronomy points the reader to the Lord God, who has redeemed his people and assigned them the mission of radiating his grace to the world”. Block (2012) further argues that ‘the function of the book of Deuteronomy is to call every generation of Israelites to faithful covenant love for the LORD in response to his gracious salvation and his revelation of himself (6:20-25) and in acceptance of the missional role to which he has called them (26:19)’. Elwell (1988) discussed that ‘the book of Deuteronomy ‘makes an important contribution to God’s unfolding revelation of his purpose for the nation of Israel’. Elwell (1988) further argued that ‘Moses’ reminders of the wilderness wanderings and the Ten Commandments, plus his instructions for life in the Promised Land, are a vital part of the OT covenant literature’.

Deuteronomy in the Larger Design of Pentateuch

Sailhamer (1992) correctly asserts that “Pentateuch is a book-a written text”. The implication of this assertion supports the view that the Deuteronomy needs to be read as a narrative that is explicitly linked to the first four books of Pentateuch. Sailhamer (1992) further argues that “though we often think of the Pentateuch as a collection of the five books viz., Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, it was originally intended to be read as a single book”. Appreciating Pentateuch as a single book is important since it lays the foundation for the rest of the Scripture. It also means that the book of Deuteronomy carries the various themes that are introduced in the book of Genesis and progressed into the book of Numbers. It is, however, important to note that the literary context of Deuteronomy is unique from the other books of Pentateuch.

The person and the ministry of Moses are key in appreciating the literary context of Deuteronomy. According to Dozeman (2017), the story of Moses in the Pentateuch spans two generations of Israelites with Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers focusing on the first generation and Deuteronomy focusing on the second generation. In doing this, Dozeman (2017) uses the leadership role of Moses over the two generations as a way of illustrating the literary context of Deuteronomy in the larger design of Pentateuch. In this case, Ex. 1-15 illustrate the exodus of Israelites from Egypt; Ex. 15-18 discusses the wilderness journey; Ex. 19-40, Lev. And Numb. Discusses the revelation of the Law; Numb. 10-36 shows the wilderness journey; and Deut. reiterates Exodus, wilderness journey, and Revelation of the Law. In all these stages, Moses is the leader Dozeman (2017). It is hence appropriate to view the

leadership of Moses as instructive in discussing the literary context of the book of Deuteronomy.

In regard to the structuring of the book of Deuteronomy, its richness in terms of its content and texture give room for more than one approaches. For instance one could structure it around Moses's speeches where chapter 1:1-4:43 comprises a historical review; chapter 4:44-28:68 indicating exhortation to Covenant loyalty followed by the law, covenant renewal, blessings, and curses; chapter 29:1-30:20 having summary and concluding challenge (Wright, 1996). Another way is to structure it around covenant form patterned after Near Eastern treaty text where we have; chapter 1:1-5 being preamble where the speaker and addressees are identified; chapter 1:6-4:49 indicating historical prologue, relating significant events in the relationship between the parties; chapters 5-11 giving general stipulations of the treaty; chapters 12-26 giving detailed stipulations or specific requirements of the imperial state on its vassal; chapters 27-28 indicating blessings and curses which are sanctions and motivations for observing the treaty; and finally chapters 30-31 containing witnesses (Wright, 1996).

The book of Deuteronomy, being a book that reiterates the Pentateuchal narrative from Exodus to Numbers with allusion to various themes introduced in Genesis makes it challenging to structure it. According to Klein et al. (2004), "the book of Deuteronomy represents a collection of laws, yet it is a unique literary genre that requires special consideration". Klein et al. (2004) further argue that;

"Deuteronomy offers a comprehensive restatement of the Mosaic Law. Excluding the brief narrative opening (1: 1- 5) and lengthy conclusion (31-34), the book consists of Moses' speeches to the Israelites while they were camped

east of the Jordan River (1:64:40; 5-26; 27:11-28; 29:2-30)
Scholars commonly describe the rhetoric of these speeches
as a parenesis-a style of speech that intends to persuade the
audience to adopt a certain course of actions”.

Therefore, the speeches of Moses in Deut. provide a helpful way of structuring the book in its literary contexts. This position is supported by Dozeman (2017), who argued that “whereas the literary structure of Deuteronomy is difficult to discern because of the mixture of narrative, law, liturgy, and poetry throughout the book’s long and complex history of composition, the emphasis in the heading (1:1) on Moses speaking to Israelites provide insight into the present structure of Deuteronomy as four speeches of unequal length. Dozeman (2017), structures the book of Deuteronomy into four parts; Deut. 1:1-4:4:43 which focuses on lessons from History and the revelation of the Word; Deut. 4:44-28:68 which focus on Divine Word as Law; Deut. 28:69-31:29 which focuses on passing on Mosaic Leadership and instruction to the Covenant People; and Deut. 31:30-34:12 which focuses on Concluding Song and Farewell blessing. This structuring is based on Moses’s speeches. The Moses’s speeches are meant to remind the community of Israel their history and the laws that they had been given and how they ought to live while in the Promised Land. It is from these speeches that the purpose of the book is brought out clearly.

In this work, the researcher adopted the structuring of the book of Deuteronomy around the speeches of Moses. This is because such a way of structuring follows the inherent presentation of the text. Considering that in Deuteronomy, Moses, as Biddle (2003) stated is ‘reiterating, explicating, and, to a degree, expanding, the sole covenant between the LORD and Israel’, structuring it around speeches of Moses provides the most natural reading of this text.

The material in Deuteronomy chapter 7 falls within Yahweh's given conditions to be fulfilled by Israel when they enter the Promised Land. Indeed Deuteronomy chaps. 4:44-11:32 form primary demands given to Israel. Lohr (2007) argued persuasively that Deuteronomy chap. 7 is linked conceptually with the material that precedes it (for example, the Shema), and the *ḥērem* is intended to be the mechanism through which favorable conditions are obtained for Israel to practice Yahweh's commandments in the land—a central theme of chaps. 4–11.

Conclusion

The above discussion indicates the uniqueness of the book of Deuteronomy. In this book, 'Moses function primarily not as a lawgiver but as a prophet (Deut. 18:15; 34:10) and as the people's pastor (Num. 27:17; Isa. 63:11)' (Block, 2012). This makes his speeches present and futuristic in relation to the time of Moses' existence and hence applicable to all generations and in the subsequent centuries. Moses becomes the point of reference in both authorship and dating aspects of the book. In considering this fact, the dates and authorship debates would not challenge its normative message.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS OF DATA

Introduction

This chapter highlights the canonical context of the book of Deuteronomy within the Torah. It provides analysis of the Deuteronomy 7:1-11, which is the main text of consideration in this research. It discusses the biblical data synthesis on the *ḥērem* concept. In the synthesis of the biblical data, this chapter indicates that the exile interweaves operationalization of *ḥērem* in the Hebrew Scripture. It discusses *ḥērem* as grounded in the holiness of the LORD; *ḥērem* as grounded in the holiness of Israelites and *ḥērem* as demonstrated in Israel's sacrificial system. The underlying argument that sin and evil is primarily the object of *ḥērem* is also undergirded in the foregoing discussion. This chapter concludes with the contemporary Christians application of the *ḥērem* concept.

Analysis of Deuteronomy 7:1-11

Deut. 7:1-11 shows the recipients of the *ḥērem* (Vs.1); the command to execute *ḥērem* (Vs. 2); how to implement *ḥērem* (Vs. 5); the motivation for carrying out *ḥērem* (Vs.6, 10, 11); the consequences for not carrying out the command (Vs. 4, 10).

Verse 1 shows that the recipients of *ḥērem* policy would be seven nations, occupying the Promised Land. The fact that the LORD is at the center stage of driving them out the Canaanites is clearly seen in verse 1. It is the LORD who is the main actor in this narrative for he will bring Israel into the land. The verb **וַיְבִיאֲכֶם** 'he-brings-you' a non-perfective that shows specific future. This means that the LORD will surely actualize this promise. It is also the LORD who **וַיִּשְׁלַח** "drives-out" the **גוֹיִם-רְבִים**

‘nations’ with the agency of Israelites. Also, this verb is in the non-perfective with specific future showing that the LORD would certainly drive the Canaanites out. This commitment by the LORD nuances his promise of giving the land to Abraham’s descendants as indicated in Gen. 13:14-15 and the certainty of Abraham’s descendants occupying the Land in ‘the fourth generation’ when the iniquity of Amorite is complete (Gen. 15:16).

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶלְקִידָה אֶל־הָאָרֶץ (The LORD is to bring the Israelites into the land (vs. 1). Now, the ‘Land’ in this verse is a direct object accusative and the article ‘the’ indicates the specificity of the Land. This is the Promised Land that the LORD gave to Abraham in His covenant with him. This is important in understanding the salvific plans of God for the whole earth. The Promised Land is linked with Yahweh’s salvific plan of the whole world through the Israelites community. Indeed, in discussing Yahweh’s salvific plan, the theme of the Promised Land becomes a thread that can be traced throughout the whole Scripture According to Wright (1990) the anticipation of the Promised Land in Deuteronomy is the culmination of a major theme running through the whole Pentateuch’. Wright (1990) wrote that

“the promise of Land is a constituent part of God’s covenant with Abraham; the Exodus is presented as God’s first act in preparing to fulfill that promise; the law and covenant are given with a view to life in the land; the wilderness wanderings are “abnormal” –a punishment for cowardly failure to enter the land at the first opportunity”.

It should be noted that geographically this Land was strategic in advancing Yahweh’s way of life as patterned by Israelites community to the world.

According to Williamson and Arnold (2005), “Canaan is commonly accepted as the area between the Mediterranean seacoast and the river Jordan; it includes the southern coast of Syria and Lebanon and Israel (Palestine) on the modern map”.

Considering that Israelites were to be a blessing to the world, every action to them and by them intrinsically carried the message of blessing to the world. Whatever they would do needed to reflect Yahweh's character of justice, righteousness, holiness, loving-kindness etc. On the other when they would fail to do as the LORD required them they would be punished and their punishment would still demonstrate Yahweh's identity to the world. *Hērem* was clearly meant to protect Israelites from being negatively influenced by the immediate neighbors in the Promised Land. On one hand, if Israelites would be influenced, their mandate would be compromised hence failing to the light to Gentile nations. But on the other hand, when Israelites would be subjected to *hērem* as predicted in Deut. 13 due to their evil ways, the nations would see and acknowledge the LORD as a just God. In other words, whether to the Canaanites or to Israelites, *hērem* achieved the purpose of exterminating evil and purifying worship of Yahweh.

