

Deuteronomy 31:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them.

Analysis

And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers—the euphemism for death emphasizes rest and reunion. **And this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land—**God's prophecy of inevitable apostasy. The sexual metaphor *zanah* (זָנָה, 'commit fornication') depicted idolatry as spiritual adultery, violating the exclusive covenant relationship. **And will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them—**the predicted rebellion would constitute covenant violation.

God's foreknowledge of Israel's failure didn't excuse their sin or negate their responsibility—prophesying unfaithfulness didn't cause it. This sobering prediction framed Israel's subsequent history: Judges through 2 Kings chronicles the pattern of apostasy-judgment-repentance-deliverance repeatedly. Yet God's foreknowledge also demonstrated His commitment to persevere despite Israel's failures, ultimately providing the faithful Israelite (Christ) who perfectly kept covenant and secured redemption for covenant-breakers.

Historical Context

Spoken circa 1406 BC as warning about post-conquest temptations. The prediction proved tragically accurate: within one generation after Joshua's death, Israel adopted Canaanite Baal worship (Judges 2:11-13). Periods of faithfulness under good kings alternated with idolatry under wicked kings, culminating in Assyrian conquest of Israel (722 BC) and Babylonian exile of Judah (586 BC). Hosea and Ezekiel used the adultery metaphor extensively, showing Israel's persistent covenant-breaking despite prophetic warnings.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does God's foreknowledge of Israel's failure demonstrate both His omniscience and their genuine moral agency?
2. Why does Scripture use marital/sexual metaphors for covenant faithfulness and idolatry?
3. What patterns of spiritual adultery (mixed loyalties, worldly compromise) threaten Christians and churches today?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוָה	אֶל	מֹשֶׁה	הַנָּבִי	שָׁכֵב	עַם
said	And the LORD	H413	unto Moses	H2009	Behold thou shalt sleep	H5973
H559	H3068		H4872		H7901	
אֲבֹתָיִךְ	וְקָם	וְהָעָם	וְהָיָה	וְזָנָה	אֲחֵרֵי	
with thy fathers	will rise up	and this people	H2088	and go a whoring	after	
H1	H6965	H5971		H2181	H310	
אֱלֹהֵי	נָכַר	הָאָרֶץ	אֲשֶׁר	וְהָיָה	בָּא	שָׁמָּה
the gods	of the strangers	of the land	H834	H1931	whither they go	H8033
H430	H5236	H776			H935	
בְּקִרְבִּי	וְעִזְבוּ	וְהִפַּר	אֶת	בְּרִיתִי	אֲשֶׁר	
to be among	them and will forsake	me and break	H853	my covenant	H834	
H7130	H5800	H6565		H1285		
כִּי	אֲתוֹ:					
which I have made	H854					
H3772						

Additional Cross-References

Judges 10:6 (References God): And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him.

Judges 10:13 (References God): Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more.

Judges 2:12 (References God): And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

Exodus 34:15 (Covenant): Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice;

Revelation 19:2 (Parallel theme): For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.

Ezekiel 16:15 (Parallel theme): But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown, and pouredst out thy fornications on every one that passed by; his it was.

Deuteronomy 32:15 (Creation): But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.

Acts 13:36 (References God): For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption:

2 Samuel 7:12 (Parallel theme): And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.