

Joshua 23:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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. This sobering warning reverses the promise of verse 5. The emphatic phrase "know for a certainty" (yado'a ted'u, יְדֻעַּו) uses the infinitive absolute construction for strong emphasis—"knowing, you shall know" or "you must certainly know." Joshua demands unambiguous understanding of covenant consequences.

The escalating metaphors trace progressive harm:

1. "snares" (le-fach, נַפְלָעַ)—bird traps that catch unexpectedly
2. "traps" (le-moqesh, נַמּוֹקֵשׁ)—baited devices attracting victims to destruction
3. "scourges in your sides" (le-shoteth be-tsiddieikhem, נַשְׁׁוֹטֵט בְּצִדְקֵיכֶם)—whips inflicting constant pain
4. "thorns in your eyes" (le-tsinim be-eineikhem, נַצְנִים בְּעֵינֵיכֶם)—sharp objects causing blindness and agony.

These images depict increasing suffering from tolerated sin.

The phrase "until ye perish from off this good land" (ad avodkhem me'al ha-adamah ha-tovah ha-zot, עַד אֲבֹדָכֶם מֵעַל הָאָדָם הַזֶּה) prophesies exile—the ultimate covenant curse (Leviticus 26:33-39; Deuteronomy 28:63-68). The verb avad (אֲבֹד, to perish) indicates complete removal. God's "good land" (adamah tovah, אָדָם טוֹבָה) remains His gift, but covenant unfaithfulness forfeits the privilege of dwelling there. This prophecy found tragic fulfillment in the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles.

Historical Context

This warning proved horrifyingly prophetic. Judges 2:11-15 describes the immediate aftermath: "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim... And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers." The Judges period featured recurring cycles of apostasy, oppression, repentance, and deliverance—exactly the "snares and traps" Joshua warned against.

The Northern Kingdom fell to Assyria in 722 BCE, with the population deported and replaced by foreign peoples (2 Kings 17:6-23). The Southern Kingdom fell to Babylon in 586 BCE, with Jerusalem destroyed and the people exiled (2 Kings 25). Both destructions resulted directly from covenant unfaithfulness—particularly syncretism with Canaanite religions and violation of the very commands Joshua emphasized in this farewell address.

Archaeological evidence confirms the biblical account. The Assyrian annals of Sargon II record the deportation of 27,290 Israelites from Samaria. The Babylonian Chronicles describe Nebuchadnezzar's sieges of Jerusalem. The Lachish Letters (ostraca from c. 587 BCE) provide poignant testimony to the final days before Jerusalem's fall. Joshua's warnings were not empty rhetoric but accurate prediction of consequences for covenant violation.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What seemingly small compromises in your life might become "snares and traps" leading to greater spiritual harm if not addressed?
2. How does understanding the progressive nature of sin's consequences (from snares to exile) motivate immediate repentance when the Holy Spirit convicts?
3. What would it look like to take covenant warnings seriously enough to make difficult separations from influences that threaten your faithfulness to Christ?

Interlinear Text

אֱלֹהִיכֶם: יְהִי הַתְּדָעַ לֹא כִּי תְּדָעַ וְיֹסֵר יְהִי הַתְּדָעַ

Know Know H3588 H3808 will no more that the LORD your God

H3045

H3045

H3254

H3068

H430

לְכָמִים יְבִיא וְמַלְפִנִיכֶם לְהֹורֶשׁ

drive out any of these nations from before

H3423

H853

any of these nations

H1471

H428

from before

H1961

H0

H6440

לְפָנֶיךָ

וְלִמְזָקֶשׁ

וְלִשְׁטָן

בָּצדִיכֶם

you but they shall be snares

H6341

and traps

H4170

unto you and scourges

H7850

H0

in your sides

H6654

בָּאָדָם הַמֵּעָל אֶבְדָּךְ מֵעַד בְּעִינֵיכֶם וְלֹצֶן יְמִם

and thorns in your eyes

H5704

until ye perish

H5921

land

H6796

H5869

H6

H127

לְכָמִים יְהִי הַתְּדָעַ

from off this good

H2896

H2063

אֲשֶׁר

נָתַן | hath given

לְכָמִים

that the LORD

H0

H3068

אֱלֹהִיכֶם:

your God

H430

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 7:16 (References God): And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee.

Numbers 33:55 (Parallel theme): But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell.

Exodus 23:33 (References God): They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me: for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee.

Psalms 69:22 (Parallel theme): Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap.

Luke 21:24 (Parallel theme): And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

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