The noun 'nations' is direct object accusative and it is further specified as 'the-Hittites and-the-Girgashites and-the-Amorite and-the-Canaanite and-the-Perizzites and-the-Hivites and-the-Jebusites. Some scholars have argued that "the enemy consists of seven nations with seven reflecting the fullness of opposition" (Mayes, 1983). The fact that the Scripture qualified the seven nations with the word 'many' could indeed capture the point of huge opposition. One can also consider the nation of corruption and wickedness practiced among the nation as the major threat to the Israelites. This means that as Wright (1983) argued, "the nations are accused by the God of Israel on the basis of the moral criteria of universal human validity".

The seven nations had indeed committed injustices among themselves and their ways were so corrupt that they threatened that salvific agenda of Yahweh. Indeed, the

mention of Amorites in Deut. 7 relate to the people mentioned in Genesis 15:16 whose iniquity would be full and the LORD would punish them using the community of Israel as His rod. This being the case, it is evident that the execution of *ḥērem* on the seven nations was not only as a result of the fullness of their iniquity but also as a preventive measure of ensuring Yahweh's salvific plan was not hindered. This notion is supported in Deut. 20 where Israel community was directed to conduct *ḥērem* on the immediate neighbors but offer peace to distance neighbors. Deut. 20:18, indicate that the reason for destroying the immediate neighbors was to prevent them from teaching Israelites detestable things they had done to their gods.

In Verse 2, *ḥērem* is captured here as the climax of the war against the seven communities. The main actor is seen as the LORD who will deliver (*ntn*) the enemies of Israel, then Israel will smite (*nkḥ*) them and finally destroy them (*ḥērem*). This progression captures the intensity of the destruction of the seven nations. The LORD initiates the destruction of these people and He oversees as Israel completely destroys them. This indicates the Yahweh-Israel partnership in carrying out *ḥērem* as discussed earlier. The verb וַיִּתֵּן *‘and-he-delivers-them’* refers to the LORD and it shows the certainty of the action in the future. In other words, The LORD (which is nominative subject) will surely deliver the nations to the hands of Israelites. The verb וְהִכִּיתָם *‘and-you-defeat-them’* (*haherem*) is an anterior future (the non-perfective describes a future action that is antecedent to another future action). It shows that when the LORD delivers the Canaanites to Israel, the Israelites were to defeat them. The verb תַּהְרִים *‘to-destroy (tahirim)’* is an infinite absolute with orders. The nuance of this verb is that of enforcing the obligation of destroying them.

As seen, the primary actor is the LORD with Israelites being the agent of executing the policy. The intensity of this destruction is captured by the verb

הַחֵרֶם ‘you-must-destroy’ (*hērem*) which is also an infinite absolute with orders of enforcing the obligation. The portrayal of *hērem* here as the final step of war and the fact that in Deut. 20 *hērem* is discussed in the context of Laws of warfare, is perhaps the reason many scholars have limited it to warfare motif. However, this approach, as earlier discussed, fails to see the overall plan of Yahweh, especially through the Israel community. The fact that the LORD is the one who is superintending over the war to the seven nations in Deut. 7 and the express command to be executed to the neighboring nations in Deut. 20 communicates that the concept of *hērem* is broader than warfare motif.

Considering the fact that through the Abrahamic covenant, Israelites were to be a blessing to the nations in the world, the concept of *hērem* as a warfare motif renders Israelites as cursed and not a blessing to the seven nations. It also seems to suggest favoritism on God’s part and gives ground to racial superiority. However, by appreciating the concept *hērem* within Yahweh’s overall salvific plan, upholds consistency to His salvific program as revealed in Gen. 12:1-3. In other words, the *hērem* concept was not just a warfare strategy for Israel to destroy their enemies. Actually, in a strict sense, one can see that the seven nations were not primarily Israelites’ enemies but Yahweh’s enemies. This is because they had defiled the land as seen in Lev. 18:27-28 and the land was vomiting them out. This is also because the Land was Yahweh’s land hence has the right to how it should be used. The seven nations posed a challenge to the salvific agenda- an agenda that was for all the nations of the earth.

The concept of *hērem* was therefore towards anyone and anything that antagonized the Yahweh. In fact, according to Deut. 13, Israelites would be subjected to *hērem* if they would commit idolatry in the land. The land would indeed spew them

out in the same way it spewed the nations that were before them (Lev. 18:27-28). It is important to underscore that indeed the threat of Deut. 13 came to pass when Israelites were taken to exile. The land spews them out because of idolatry. The exile was an operationalization of *ḥērem* to Israelites community. This is seen in both historical and prophetic books.

Israelites were also warned not to make any treaty with the nations. The word that is used is *לֹא-תִכְרֹת* ‘not-you-make’ which is a non-perfective of prohibition. The Israelites were not to make any treaty with the Canaanites. Israel community was forbidden from making the covenant with the Canaanites (vs.2) because they were covenanted to the LORD (vs.6-9). The idea of being covenanted to the LORD is also salvific motif bringing to mind Abrahamic covenant. If Israelite would make any covenant with the neighboring nations, they would be taught the detestable ways that would jeopardize their relationship with Yahweh. This would lead to defiling of the land and consequently being spewed out by the land.

In Verse 3, forbiddance to intermarry is highlighted as a concept that was meant to ensure Israel is holy. The verb *תִּתְּחַתֵּן* ‘and-not you-intermarry’ is non-perfective of instruction. The nuance here is that of negative instruction hence non-perfective of prohibition. Christensen (1991) commented that “the forbiddance to engage in mixed marriages (vs. 3-4) share to a large measure the same linguistic word as that of ‘Holy War’”. It is a graphic portrayal of what holiness means so far as the people of the LORD are concerned’. The forbiddance to intermarry reinforce the idea of holiness which is the central reason for the execution of *ḥērem*. Intermarriages among people of Ancient Near East was seen as a way of making a treaty. Israel was to shun that idea. Christensen (1991) further argued that “covenant or treaty gives clue as to the reason for the harsh policy of war in this context. The Israelites were bound by their

berit with Yahweh, which was both a religious and political bond. To make a treaty with other peoples would indicate a lack of faithfulness on the part of the Israelites to their God”. Therefore, the idea of endogamous marriage is meant to keep Israel from following other gods hence corrupting the worship of Yahweh.

Verse 4 is introduced with the particle **כִּי** ‘for’. This particle provides a logical reason for the prohibition to intermarry. Intermarrying with the Canaanites has the potential of turning the children of Israel to serve other gods. The verb used is ‘he-will-turn’ which is non-perfective of capability. It denotes the subject’s ability or non-ability to perform the action expressed by the verb. Another verb is **וְעָבְדוּ** ‘and-they-will-serve’, also a non-perfective of capability. Intermarrying with the Canaanites has the potential of turning the children of Israel away from serving the LORD and towards serving other gods. The nouns **אֱלֹהִים** ‘gods’ is a direct accusative which means the service will be directed to other gods apart from Yahweh. This idolatry will cause **אַף-יְהוָה** ‘anger-of Yahweh’ (possessive genitive also acting as nominative subject) to burn against Israelites. The verb **וְתָרָה** ‘and-he-will-burn’ is non-perfective of a specific future indicating the certainty of an event happening. In other words, the anger belongs to the LORD will surely burn when the Israelites turn towards other gods and serve them. The word **בָּכֶם** ‘against-you’ shows that the anger of the LORD will be directed to the Israelites. Also the verb **וְהִשְׁמִידָךְ** ‘and-he-will-destroy-you’ non-perfective of specific future directed to Israelites. There is a clear transition from the LORD destroying the Canaanites for the sake of keeping Israelites holy and the LORD destroying Israelites if they would follow Canaanites’ ways. In fact, the destruction directed to Israelites would be **מֵהָרָא** ‘quickly’. This word ‘quickly’ is accusative of manner qualifying the manner in which the destruction of the LORD

upon Israel would come. The seriousness of sin especially that of idolatry is clearly alluded here.

Verse 5 shows that seven nations were subjected to *ḥērem* because they were idolatrous. Altars, pillars, *asherim* and idol which are the paraphernalia of worship among foreign peoples in the land was to be totally destroyed, so as to remove all temptations to follow pagan religious practices. Idolatry, as mentioned above is an attack to the holiness on the LORD and anyone practicing this would be subjected to *ḥērem*. The verb תַּעֲשֶׂה *‘you-do’* is non-perfective of instruction which denotes the speaker’s legislation or teaching. The Israelites were instructed to break down the altars, smash the sacred stones, cut down the Asherah poles, and burn the idols belonging to the Canaanites. Idolatry was evidently a threat to the missional role of Israel. They were thus expected to destroy any paraphernalia that was associated with false gods.

Verse 6 clearly captures the justification for Israel’s role in executing *ḥērem*. The particle כִּי *‘for’* introduce the reason for the above strict instruction. The Israelites were people holy or ‘set apart’ for Yahweh. They are Yahweh’s possession chosen from all the peoples of the earth. The LORD chose them on the ground of the oath made to their forefathers. It is, however, worth emphasizing that the election of Israelite community was neither on merit nor “arbitrary picking out one nation or race from the rest” (Wright, 1983).

