

Joshua 23:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you:

Analysis

Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you.

Joshua's warning employs stark conditional language: "Else if ye do in any wise go back" (ki hashov tashuvu, קַיְשֵׁב תְּשׁוּבָה, an emphatic construction meaning "if you indeed turn back"). The verb shuv ("turn back/return") suggests apostasy—abandoning forward progress in covenant faithfulness to regress toward paganism. The specific danger is "cleaving" (davaq, דָבָק) to remaining Canaanites through intermarriage. Ironically, the same verb describes proper covenant loyalty ("cleave unto the LORD," Deuteronomy 10:20; 11:22; 13:4); here it describes misplaced allegiance.

The phrase "Know for a certainty" (yadoa ted'u, יְדֹעַתְּדָעַ, "knowing you shall know") uses emphatic duplication to stress absolute certainty. If Israel compromises, God "will no more drive out" remaining nations. This reveals that covenant unfaithfulness doesn't merely forfeit future blessing—it reverses previous

victories. God's enemies become instruments of discipline for His people. The covenant operates bilaterally: obedience brings blessing and victory; disobedience brings curse and defeat (Deuteronomy 28).

The imagery—"snares and traps... scourges... thorns"—depicts comprehensive affliction from multiple angles. "Snares" (mokesh, שָׁׁרֶשׁ) are hunters' traps; "traps" (pach, נָּסָר) are bird snares; "scourges" (shotot, שָׁׁבֶשׁ) are whips causing pain; "thorns in your eyes" (tzinim be'eineikhem, צְנִים בְּעֵינֵיכֶם) cause blindness. Together they describe how compromise produces entrapment, suffering, and eventually spiritual blindness. The progressive nature warns that small compromises metastasize—what begins as toleration ends in captivity. Tragically, Israel's subsequent history vindicated Joshua's warning as they experienced exactly these consequences (Judges 2:1-3; 3:5-8).

Historical Context

Intermarriage with Canaanites was explicitly prohibited (Exodus 34:15-16; Deuteronomy 7:3-4) not from ethnic prejudice but from covenant concern—foreign spouses would lead Israelite hearts toward false gods, exactly as happened with Solomon (1 Kings 11:1-8). Ancient Near Eastern marriage involved not just individual union but family alliance, including religious obligations. An Israelite marrying a Canaanite would face pressure to honor his wife's family gods, participate in her religious festivals, and raise children with syncretistic faith.

The warning that remaining nations would become "snares and traps" proved accurate throughout Judges and the monarchy. The Philistines oppressed Israel repeatedly (Judges 3:31; 10:7; 13:1); the Canaanites enticed Israel into Baal worship (Judges 2:11-13; 1 Kings 16:29-33); and Moabites, Ammonites, and others raided Israel's borders. What Israel failed to eliminate during the conquest became perpetual source of suffering—a principle applicable beyond military conquest to spiritual warfare. Sins we tolerate, compromises we accommodate, become ongoing sources of temptation and defeat.

The final phrase—"until ye perish from off this good land"—anticipates eventual exile, fulfilled when Assyria conquered the northern kingdom (722 BCE) and

Babylon conquered Judah (586 BCE). The land gift was conditional on covenant faithfulness (Leviticus 26:33-39; Deuteronomy 28:63-68). God's patience endured for centuries, but persistent covenant violation eventually brought the threatened judgment. This demonstrates both God's longsuffering (giving many opportunities for repentance) and His justice (eventually executing threatened curses when repentance doesn't come).

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does Joshua's warning about compromise with Canaanites apply to Christians' relationships and alliances with anti-Christian cultural forces?
2. What "small compromises" in your life might become "snares and traps" if left unaddressed?
3. How does the conditional nature of land promises (obedience brings blessing; disobedience brings exile) inform our understanding of God's covenantal dealings with His people?

Interlinear Text

וְאִם כִּי	פֶּשׁ וּבָרְךָ	פֶּשׁ וּבָרְךָ	וְלִבְרֹכְתָּם
H3588	H518	Else if ye do in any wise	Else if ye do in any wise
	H7725		H7725
		and cleave	
		H1692	
עַד תֶּרֶם	בְּנֵי מַגְדָּלָה	בְּאֶלְעָזֶר יְמִינָה	בְּאֶלְעָזֶר יְמִינָה
unto the remnant	of these nations	even these that remain	
H3499	H1471	H7604	H428
אַתָּךְ	וְתַּמְכִּנָּתָה מִ	בְּבָתָה מִ	בְּבָתָה מִ
H854	among you and shall make marriages	H2859	H935
בְּכָמָן: וְהַמְּבָרְךָ			
H0	H1992	H0	

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 7:3 (Parallel theme): Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.

Ezekiel 18:24 (Parallel theme): But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.

Zephaniah 1:6 (Parallel theme): And them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him.