“Cursed is the one who is slack in doing the work of the Lord; cursed is the one who keeps their sword from bloodshed.” — Jeremiah 48:10 (ESV)

At first glance, this verse might seem shocking: Is God encouraging violence or murder? To understand this properly, it is essential to distinguish between God’s commands, laws, and judgments in the Old Testament. These terms are related but not identical, and understanding their differences clarifies the meaning behind such difficult verses.

Understanding God’s Commands, Laws, and Judgments

In the Old Testament, God’s commands and laws were given with strict judgments attached. These judgments were not optional; disobedience required carrying out the prescribed punishment. Failing to execute these punishments was itself considered sin.

For example, one of the severe judgments was the stoning of an individual caught in adultery (Deuteronomy 22:22-24). Similarly,

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 prescribes the death penalty for a rebellious son who disrespects his parents:

> *“If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother... then all the men of his town shall stone him to death with stones.”*

Likewise, any person who enticed others to worship false gods was to be put to death, regardless of their relationship—even if they were family (Deuteronomy 13:6-10). The command was explicit:

> *“You shall surely put him to death. Your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people.” (Deut. 13:9, ESV)*

This harsh judgment served to protect the covenant community of Israel from idolatry and spiritual defilement. God’s people were called to be holy, and idolatry was seen as spiritual treason

against the Lord.

What Does Jeremiah 48:10 Mean?

Jeremiah 48:10 condemns those who fail to carry out God’s judgment against the enemies of His covenant people—those who have turned away from Him and broken His laws. The “sword” here symbolizes divine justice and judgment against sin and rebellion. To “keep the sword from bloodshed” means to withhold necessary judgment.

Thus, the verse pronounces a curse on those who refuse to act in accordance with God’s justice as revealed in the Old Testament covenant context.

Does This Apply to Believers Today?

In the New Testament era, the application of such laws changes fundamentally. Christians are not called to carry out physical executions or kill those who sin. Instead, the New Testament teaches spiritual warfare—the fight against sin and evil through the power of the Holy Spirit, prayer, and God’s Word.

We are called to “put to death the deeds of the body” by

crucifying our sinful nature (Romans 8:13). The “sword” we now wield is the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17, ESV). Our battle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of evil:

> *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:12, ESV)*

Therefore, rather than physical bloodshed, believers are empowered to combat sin, demonic influence, and falsehood through spiritual means—prayer, the truth of Scripture, and living in holiness.

Conclusion

Jeremiah 48:10 must be understood in its covenantal context—where God’s justice was visibly executed to maintain the holiness and survival of His chosen people. In the New Covenant, the sword’s bloodshed is replaced by the spiritual warfare Christians engage in daily, armed with faith,

righteousness, and the Word of God.

May we all be diligent in wielding the “sword of the Spirit” and faithful in fighting against sin—not with literal bloodshed, but with the power of God to bring freedom and life.

Maranatha!

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