Verse 7 begins with the particle of negation אֵין *‘not’* which introduces the grounds that the LORD did not consider for setting His affection or choosing Israelites (i.e. not because they were numerous than other people for they were indeed the fewest). It is on the basis of the Abrahamic covenant (a covenant that was unconditional) that Israel was chosen. The Scripture indicates that the choosing of Israelites was never based on

racial superiority but on Yahweh's grace (vs. 7). The nation of Israelites was indeed chosen so that other nations, through them, would be blessed. This rules out any notion that *ḥērem* was just a warfare strategy for the privileged community towards the wicked nations. This disallows any literal implementation of *ḥērem* policy on the notion of racial superiority. Commenting on Genesis 12:1-3, Wright J. C., (2010) state 'at Genesis 12:1-3, we stand at the fountain-head of Old Testament Israel's self-consciousness of being God's elect people. That is, they believed they were a people uniquely chosen by God for a relationship with himself to be consolidated in Sinai covenant'. This neither suggests that the Israelites were to monopolize Yahweh's knowledge nor that Yahweh's choice of Israelite was an end in itself. On the contrary, the community of Israelites had a missional mandate to other nations so that the blessing of Abraham would come to 'all the families of the earth' (Gen. 12:3b). It is only in understanding this missional mandate that the perceived indiscriminate murder of Canaanites is properly interpreted. Wright (2010, pg. 71) explains that;

“But it is utterly crucial to see that this divine election of one man and one people takes place in the context of, and on the global stage of, God's dealings with all the nations, who have been the main focus of the narrative in chapters 10 and 11.....one nation is chosen, but all nations are to be the beneficiaries of the choice”.

In establishing the missional mandate of Israelites, one would then interrogate the purpose of *ḥērem* in relation to other nations. This is because limiting *ḥērem* to the conquest period without appreciating the missional mandate of Israelite would encourage anti-Semitic tendencies in the mind of modern readers. The missional mandate of Israelites which is rolled out in Gen. 12:1-3 is seen as Yahweh's strategy to undo the degeneration effect of sin that started in Gen. 3 and the outright rebellion of the nations in Gen. 11. The manner in which the LORD intervene to address

wickedness in previous chapters in Genesis indicates the repugnant nature of sin and the seriousness of his Holiness. These two perspectives (repulsive nature of sin and the seriousness of Yahweh's holiness) are clearly interwoven with the salvation theme throughout the Scripture. In a way, the execution of *hērem* on the seven nations and on any of Israelites' tribe that would commit idolatry dramatized to them the seriousness of sins such as idolatry and the seriousness of Yahweh's holiness.

Verse 8. Gives the grounds for choosing Israelites. The phrase **מֵאַהֲבַת יְהוָה** 'because-of-love-of Yahweh' is in a construct relationship (possessive genitive). It is the love of the LORD to the Israelites and His commitment to keeping the oath He swore to their forefathers. In this verse the LORD is nominative subject, effecting the action of bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. The verb **מֵאַהֲבַת יְהוָה** 'he-brought-you' is a definite past which refers to the exodus, the action that took place once in a given situation. This is a historical fact and the recipient Deuteronomy knew it very well. Another key verb used here is **וַיִּפְדֶּךָ** 'and-he-redeemed-you' which nuances a perfective definite past. The Israelites were redeemed from the house of slaveries, from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. The house of slaveries is qualified here as the hand of Pharaoh King of Egypt. The word *pada* (to redeem) is used as a metaphor for Yahweh's salvation of Israel from the bondage of Egypt (Block, 2012). According to Block (2012), this *pada* is more formal than the kinship term *gaal* which is used metaphorically for Yahweh's salvation of Israel outside Deuteronomy in Ex. 6:6; 15:13; Ps. 74:2; 77:15'. Block (2012) further argues that 'whereas the latter speaks of the intervention of the close relative when persons are in distress and helpless to save themselves, *pada* is associated with rescuing a slave through the payment of a ransom'. This salvific language. It shows the incapability of Israel to set themselves free apart from the intervention of Yahweh. This reality needed to cause the

community of Israelites to be committed to Yahweh. It was also to guide how they would handle other people. The call to remember that they were slaves in Egypt followed by redemption by the LORD is emphasized in the book of Deut (Deut. 5:15; Deut.15:15; 24: 18, 22). This means that the community understood the grace of the LORD very well. This also suggests that as the Israelites subject the immediate neighbors to *ḥērem* they were aware of the gracious nature of Yahweh. This gracious nature of the LORD was contrary to indiscriminate vengeful gods of Egypt and neighboring communities. By grasping that the execution of *ḥērem* by Israelites was also based on their understanding of holy and gracious God is key in addressing the misconception that is caused by limiting *ḥērem* to warfare motif.

Verse 9 indicates the Israelites are informed of what they should know and do on the basis of who the LORD is to them. The verb **וַיִּדְעֶתָ** ‘so-you-know’ is a non-perfective of an injunction which denotes what the speaker (in a position of authority) would like for someone (in a subordinate position) to do. Israelites were to reckon that the LORD who is their God is a faithful God in keeping the covenant and love to those who love Him and keep His commandments forever. The phrase **יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ** ‘Yahweh, your God, he is the God’ is in apposition which brings out the emphasis of who the LORD is. The word **לְאַלְפֵי דוֹר** ‘to-thousand generation’ is an accusative of time which denotes a point of time or a duration of time. In other words, Yahweh’s faithfulness is consistent to all generations. This means that the severity of punishing sins and rewarding of faithfulness is consistent in all time for all generations. In fact, in vs. 10, the verb **וַיִּשְׁלַם** ‘but-repaying’ is used, showing that the just God will surely address any wickedness. The ‘*waw*’ is better rendered as “but” so as to contrast Yahweh’s attitude toward those who hate Him from those who love and keep His

command (vs. 9). According to Christensen (1991), vv9-10 ‘present the character of the covenant God who is faithful to those who keep his commandments and will destroy those who **לשנאיו** “hate” him. This means that the seven nations being destroyed were being accused of hating the LORD as evidenced in their idol worship. The employment of *hērem* to punish them is indeed a testament of the Yahweh’s attitude towards sin in any generation.

Deuteronomy 7:11 summarizes the argument of the passage by emphasizing the need of responding positively to the LORD command. The verb **וְשָׁמַרְתָּ** ‘so-you-take-care’ is a non-perfective of an injunction which denotes what the speaker (in a position of authority) would like for someone (in a subordinate position) to do. The Israelites are to keep the command and the decrees given by the LORD through Moses. By keeping the commandments and the decrees, the Israelites would be kept in the Land. This urged to keep the commandments and the decrees are repeated through the book of Deuteronomy.

Hērem as grounded in the holiness of the LORD

It is important to note that the holiness of the LORD foundational to His activity among His creations. In the case of *hērem*, it is clear that it is a concept that is first and foremost grounded in Yahweh’s holiness. Holiness of Yahweh, according to Bromiley (1979) has a twofold aspect; “the basic idea conveyed by the holiness of God is His separateness, His uniqueness, His distinction as the wholly other, the one who cannot be confused with the gods devised by men (Ex. 15:11), the one who stands apart from and above the creation”. Secondly, “the holiness of God denotes His moral perfection, His absolute freedom from the blemish of any kind (Ps. 89:35)”. Yahweh’s moral perfection demands that sin is eliminated from His Land

and among His people, and His separateness and uniqueness give Him legitimacy to command *hērem* to nations that worship other gods. Throughout the Scripture, idolaters are depicted as enemies of the LORD and would attract Yahweh's wrath. Israelites were warned against worshiping idols. The command to execute *hērem* to their fellow Israelites' tribe if they would engage in idolatry is relevant throughout Israel's history. It would be effected at any time Israelites' tribe would fall away from Yahweh's ways and worship other gods. This is because Yahweh's holiness is unchanging. Therefore, the consistency of the holiness of the LORD makes *hērem* a concept that goes beyond the conquest period. It would be effected among the Israelites themselves if they would follow the ways of the Canaanites. In other words, just as the Canaanites were exterminated on the ground of polluting the Land, Israelites would be exterminated if they would do the same thing.

The purification of Yahweh's Land and His people is depicted as a continuous process as long as wickedness is practiced in the Land. This process will culminate in the second coming of Jesus Christ when all evil is completely purged away and the people of God worship God in purity and in His holiness. As oppose to the argument that *hērem* depicts the LORD as inconsistent in the Biblical narrative, *hērem* illustrate His consistency in character. I submit that with the holiness of God being the basis on which *hērem* was initiated and operationalized, *hērem* is thus rendered as a concept that would best be seen as upholding consistency of God's character.

The analysis of the Deuteronomy 7 shows that *hērem* concept is linked to Yahweh's holiness. The holiness of the LORD informed the formation of Israel as a nation and the Israelites' legitimacy to execute *hērem* on the Canaanites nations. Israel was called to be holy as the LORD is holy. To continue executing *hērem* to

other nations, the Israelites were expected to uphold Yahweh's holiness by keeping the covenant. This affirms that the uniqueness of *ḥērem* is on the fact that the LORD who commanded it is holy and Israel, through whom *ḥērem* would be executed, needed to be holy (Leviticus 20:26).

It is important to underscore that fundamentally, *ḥērem* in Deut. 7, and 20 is directed to the extermination of sin and not indiscriminately towards the Canaanites people. Gen. 15:16 had predicted that Israelites would inherit the Land when the sin of Amorites reached its full measure. The inhabitants of the Land would thus be expelled from the Land on the account of sin they committed. Sin which is contrary to the Holiness nature of the LORD and defiles His worship needed to be exterminated from the Land. The people of the LORD needed to be insulated from being affected by the sinful ways of the Canaanites. *Ḥērem* would then play a key role in the insulation of Yahweh's people and in ensuring that evil is purged from the Land. Glick (2007) rightly argued that 'sin *ḥērem*' as seen in the apostate city in Deuteronomy 13, and the *ḥērem* against the Canaanite nations in Deuteronomy 7 & 20 addresses sin either punitively or proactively.

The holiness of the LORD is the key attribute that acts as central to all other attributes. It informs every act of Yahweh, especially that of punishing sin. The Scripture portrays sin as repugnant and needs to be exterminated. The repugnant nature of sin is only seen in that it challenges the holiness nature of Yahweh. Therefore, without appreciating the idea of holiness as central to every act by Yahweh, *ḥērem* would indeed become genocide executed by Israel on equally wicked people. But as seen in the foregoing discussion, the book of Deuteronomy shows that the holiness of the LORD is central in the origination and the execution

of *ḥērem*. Christensen (1991) rightly points out that the “absolute destruction of evil is a way of expressing the meaning of holiness in relation to God himself”. The absolute destruction of evil is a theme that is clearly carried throughout the Scripture. The end times which is mainly characterized by the second coming of Jesus portrays evil and its sources as being completely obliterated. Consequently, the idea of the holiness of the LORD being central to origination and execution of *ḥērem* renders *ḥērem* as the concept that is relevant beyond the conquest period and indeed beyond the Old Testament canon. Such understanding challenges the arguments that limit the operationalization of *ḥērem* policy to the conquest period hence cannot be reenacted (Stern, 1991); or the suggestion that *ḥērem* policy should be read metaphorically (Moberly, 1999). *Ḥērem* policy, though it superficially seems genocidal, is fully grounded in the holiness of Yahweh. This policy best express the meaning of the holiness both to the community of Israel and to other nations. The extermination of the Canaanites hence become a microcosm of the ultimate extermination of evil and its sources.

The Call of Israel as *ḥērem*

The call of Israel is considered as *ḥērem*. In other words, Yahweh’s act of separating Israel to Himself was *ḥērem*. This means that they were to be separated from anything that was profane in the world. They were to be as holy as Yahweh is holy. According to Bromiley (1979), Israel’s holiness has two aspects. The first aspect is seen in “the privileged position as a chosen nation in distinction from all the people of earth, to be the special possession of the Almighty (Deut. 7:6)”; and the second aspect is the acquired holiness where the positional holiness ‘makes it natural and inevitable that Israel will be summoned to honor Yahweh’s will by being obedient to

His commandments and faithful to His covenant (Ex. 19:5 ff.)'. Bromiley (1979), rightly stated that "Israel's holiness is to be traced primarily to its position in God's purpose". Deuteronomy 7 shows that *ḥērem* concept is connected to Israel's positional and acquired holiness. Evidently, the community's permission to carry out *ḥērem* was premised on that fact that they were set apart to be Yahweh's people and to demonstrate holy conduct to other nations.

It is important to reiterate that the setting apart of Israel by the LORD was for the purpose of 'being the light to the nations so that my Salvation may reach to end of the earth' (Isa. 49:6). They were mandated to carry out the salvific purpose of the LORD as unveiled in Genesis 12:1-3. This means that whatever Israel was commanded to do would be tied to this salvific purpose. There was a need for Israel community to devote themselves to the LORD and avoid anything that could defile them. If they would engage in idolatry, they would be defiled thus would be subjected to *ḥērem* as outlined in Deut. 13. Indeed, the history of Israelites' continued disobedience and the repeated divine judgments they were subjected to can be seen throughout the Scripture. Perhaps, the book of Judges would best illustrate the initial acts of disobedience and the LORD's interventions both in punishing and in delivering them. This history also shows that the LORD would use other nations to discipline Israel for their disobedience. Although the book of Judges records the various failures of Israel, punishment, and deliverance of the LORD, the exile would indeed become the major subjection of Israel's community to *ḥērem*. Even so, this subjection of the *ḥērem* has to be seen in the light of their missional mandate to the nations of the earth. Indeed, it seems that Israel, by the virtue of their position, experienced the severity of *ḥērem* than even the Canaanites.

The missional mandate of Israelites is determinative on how *ḥērem* policy is to be understood. Israelites needed to propagate an adulterated Yahwism to their children and to other nations. This explains the reason for the endogamous marriage that is clearly juxtaposed to the *ḥērem* policy in Deut. 7. Indeed, endogamous marriage also provides another illustration that *ḥērem* policy was grounded on Israel's holiness. Sparks (1998) in commenting on endogamous and *ḥērem* policies in Deuteronomy 5-11 stated that "these policies had the ultimate aim of protecting Yahwism from the influence of foreign religious elements. Even in its most ethnic guise—"kill the Canaanites"—Deuteronomic identity was concerned primarily with religious elements". This suggests a twofold perspective of *ḥērem* policy as far as Israelites is concerned; first, because they are holy people, they were to execute *ḥērem* to the nations that could easily be defiled them; secondly, because they are holy nation, they will be subjected to *ḥērem* if they would practice idolatry in the Land. In either of these perspectives, their holiness is the central factor. According to Merrill (1994) *ḥērem* as a "drastic action that was taken as a form of immediate divine judgment upon those who had sinned away their day of grace (Genesis 15:16; Leviticus 18:24-30)".

The command to subject the Canaanites under *ḥērem* had ethical grounds. Dozeman, (2017) commenting on Deut. 7 correctly stated that 'the foundation for ethics is the transformation at Horeb where the entire nation became "a people holy to Yahweh" (7:6). This further affirms that Israelites' holiness was one of the grounds of *ḥērem* execution. Ethics find its roots in the ethical Yahweh. Therefore, on raising the issue of ethics as the ground of *ḥērem*' execution challenges the notion that *ḥērem* was tribal or nation-to-nation war. Indeed Deut. 7:1-11 falls within 'larger structure of

6:4-7:11 as a whole' which begins with the Shema (Christensen, 1991). It is clear that the execution of *ḥērem* in Deut. 7 was directly linked to the love of Yahweh, which is the highest ethical requirement from Israelites. In essence, one of the ways of demonstrating their love for the LORD was through executing *ḥērem* on the wicked and sinful nations and by executing *ḥērem* to their brothers who would lead them to idolatry (Deut. 13).

However, considering the many moral failures of Israelites in the Pentateuch, one would wonder whether Israelites would have a moral ground to execute *ḥērem* on the wicked nations. In other words, the fact that Israel was equally sinful in many ways, as seen in most part of Pentateuch's narratives, would question the justification of *ḥērem* execution on the Canaanites by Israelites. Even if one is to argue that the commands in the Deuteronomy are futuristic and dependent on Israelites' obedience to Yahweh, the prediction of Israelites' disobedience in Deut. 31:14-22 would still challenge the basis of *ḥērem* execution by Israelites. This is because Yahweh, in His foreknowledge, admits that the Israelites would surely fall away when in the Promised Land. This tends to disqualify Israelites from claiming any moral ground to execute *ḥērem* to the sinful nations hence leading a modern reader to question Yahweh's fairness in dealing with other nations. I propose that the issue for such an erroneous conclusion is the misunderstanding of holiness.

The misunderstanding of the concept of holiness would indeed lead to a conclusion of unfairness on the side of the LORD by the modern reader. Nevertheless, as seen in the foregoing discussion, the commands to execute *ḥērem* in Deuteronomy has an outward and inward approach. In Deut. 7 and 20, the execution of *ḥērem* is outward looking where Israelites were to subject other sinful nations to *ḥērem*. In

Deut. 13, the execution of *ḥērem* is inward looking where Israelites would have to purge themselves of evil if one of their own practiced idolatry. Also, from the standpoint of Israelites, the exile was an inward-looking approach of *ḥērem* execution. It is worth noting that in both approaches, the focus is to purge evil in the Land so that the LORD would be worshipped alone. Actually, the prophets would later show that the LORD set aside wicked nations for the purpose of punishing Israelites' because of their sins. For instance, in Jeremiah 27, the LORD calls Nebuchadnezzar His servant (vs. 6). Nebuchadnezzar was set apart to punish the community of Israelites for their disobedience in the Land.

Deuteronomy 7:1-11 emphasis the positional and acquired holiness of Israel community. In other words, because the Israelites had been chosen as holy people, they needed to stay holy by keeping the laws given to them. Without practicing acquired holiness, they would be subjected to *ḥērem*. The requirements for the holy living were for the entire nation. Block (2012) rightly observed that "in Deuteronomy, the shared experience of the divine word at Horeb transfers holiness to the entire nation; all the people become sacred and thus separate from the profane world". Therefore, *ḥērem* was to play a key role in fencing out any negative influence from the neighboring communities as seen in Deut. 7 and 20. It also became a tool to purify the chosen nation if idolatry is introduced among them as seen in Deut. 13.

It is important to underscore here that with the basic idea of holiness being 'set apart', the execution of *ḥērem* by Israel must be seen in the light of their missional mandate. Therefore, this missional mandate of Israelites that primarily meant being the light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6), places *ḥērem* within the salvific language as

oppose to warfare language. Confining *ḥērem* the warfare language tends to advocate for genocidal understanding of the war texts in the Bible.

Israel's missional mandate as determinative to understand *ḥērem*

The missional mandate of Israel community is highly alluded to in the book of Deuteronomy. Sailhammer (1992) rightly observed that “Deut. 7 weaves together sections of Exodus (19:1-7; 23:20-33) as a means of elaborating on the importance of separation from the nations”. Exodus 19 is a key text in understanding the constitution of Israel into a holy nation with a mandate of showcasing the glory of the LORD to the other nations. It is also a foundational text in appreciating the mission of God to the world. The text is also linked to Genesis 12:1-3 where The LORD outlined His salvific program to the world through the lineage of Abraham. In relation to the researcher's focus in this work, Deuteronomy 7:1-11 highlights the conceptualization of *ḥērem* as representative of the whole Pentateuch. It shows that *ḥērem* is to be understood as a holiness maintained mechanism for Israel so that Israel would be able to achieve her missional mandate.

This *ḥērem* concept both captures the idea of being completely devoted to The LORD and completely destroying anything that could jeopardize such devotion to Yahweh. The fact that The LORD has chosen to associate Himself with a community of Israelites for the sake of showcasing His holiness nature to nations practicing idolatry would demand strict adherence to the Law of the LORD. The nations that were being expelled in Deut. 7 had been practicing idolatry in the Land hence attracting the wrath of the holy God. Though mandated to be missionaries of Yahweh in the world for the purpose of drawing people to Him, the Israel community needed

to fully appreciate the consequences of idolatry either by them or by any other nation. The execution of *ḥērem*, therefore, communicated to both Israelites and other nations the heinousness of sin in light of the holiness of Yahweh. The drastic nature *ḥērem* among idolater nations would be broadcasted to other nations. This would inspire both fear and reverence of Yahweh among nations and among the community of Israelites. The inspiration of fear and reverence from among the nations would achieve the purpose of drawing nations to the worship of Yahweh. This shows that *ḥērem* was practiced within the context of the salvific program of Yahweh.

In Deuteronomy 4:6-7, Moses indicated that by Israelites keeping the Law of God, their wisdom and understanding would be seen and heard by other people who would admire them. In doing this, Israelites would have become a light to the gentiles' nations hence achieving their missional mandate. In other words, the Israelites needed to be truly separated from the nations and be distinct in their sociopolitical, religious and economic life so as to be an envy of the world hence drawing men to Yahweh. This missional mandate by Israelites was to be carried out among polytheistic and idolatrous Ancient near East communities. The seven nations that were to be displaced had had their iniquity full as predicted in Genesis 15:6. Moreover, they would be the immediate neighbors to the community of Israel hence would easily influence them. It is evident that if these nations were allowed to live, their corrupt ways would corrupt Israel before Israel model a pattern of holiness. Therefore, the concept of *ḥērem* in Deut. 7 is seen as punitive aimed at eradicating the evil that could influence the Israelites community.

Whereas *ḥērem* has been seen discussed within the context of Old Testament warfare motif, the fact that *ḥērem* is punctuated with the key theological words such;

the Promised Land (Deut. 7:1), the covenant (Deut. 7:2), forbiddance of intermarriages (Deut. 7:3), idolatry (Deut. 7:5), the chosen people (Deut. 7: 6), redemption from slavery (Deut. 7: 8), God’s loving-kindness (Deut. 7: 9), God’s vengeance (Deut. 7: 10), and fidelity to the Commandment (Deut. 7:11) is indicative of its salvific nature as oppose being confined to holy war carried out against enemies of Israel. The missional mandate of Israel is strongly nuanced in the language of Deut. 7. As will be discussed, the holiness of Yahweh and the holiness of Israel is the unifying principle in the execution of *hērem* in this texts and other related ones.

The exile of Israel directly related to their missional mandate among the nations. In Ezek. 5:5-8, Israel is accused of being wicked than the nations surrounding them. The LORD then promised to punish them in the sight of all the nations; ‘behold, I, even, I, am against you and I will execute judgments among you in the sight of the nations’ (Ezek. 5:8; NIV). Duguid, (1999) commenting on Ezekiel 5:5-8, rightly mentioned that “the idea of the relationship between God and his people as a covenant is central to the Old Testament, and it is key idea underlying Ezekiel 5. This text argues that Israel has not merely failed to live up to God’s standard; they have not even lived up to the standard of the nations around them (5:7). Instead of being light to the nations, they have led the nations further into the darkness”. This makes the exile inevitable as the operationalization of *hērem*.

Hērem as demonstrated in Israel’s sacrificial system

The Israelites’ privileged position came with various ethical requirements. Fundamentally, they needed to be a holy people. Throughout the Pentateuch, the implications of being Yahweh’s chosen people is highlighted. The book of Leviticus,

whose central theme is holiness, clearly outlined how the Israelites needed to carry out themselves as a holy nation. According to Sailhamer (1992) the book of Leviticus “intends to show how Israel was to fulfill its covenant responsibility to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex.19:6; Lev. 26:5)”. As Wright (1983) Israelites were ‘called into being a community of people who would then live among the nations to serve His purpose’. (Crossley, 2002) argues that “the severity of the penalties which were attached to the Levitical laws are consistent with the impeccable holy character of God”. Crossley (2002) further discussed that “liberal-minded critics may call these punishments harsh, but they underestimate the seriousness of sin, and how repugnant and insulting sin really is to the all-holy and all-glorious God”. The book of Leviticus “impresses the Israelites with God’s absolute intolerance of sin and impurity” (Crossley, 2002).

In Lev. 18:3-4, the Israelites are forbidden from patterning their lives after the people of Egypt where they came from or after the people of Canaanites where they were going. Crossley (2002) rightly observed that the book of Leviticus was intended to “teach the holy requirements of God in worship and life, and gracious provisions he has made to meet those requirements. Israelite was to maintain a distinctive lifestyle. In regard to *ḥērem*, the book of Leviticus discusses it as a form of a vow. According to Sailhammer (1992), the heightened form of the vow was called a devotion (*ḥērem*). In this vow the person or thing devoted was given completely and without reservation to the LORD. Such vow could not be reversed or substituted by a payment (Lev. 27:28). The usage of *ḥērem* in this sense connotes the “positive concept of sanctification in which someone or something was set aside for service and glory of

God” (Kaiser Jr., Davids, Bruce,& Brauch, 1996). This usage of *ḥērem* is closely associated with Israel’s sacrificial system for which Christ would be the fulfillment.

Everything that was used in the worship were devoted to Yahweh as *ḥērem*. This includes utensils, priests’ clothing and the even the priests themselves. Bromiley (1979) in commenting on the holiness of cultus argued that “since the place where God is pleased to reveal Himself can rightfully be proclaimed as holy (Ex. 3:5), it is natural that everything connected with His worship should be so designated”.

The usage of *ḥērem* in the context of a sacrificial system in Leviticus is key in further appreciating the holiness as the basis for initiating and operationalizing *ḥērem* concept. Glick (2007) argues that this Leviticus usage of *ḥērem* is understood as ‘sacred *ḥērem*’. The idea being advanced here is the total devotion of things or persons to service of Yahweh within the sacrificial system. The fact that every person would personally and communally participate in the worship system, makes this usage of *ḥērem* practical to all the community of Israel. It was not limited to the priests alone, though the priests experience its practical weight daily in the temple. Every person needed to devote themselves to Yahweh during the day’s cultic worship. Dozeman, (2017) captures this point when he stated that ‘the laity is not holy in Leviticus; it is commanded, instead, to strive toward holiness through ethical behavior empowered by cultic rituals: ‘you shall be holy, for I the LORD your God I am holy’ (Lev. 19:2).

Whereas this usage of *ḥērem* is different from that of Deuteronomy 7, the underpinning principle here also is the holiness of Yahweh. In other words, whether

used in the sense of dedication to the service of The LORD or complete destruction, *ḥērem* concept serves to exterminate sin and purify Yahweh's worship.

Exile as *ḥērem* against Israel for missional mandate's failure

Much debates regarding *ḥērem* policy have been centered only on Canaanites. Little has been said about how *ḥērem* as directed to the Israelite community. This has depicted a picture of divine genocide against outsiders thus setting a stage for possible racial superiority on the side of the Jews themselves or anti-Jews attitudes on the side of other nations. The possible racial superiority is seen in that fact that the Jews could view themselves as the privileged people that had the right to destroy other nations. This makes *ḥērem* an ethnic concept. On the other hand, anti-Jews attitudes could be due to the view that Jews historically did commit ethnic cleansing on the Canaanites. However, the consideration of the exile where the LORD used pagan nations such as Babylon to drive out Israelites out of the Promised Land, refocuses the debates to right place i.e. the object of *ḥērem* being the extermination of evil and purification of Yahweh's worship. It is necessary to point out that Israel had been warned that if they would not walk in the ways of the Canaanites, the Land would vomit them out in the same manner it did to the Canaanites. This warning would come to pass during the exile of the chosen nation by the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

The Old Testament prophets warned the community of Israelite of the impending danger of being exiled urging them to repent. This makes many materials in the books of pro-exile prophets be about the forthcoming *ḥērem* of the community of Israelites. For instance, Jeremiah warned the Southern Kingdom that the LORD would make His house like Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the

nations of the earth' (Jer. 26:6). This seemed impossible to the house of Judah who believed that the LORD would not destroy a house and a city that was named in His name. The prophet Ezekiel also pointed out the reason for the exile. But the LORD was committed to exterminate evil from the Land and purify His worship hence could not spare even His own people. In other words, the LORD would jealously guard his integrity in the eyes of all nations including Israel community.

In doing this, His salvific plans, which evidently include calling out multitude 'from every nation, tribe, people and language' (Rev. 7:9), would still be on cause without compromising His holiness standard.

The exile as *ḥērem* meted against Israel clearly ruled out any notion of favoritism of Israelites by the LORD. It also objectively established that the focus of *ḥērem* policy is the extermination of sin and evil in the Land and the purity of the LORD's worship. The exile meant that *ḥērem* policy was never a tool exclusively in the hands of Israel but ultimately in Yahweh's hands. The LORD would 'set apart' any other nation to execute *ḥērem*, even to his chosen nation. The fact that the Israelites were chosen out of the nations of the earth was not an end in itself but a means to an end. The LORD was constituting a community who would showcase His character to nations of the earth. The end goal is what is indicated in Rev. 7:9 that states; 'after this I looked and there before I was a multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb' (NIV).

The Israel community needed to get rid of sin and evil in their midst. The seriousness at which they needed to address the sin and evil in their midst was

dramatically demonstrated in the execution of *ḥērem* among the Canaanites immediately they entered the Land. They were allowed to subject the Canaanites to *ḥērem* with the explanation that they were nations practicing idolatry. In essence, this oriented them to the LORD's attitude towards idolatry and any other evil in the Land. The exile reminded that they were not exempted from the *ḥērem* policy. Therefore, any argument that tends to uphold racial superiority on the account of *ḥērem* policy or accuse the Old Testament God of subjecting Canaanites to *ḥērem* is effectively challenged when one considers the exile of Yahweh's people.

Israel failed to adhere to the requirements of the Law but adapted to the pattern of the polytheistic societies of Canaan. Elwell (1988) noted that "Hebrew ethical monotheism was in many ways opposite to the depraved polytheistic nature worship of Canaanite religion". Elwell further states that "when the Israelites appeared in Canaan, they faced a religion that was decadent and perverted. They were forbidden to adopt any such practices. However, the sins of Israelites recorded in Numbers 25, idolatry and adultery, no doubt included the pagan practice of temple prostitution" (Elwell, 1988). This means that God's command to exterminate the Canaanites and their religion and the Israelites' exile must be seen in the context of idolatry eradication. In both cases, the object of *ḥērem* is seen as idolatry in the Land. Therefore, the exile as an operationalization of *ḥērem* policy indicates that ultimately *ḥērem* concept is anchored on the twofold purpose i.e. extermination of sin and evil in the LORD's Land and purification of the LORD's worship by His people. It also indicates, as pointed out earlier, that *ḥērem* concept is premised on the holiness of the LORD and not on the righteousness of any nation. The 'sin *ḥērem*' where the LORD

commanded complete extermination of nations who were practicing idolatry was done on the basis of His holiness and that of Israel.

As argued, the ‘sin *ḥērem*’ was not confined only to Canaanites but also to Israelites who would engage in idolatry as commanded in Deuteronomy 13. In essence, *ḥērem* is a concept that cannot be confined to the Israelites-Canaanites holy war but should be seen as a *supracultural* salvific concept. Any community, including Israel that practices idolatry would be exterminated. Block (2012) seemed to point out this when he argued that “in Deut. 7:2-5 and 20:18, Moses’ primary concern is not ethnic elimination, but ethical scrupulosity (the narrative of Joshua prove the issue to be devotion to the LORD rather than ethnicity)”. This advances the argument that *ḥērem* is a salvific concept and is not an ethnically bound policy that is practiced within the context of warfare motif.

In essence, the fact that Israel was chosen as a holy people granted them the ground for executing *ḥērem*. This is because they represented the LORD in the midst of other nations. But as they subjected other nations to *ḥērem* it was not lost to them that they would also be subjected to *ḥērem* if they would adopt corrupt ways. Their actions had serious implication the surrounding nations’ perception of the ways of the LORD and by extension whether they were fulfilling their purpose.

Towards a canonical understanding and Application of the *ḥērem* concept

Contrary to the view that the concept of *ḥērem* was limited to the conquest period, this research proposes that *ḥērem* concept is canonical. Its applicability is seen both in the Old and New Testament. Paul writes that the recorded history of Israel was meant to provide warnings to the believers in the New Testament times. Paul wrote

that “these things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (1 Cor. 10:11). This means that in the revelatory agenda of God, the same *ḥērem* is being carried albeit through different experiences. Gard (2003) is correct in stating that “the imposition of the *ḥērem* ban is identifiable in the New Testament’s eschatological texts such as 2 Peter 3:7, 10, 13”. Gard (2003, pg. 135) further argued that,

“Although neither 2 Peter nor any other New Testament text speaks specifically of the *ḥērem* of the Old Testament, the image of the total destruction of the entire earth is a prevalent theme in the eschatology of the New Testament. The God who commanded and, at times, personally executed *ḥērem* against the enemies of Israel is the same God who will execute judgment and destruction at the end of time”

Indeed, *ḥērem* being a salvific concept, is clearly operationalized in the Testament. It is seen both at the idea of the total destruction of the entire earth and in the sanctification process, the believers undergo daily. In other words, it is seen both at the contemporary Christian living and in the eschatological reality.

As the researcher has argued, *ḥērem* is demonstrated in Israel’s sacrificial system. The cultus were devoted to Yahweh. The priests were also devoted to Yahweh. The tabernacle and the temple were devoted to Yahweh. Now, according to the book of Hebrews, Israel’s sacrificial system was foreshadowing of the things to come. The book of Hebrews clearly shows that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Israel sacrificial system. Comparing the Old and New Testament times, the author of Hebrews argued that “in the past God spoke to our forefathers through various ways, but in these days he has spoken to us by his son who he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (Hebrews 1:1-2.). This introductory statement to the book of Hebrews supports the argument that Jesus is the fulfillment

of Israel's sacrificial system. It is important to underscore that Israel's sacrificial system was salvific. It was meant to provide a way in which a sinful man or community could approach Yahweh, the holy God.

In the New Testament, Jesus is seen as the perfect way to approach the holy God. This is so because of the kind of death he underwent on the Cross. Actually, the Cross of Jesus is perhaps the zenith operationalization of *hērem* in the New Testament. This is so because of the person of Jesus and what it achieved. The Cross became foundational of the apostolic message and the ultimate termination of Israel's sacrificial system. At the Cross, Jesus was seen as the sacrificial lamb. John the Baptist referred to him as 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). The apostle Paul would later declare that "we preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:23) and also that "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me". The Cross of Christ was *hērem* in the sense that on it, Jesus became a sacrificial Lamb that takes away the sin of the world. It was also *hērem* because it set a pattern for believers to die to sin daily as symbolized by the phrase 'picking up the cross daily and follow me'.

In the same way, the Old Testament lamb was slain (Lev. 4:32) so as to take the position of the sinner, Jesus was also slain in the position of humanity. According to the 1 Peter 1:19, Jesus was a 'lamb without defect or blemish'. The sacrificial lamb was *hērem* to Yahweh and was to be burnt completely. In this way, sin would be atoned for. In killing the lamb so that the sinner could not be killed in his sin, Israel's sacrificial system foreshadowed the principle of dying to sin so as to live with Christ. In other words, the sin *hērem* where sin is proactively punished must take effect one is to live for Christ. The daily bloody sacrifices serve as a dramatization that the wages

for sin are death. The animal had to die on behalf of the sinner. The image of the sacrificial lamb taking the place of the sinner carries salvific connotation. Indeed, the extermination of sin is cardinal to the idea of sacrifice in both Old and New Testament.

The New Testament also teaches that the believers are the temple of God both corporately and individually (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). This means that just as everything in the temple was *ḥērem* to Yahweh, the believers as the community and their body members are *ḥērem* to the LORD. Because of this reality, anything sinful must be done away with. In fact, Jesus demonstrated this principle, called for a radical removal of any part of the body that could lead one to sin. Jesus hyperbolically stated that “if your right eye causes you to sin gouge it out and throw it away....and if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw away” (Mathew 5:29-30, NIV). This demonstrates the repugnancy of sin how it should be addressed. Being the temple of a holy God, believers need to eradicate anything that is sinful among them and individually.

Jesus’ message invited the believers to exercise *ḥērem* if they were to walk with him. He called out all those who follow him to deny themselves by carrying the cross (Mathew 16:24). This self-denial is developed later by Paul using the metaphor of putting off the old self, putting on the new man and dying to sin. It should be noted that the language of ‘putting off’ the old man and ‘putting on’ the new man is *ḥērem* language, especially in the New Testament. Tozer (1992) rightly stated that “the old self-sins must die, and the only instrument by which they can be slain is the cross”. In this case, the cross refers to the denial in which the followers of Jesus

exterminate sin within. The testimony of the Scripture is that unless one allows the extermination of sin within him or her, there would be no salvation.

The idea of being separated from evil influence is one of the theme discussed by the New Testament writers such as Paul, Peter, and John. Perhaps, of the all the books by Paul, the book of Cor. clearly captures the imposition of *hērem* concept in the New Testament. The environment surrounding the church of Corinth is identifiable with the Canaanites communities neighboring the Israel community. Writing to the Cor. church, Paul urged the believers to “purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Cor. 7:1). Also, Paul urged the believers to expel an immoral brother (1 Cor. 5:1-12). This is because the immoral brother was spreading impurities in the body. The sinful act by the immoral brother is referred to as ‘old yeast’ that was causing impurity to the ‘new batch’. This scenario clearly parallels the command to subject any member of the community of Israel to *hērem* if he or she would introduce idolatry to the community. In other words, Paul was urging the Cor. to exterminate evil among them so as to remain as sanctified people.

For Paul, the Corinthian believers needed to appreciate their new position as the people of God and fence out evil influence from the surrounding. This fencing out of the evil influence would happen by eradicating sinful act by judging themselves through exercising *hērem*. It was not by outward-looking approach but inward-looking approach. They were not to subject the outsiders to *hērem* as seen in Deut. 7 but subject themselves to *hērem*. Paul writes that “what business is it mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. ‘Expel the wicked man from among you’ (1 Cor. 5:12, NIV). This inward-

looking application of *ḥērem* was also taught by Jesus when he directed his followers not to judge others without judging themselves first (Mathew 7:1-5, NIV).

The contemporary Christians application of the *ḥērem* concept

There has been a growing misunderstanding of *ḥērem*, especially in relation to Christianity. The main cause of the misunderstanding is the narrow appreciation of *ḥērem* concept, especially the limitation of the concept within the warfare motif. Many modern readers have concentrated on the destruction of the Canaanites, arguing that for the perceived unfairness and genocidal tendencies on the side of the LORD. As discussed earlier, the *ḥērem* concept has been seen to be contradicted by the teaching of Jesus' Olivet discourse where he emphasized on the peaceful co-existence with ones' enemies. It has been argued that the God who is revealed in the New Testament has been seen as diametrically opposed to the one revealed in the Old Testament.

Relating the mass extermination of the Canaanites in the Old Testament to the loving God who is revealed through the person of Jesus Christ has been found overwhelmingly challenging among the contemporary Christians. For instance, according to Cowles (2003) "to attribute such atrocities to actual intention and will of God poses insuperable difficulties for Christian theology, ethics, and praxis". Cowles (2003) proposes the need to read the Old Testament war passages through the complete picture revealed in the person and ministry of Jesus. However, as pointed out, this approach is anachronistic and seeks to wrongly read the New Testament into the Old Testament as opposed to tracing the cumulative-progressive revelation of God throughout the Scripture.

The proposition that *ḥērem* ought to be interpreted within the context of Yahweh's salvific agenda, provides a consistent biblical understanding of the *ḥērem* concept. Having established that *ḥērem* is to be primarily seen as exterminating sin and evil with the aim of purifying the worship of God, *ḥērem* concept ceases to be a challenge to the contemporary Christians. On the contrary, it provides an interpretive framework of understanding the Christian theology such as that of sin, sanctification and the last days. The definition of *ḥērem* involves the "voluntary, irreversible gifts that transfer items or persons to God's exclusive ownership" and the 'proactive or punitive addressing of sin' (Glick, 2007). This usage essentially needs to be understood within the backdrop of the grand narrative of the Fall and the redemption.

The message of Christianity appreciates that the Fall in Gen. 3 introduced sin to the world and the LORD has been working in history to redeem humanity from the bondage of sin. The history of Israel community shows how Yahweh has been reaching out to sinful humanity. At no single point has Yahweh lowers His holiness standard in this process but has demonstrated that sin is repugnant and needs to be exterminated from among the people and in the Land. There is both an invitation to engage in sacred *ḥērem* where one willingly offers himself or herself to the LORD and to upheld sin *ḥērem* where sin is proactively addressed.

The modern Christians ought to view the concept of *ḥērem* primarily as addressing the sin that lodges in one's heart and in the world. Indeed, the poignant nature of sin is dramatically illustrated on the Cross. At the Cross, the skeptics who accuse God of the genocide of the Canaanites are challenged to rethink their accusations. This is because whereas the Canaanites were accused of perverted conduct hence their destruction, no sin was found in the Jesus that could lead to his

crucifixion. Yet just as the LORD is the primary actor in subjecting the Canaanites to *ḥērem*, He was also the primary actor in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, His own son. In 2 Cor. 5:21, Paul indicates that Jesus was made sin for the sake of humanity then subjected to severe punishment.

The Cross also act as a counter-intuitive to any culture of violence and challenges the Christians to subject sin in them to *ḥērem*. This means that no Christian would attempt to reenact the destruction of their neighbors who may negatively influence them. In other words, instead of engaging in power over other, they are now to engage in power over self. Gorman (2001) discussed that “the cross, an instrument of political control and lethal punishment, was the symbol of Roman power in its ability to inflict suffering and death”. For Christians, however, the cross is the symbol of power because it is where Christ endured suffering and death rather than inflicting it suffering and death to his persecutors.

One cannot fail to see the correlation between God’s attitude towards sin placed on Jesus and His attitude towards the sin committed by the Canaanites and the Israelites in the Old Testament. The common principle here is that *ḥērem* concept is directed towards sin for the purification of God’s people. As discussed above, the book of Deuteronomy illustrates two approaches to the *ḥērem* application. These approaches are outward looking where Israel would subject the Canaanites to *ḥērem* (Deut. 7 and 20) and inward-looking where individual Israel or the community would be subjected to *ḥērem* (Deut. 13 and the exile experience).

The New Testament invites its readers to focus on the inward operationalization of *ḥērem*. The researcher proposes that the inward-looking

approach of *ḥērem* application where the chosen people purge themselves from evil and sinful deeds is developed in the New Testament, especially in Pauline theology. This approach is clearly developed in the sanctification process where the Christian is to daily deal with ingrained sinful nature as they conformed to the image and likeness of Christ. For instance, in the Olivet discourse, Jesus challenged the disciples not to carry out vengeance but to deal with murderous posture of their hearts (Matt. 5:22). It should be noted therefore that although the New Testament does not use the word *ḥērem*, it carries forward the nuances *ḥērem* conceptualization especially in the way God addresses sin.

The concept of *ḥērem* is contained in the idea of sanctification where Christians undergo daily purging of sin and growing into the image of Christ. According to Walton, J.H., Walton, J.H., (2017) “in the New Testament’s own language, the *ḥērem* of self is represented by such phrases as ‘crucified with Christ’, ‘died to sin’, and Rom. 6:3-4, 13, Gal 5:24; 2 Cor. 5:15. This means that the work of the Holy Spirit in every believer is geared towards subjecting sinful nature to *ḥērem*.”

The fact that Jesus is the fulfillment of Israelite’s sacrificial system as aptly captured in the book of Hebrews is also instructive in appreciating *ḥērem* concept by the contemporary Christians. This is because it expands the understanding of *ḥērem* within the context of warfare to the salvific context. Throughout the Scripture, the LORD has been providing various interventions to address the issue of sin. This include the sacrificial system clearly taught in the book of Leviticus. *Ḥērem* as demonstrated in the Israelites sacrificial system is part of the interventions the LORD provided as a way of addressing sin and its effect.

The fact that the persons, animals or things that were subjected to *ḥērem* were be exempted from ordinary usage, clearly dramatized the repugnant nature of sin in creating a chasm between God and man. The cultus could not be handled anyhow by any person for in doing so, they would be defiled. Indeed the conceptualization of *ḥērem* in regards to the cultus created a sense of awe among the community of Israel even as they approach the LORD in worship. It also reminded them of daily engaging in personal and communal purification so as to worship Yahweh worthily. *Ḥērem* concept clearly communicated the exclusive nature of Yahweh who demands to be approached in a prescribed manner. Tozer (1992) rightly commented that “the heaviest obligation lying upon the Christian church today is to purify and elevate her concept of God until it is once more worthy of Him- and of her”. It is the submission of the researcher that a proper appreciation of *ḥērem* concept within salvific context would contribute to a high view of the God and His worship.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This research sought to establish how the concept of *ḥērem* was prescribed in the Torah; how it is operationalized in the rest of the Hebrew Scripture; and the how the contemporary Christians are to apply it. Therefore, this chapter gives conclusions basing on the discussed research findings as per the stated objectives. It also gives recommendations on how the concept of *ḥērem* is to be applied.

Ḥērem concept as prescribed in the Torah

The Torah can rightly be defined as the fountainhead of wisdom. This is because it forms the foundation of the revelation of God with the rest of the Scripture building on it. Torah is hence vital if a balance Biblical understanding of the *ḥērem* concept is to be properly understood. The researcher established that in the conceptualization of *ḥērem* in the Torah, three key aspects are to be considered; that the holiness of Yahweh is the foundation of *ḥērem*; that sin/ evil is primarily the object of *ḥērem*; and that Israel's sacrificial system demonstrated *ḥērem*. These three aspects form the basis of the operationalization of *ḥērem* in the rest of the Hebrew Scripture.

The holiness of Yahweh as the foundation of *ḥērem*

As largely discussed in chapter two and chapter four, the holiness of Yahweh is pivotal in the execution of *ḥērem*. That *ḥērem* is premised on the holiness of Yahweh and not on the righteousness of any nation. This is clearly taught in the book of Deuteronomy. The book of Deuteronomy brings out the exclusivity of Yahweh in

comparison with other ancient Near Eastern gods. His holiness attributes determine how He interacts with all the people of all nations. Because He is holy, He calls Israelites, who would be the agent of subjecting the Canaanites to *ḥērem*, to be holy. Because of His holiness, he would punish sin by all nations, including the chosen nation, Israel. This attribute is highly attested in the Torah and it demonstrates how Yahweh detests sin and evil in the His Land and among His people. *Ḥērem*, therefore, serve the purpose exterminating sin and evil in the LORD's Land and the purify worship of the LORD by His people.

The skeptics who have accused the LORD of genocide fail to factor in holiness of God as the foundation of *ḥērem*. The Canaanites were to be subjected to *ḥērem* on the basis of defiling the Land belonging to a holy God. The community of Israel would also be subjected to *ḥērem* if they would walk in the pattern of the Canaanites or Egyptians. It is because *ḥērem* was originated and executed on the basis of the holiness of Yahweh that its relevance goes beyond the conquest period. This is because the LORD's holiness attribute informs His progressive salvific interventions. For instance, the institutions of the sacrificial system in Leviticus was meant to facilitate Israel's community approach to the holy God in worship.

The holiness of Israel, which is derived from the holiness of Yahweh gave them the grounds for executing *ḥērem* to the Canaanites. *Ḥērem* became a holiness maintenance mechanism. It serves to protect the community of Israel from being defiled by their neighboring communities. This is seen more clearly in what has been termed 'sin *ḥērem*' which entails exterminating the wicked neighboring nations. The sacred *ḥērem* provided a pattern of approaching the LORD's worship within the

sacrificial system. Both the sin *ḥērem* and sacred *ḥērem* provided the community of Israel with a conducive environment of being what Yahweh intended them to be.

Sin and evil as the object of *ḥērem*

As opposed to the arguments that tend to reduce *ḥērem* to an ethnic cleansing mission by Yahweh through Israel nation the researcher argued that the object of *ḥērem* was primarily sin and evil residing in the LORD's land and among His people. As it has been argued, the Canaanites were to be subjected to *ḥērem* because their wickedness had reached its full measure (Gen. 15:4) and because their corrupt ways would negatively influence the community of Israel. Historically, it has established that indeed the religion of the Canaanites was extremely corrupt, necessitating the subjection to *ḥērem*.

The community of Israel was also warned that the Land would vomit them. In Deut. 13, the Community of Israel is warned that if any tribe or person would engage in idolatry, they would be subjected *ḥērem*. They were reminded that they would be subjected to *ḥērem* just as they executed *ḥērem* to the Canaanites. They were aware of the reasons for subjecting the Canaanites *ḥērem*. In this way, *ḥērem* dramatizes the seriousness at which they needed to address the sin and evil in their midst. In fact, Deut. 13 indicates that if one of them would advise others to engage in idolatry, they closest relative would be the first one to cast stone. This would ensure that no wickedness is found in the Land. And indeed, as discussed, the exile acted as the operationalization of *ḥērem* and a reminder that, though God's people, they were not exempted from the *ḥērem* policy.

In essence, the fact that the Canaanites and Israel would be subjected to sin *ḥērem* on the ground of their sins makes *ḥērem* a *supracultural* concept. It shows that the *ḥērem* policy was not limited to the usage of Israel against other nations but is used by the LORD to address sin and evil in the Land. Only Yahweh had the right to command *ḥērem*. The holiness of Yahweh demands that Sin is exterminated.

Hērem as demonstrated in Israel's sacrificial system.

As discussed, another usage of *ḥērem* within Torah is what has been called sacred *ḥērem* which communicates the idea where persons, animals, and property were devoted to Yahweh. This mainly taught in the book of Leviticus. This means that the devoted things were removed from the human sphere to God's sphere and no man would be allowed to use it. For instance, the cultus was *ḥērem* and hence were disallowed for common usage.

Sacred *ḥērem*, communicated total devotion of a person or a thing to the service of Yahweh, especially in relation to the sacrificial system in Leviticus. Generally, the choosing of the community of Israel could be seen in the light of sacred *ḥērem*. This is because Yahweh chose them out of the earth be holy unto God. They were thus to be separated from anything that is profane. They were thus forbidden neither to pay allegiance to the gods of the Land they were entering nor the gods of the land Egypt that they left. This idea of sacred *ḥērem* can be seen to dramatize the separation of the community of Israel from among other nations for the divine purpose. This means an end of former identity to a new identity where they would identify themselves with Yahweh.

Hērem concept as operationalized in the rest of the Hebrew Scripture

The book of Joshua makes reference to the usage of sin *hērem* than any other book in the Hebrew Scripture. It mentions this term 14 times. This is mainly in relation to the conquest. These verses include Josh. 2:10; Josh. 6:18; Josh. 6:21; Josh. 8:26; Josh. 10:1; Josh. 10:28; Josh. 10: 35; Josh. 10:37; Josh. 10:39; Josh 10:40; Josh. 11:11; Josh. 11:12; Josh. 11:20; and 11:21. The context of these texts is that of the conquest period where Joshua is obeying the command given in the Torah. This usage is also seen in passages such as Judges 1:17; 21:11; 1sam. 15:3, 8, 9, 15, 18, 20; 1 Kings 19:21; and 1 Ch. 4:41. From the standpoint of Israel community, this application of *hērem* was mainly outward-looking for it entails Israel subjecting other nations to *hērem*.

Considering the warning in Leviticus 18: 24-30 that the Land would vomit Israel out if they would engage in the ways of Canaanites, the exile becomes an inward-looking operationalization of *hērem*. It is inward-looking because it focuses on the community of Israel. The exile has been used to divide the era in which the Hebrew prophets did their prophetic ministry. There are those considered pre-exilic prophets, exilic prophets, and post-exilic prophets. This is because the exile marked a major transition in Israel's history. For example, prophet Jeremiah referring to the exile stated that; "I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon" declares the Lord "and I will bring against them against this land and its inhabitants and against its surrounding nations and-I-will-destroy-them and make them an object of horror and scorn, an everlasting ruin" (Jer. 25:9). Even Isaiah's prophesy that promised the extermination of all nations was also

a warning to Israel. The prophet Isaiah said “the LORD angry with all nations; his wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them” (Isa. 34:2).

The researcher argued that *hērem* concept ought to be interpreted within the context of Yahweh’s salvific plan, implemented through the community of Israel. This is because the underlying theme in the execution of *hērem* is the extermination of sin from the LORD’s Land and among His people and the purification of Yahweh’s worship by His people. The execution of *hērem* happened within the overall backdrop of the missional mandate of the community of Israel. The Torah establishes the missional mandate of the community of Israel. Beginning at Genesis 12:1-3, where Yahweh outlines His salvific plan for the whole world that would be realized through the descendants of Abraham. These descendants would be constituted to a holy nation and would be a light to the nations of the earth. This means that whatever they would do and would be, would advance their missional mandate on the earth.

The Israelites’ contact with the seven Canaanites nations must be seen in the light of their missional mandate. It should be noted that the choice of the nation of Israel to be Yahweh’s people was in a sense sacred *hērem*. They were set apart to be devoted to Yahweh. This gave them the basis of executing sin *hērem* to the Canaanites. Therefore, as they occupied the Promised Land, they were to subject its inhabitant to *hērem* because they had defiled the land. Their mandate was to pattern the worship of Yahweh with the intent of attracting nations of the earth.

Superficially, it may seem contradictory that the people who are meant to attract other nations to Yahweh are instead completely destroying some nations. However, when one considers the fact that the distinctiveness of Israel community

was crucial for the realization of the salvific agenda to other nations, the perceived contradiction is addressed. More so, the fact that the sin *ḥērem* was to be effected to the neighboring communities with those further being given option of peace and servitude shows that the ultimate goal of the Israel mandate was to have all nations under Yahweh.

Any economic, religious or political system that posed an immediate threat to the missional mandate of Israel needed to be exterminated. But people from corrupt systems that were far would have an opportunity to observe the just religious, economic and political system of Israel and perhaps convert to it. This is contrary to the Islamic holy war where nonbelievers would be forced to convert. There is, therefore, a clear link between the missional mandate of the community of Israel and the execution of sin *ḥērem* to the Canaanites. This linkage is best understood within the salvific program, of Yahweh as opposed to Old Testament warfare context.

Essentially, *ḥērem*, as practiced by Israel, was to globally communicate the nature of the LORD as a holy God that demands worship from all creation. It was to communicate that salvation is only experienced when one acknowledged His holiness and submit to His holiness. For instance, Rahab who appreciated the fact that *ḥērem* had been exercised to Amorites (Joshua 6:10) and that the LORD is God in heaven above and earth below (Joshua 6:11), had her life and her family spared. Whereas Rahab may not have necessarily understood the holiness of God as the reason for *ḥērem*, it is clear that she understood the exclusive nature of God in relation to other gods.

It is also important to note that Moabites and Assyrian practiced *ḥērem* primarily on militaristic grounds, but the *ḥērem* by Israel was mainly on the religious ground for it focused on addressing evil and preserving the purity of Yahweh's worship. It was on the ground that the Canaanites had defiled the Land that they would be subjected to *ḥērem*. Even Israel would be subjected to *ḥērem* if they follow the pattern of the Canaanites. This means that for Israel, *ḥērem* was not just for territorial expansion but was for the eradication of corrupt systems that challenged Yahweh's holiness. This does not mean that Israel never engaged in *ḥērem* on militaristic grounds but that to Israel *ḥērem* was uniquely link to her covenantal relationship to the LORD and that the LORD claims the ownership of all people. In the understanding of Israel community, both they and other nations would be subjected to sin *ḥērem* if they would sin against Yahweh.

Contemporary Christians Application of *ḥērem*

Without a doubt, contemporary Christians have found the policy of *ḥērem* challenging to incorporate in their worldview. The past argument that confined *ḥērem* concept within the warfare motif has indeed raised more ethical issues relating to Christianity's role in propagating violence. This misunderstanding of *ḥērem* has caused a dichotomous view of the Scripture where the wrathful God of the Old Testament is seen as diametrically opposed to the merciful God of the New Testament.

This research, however, proposes that *ḥērem* is a salvific concept whose purpose is to exterminate sin and evil in the LORD's Land and purification of worship by the LORD's people. This is contrary to the argument that places *ḥērem* within the

context of warfare in the Old Testament that was aimed at exterminating the Canaanites. Biblical data indicates that both Canaanites and the Israelites were subjected to *ḥērem* on the ground of idolatry in the Land. From the standpoint of the covenant community, there is a twofold application of the *ḥērem* concept in the Scripture- an outward looking and an inward-looking. The outward looking that focuses on the enemies of Israelites has been emphasized over the inward-looking that focuses on the community of Israelites. The overemphasis of the outward-looking has tended to ethnically bind the *ḥērem* policy hence encouraging racial superiority by the chosen people and tend to justify ethnic cleansing ideology.

The research established that salvific language, as opposed to militaristic language, would best communicate the biblical *ḥērem* concept. The Levitical sacrificial system by which Christ is its fulfillment uses sacred *ḥērem* in reference to the things or persons that are totally devoted to the LORD. Even sin *ḥērem* discussed in the book of Deuteronomy is linked to Yahweh's covenantal relationship with Israel and Israelites' missional responsibility. Appreciating this unique use of language at which *ḥērem* concept is communicated is important in addressing the skeptic notions that religion in general and Christianity, in particular, promotes violence and are intolerant to different views. As discussed, these notions are due to the skeptics' misconceptions of Yahweh war passages and particularly the *ḥērem* policy.

The holiness of God, which is the foundation of *ḥērem* policy's origination and execution is a normative attribute. It is not limited to the Old Testament. The command to be holy because the LORD is holy is directed to the Old Testament community as well as the New Testament community. This means that any notions of dichotomizing the God into a God of the Old Testament and a God of the New

Testament are incorrect. Holiness, being the goal of every Christian, demands that any residing sin must be exterminated. This principle is at the core of the *ḥērem* concept. The principle of exterminating sin is hence carried forward to the New Testament, albeit with different wording. Every Christian is called to the life of sanctification where sin is daily cut off. This is an inward-looking of *ḥērem* concept application. It means that the Christians are to consider the repugnancy of sin and daily die to it.

The principle that sin and evil is the main object of *ḥērem* is evidently seen in both the Old and New Testaments. As established, the Canaanites were not primarily the object of *ḥērem* but that their wicked system that had defiled the LORD's land was. In other words, *ḥērem* was not ethnic cleansing but ethnic purification. This is why even Israelites would be vomited by the Land if they would seek to reconstruct the idolatrous Canaanites' system. The destruction of everything including all paraphernalia was indeed a destruction of a well-established wicked system that posed an immediate danger to the salvific agenda of the LORD.

Recommendations

This research recommends that *ḥērem* policy is interpreted in light of Yahweh's salvific program as opposed to interpreting it within ancient East's warfare motif. Being grounded on the holiness of Yahweh, with the eradication of sin being its primary object, *ḥērem* concept finds relevance throughout salvific history. Also considering that sacred *ḥērem* finds fulfillment in Christ just as seen in the book of Hebrews, shows its timeless relevance. Indeed, the approach taken by the researcher de-ethnized the concept by proposing the inward-looking of applying the concept. In

other words, the *ḥērem* concept is to be seen as a *supracultural* concept that plays a key role in the missional mandate of God's people. This means that it was a tool in Yahweh's hand as opposed to being within the Israelites' community to be used indiscriminately against the Canaanites. In the New Testament, it is to be seen in the light of Christian's sanctification where Christians are expected to daily die to sin so as to be holy as the LORD is holy. With the concept of sin and holiness of God held in proper perspective, *ḥērem* is therefore seen as having an inward-looking application. This means that every Christian applies the concept of *ḥērem* in their lives in the process of sanctification.

The approach offered in this research would be a biblical approach to responding to the skeptics who, on the account of *ḥērem*, hold that Christianity encouraged violence. This is by appreciating that *ḥērem* was never meant to be a tool used by privileged Israel against the wicked Canaanites and that *ḥērem* objectively addresses sin in the LORD's land and among His people. More so, by appreciating that at the Cross of Jesus, sin *ḥērem* was at work would challenge the notion that the Old Testament God killed the innocent Canaanites children. This is because, at the Cross of Jesus, the LORD's attitude towards sin was made apparent. This approach also challenges the relativistic attitude at which majority of Christians perceive the nature of a holy God. The thinking that *ḥērem* was limited to the Old Testament and that the gracious God of the New Testament cannot possibly punish sin in the same manner He did in the Old Testament is faulty.

Other recommendations that could be consider in light of this research are as follows;

1. Biblical theologians should exegetically expose all Yahweh-war passages in the Old Testament with an apologetic tangent: This would provide resources for modern young Christians who are being confronted with skeptical questions that seek to undermine their faith on the ground of divine violence in the Old Testament.
2. Christians teachers and pastors to emphasis on expository preaching that refocus on the modern Bible readers from seeing the heinousness of *ḥērem* on an ethnic group to looking inward and appreciating the repugnant nature of sin in light of the holiness of God.
3. Christian teachers and pastors to emphasis more on a balance view of salvation that appreciates the concept of holiness, sin, grace, justification, sanctification heaven and hell concepts rather than prevailing view of salvation that is characterized by terms such as ‘happiness, niceness, and an earned heavenly reward’.

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