

Joshua 23:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them:

Analysis

That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them. Joshua issues four prohibitions governing Israel's relationship with remaining Canaanite populations. The command "come not among" (lev le-viltibole, לבל תי-בזא) demands separation—not isolation from all contact but avoidance of religious and social integration that compromises covenant loyalty.

The escalating prohibitions trace the path of apostasy:

1. "make mention of the name of their gods" (tazkiru be-shem eloheihem, תזכיר בשם אליהם)—even speaking pagan divine names invites mental familiarity
2. "cause to swear by them" (tashbiu, תשבעו)—invoking false gods in oaths acknowledges their authority
3. "serve them" (ta'avdum, מעבדות from avad, עבד), the same word for serving Yahweh—giving loyalty and worship
4. "bow yourselves" (tishtachavu, תשתחוו)—physical prostration in worship, complete submission.

This progression mirrors the Ten Commandments' jealous exclusivity: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

The phrase "make mention of the name" deliberately contrasts with calling on Yahweh's name (Genesis 4:26; Psalm 116:13, 17). What we speak reveals and shapes heart allegiance. Jesus taught that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matthew 12:34). Refusing even to name false gods protects covenant purity.

Historical Context

Canaanite religion centered on Baal (storm/fertility god), Asherah (mother goddess), and various local deities. Worship involved ritual prostitution, child sacrifice, and sympathetic magic aimed at manipulating divine powers for agricultural and human fertility. These practices directly contradicted Yahweh's moral character and covenant demands. Israel's temptation to syncretism—combining Yahweh worship with Canaanite practices—proved overwhelming, dominating the Judges period and eventually bringing exile.

Archaeological discoveries, including the Ras Shamra texts from Ugarit (Syria, 14th-12th centuries BCE), illuminate Canaanite mythology and religious practices. These texts describe Baal's sexual exploits, violent conflicts with other deities, and seasonal death-and-resurrection cycles tied to agricultural fertility. Such mythology sacralized immorality and naturalized violence, corrupting those who embraced it.

Joshua's prohibition against even naming false gods reflects ancient Near Eastern understanding that names carried power and significance. Speaking a deity's name acknowledged its existence and potential influence. Modern parallels exist in avoiding profanity or refusing to repeat blasphemies—recognizing that speech patterns shape thought patterns, and thought patterns shape behavior.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. What modern equivalents to "naming false gods" might Christians need to avoid—entertainment, ideologies, or cultural practices that subtly compete with Christ's lordship?
2. How does the progression from speaking about false gods to fully worshiping them parallel subtle compromises that gradually lead believers into serious sin?
3. In what areas of life might you be "coming among" the world's values in ways that threaten your distinct identity as Christ's covenant people?

Interlinear Text

בְּאַתְּ לֹא־בָּא בְּגֹוי מִן־הַגָּנֶשׁ יְמִינְךָ לְבָלְתִּי H1115 That ye come not among these nations H935 H1471 H428 these that remain H7604

לֹא אֶלְהִים מִבְּשָׂר וְבִשְׂרָם אֶתְכֶם בְּאֶתְכֶם לֹא
H428 H854 of the name of their gods H3808
H8034 H430

תַּזְכֵּר יְדוֹ	תַּשְׁבַּח יְעוֹד
among you neither make mention	nor cause to swear

לָהּם:	תְּשַׁפְּכוּ וְ	לְאַל	תְּעַבֵּד וְ	לְמַעַבֵּד וְ
by them	neither serve	H3808	them	nor bow

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 23:13 (References God): And in all things that I have said unto you be circumspect: and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth.

Psalms 16:4 (References God): Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips.

Jeremiah 5:7 (References God): How shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods: when I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses.

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.

Proverbs 4:14 (Parallel theme): Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.

Ephesians 5:11 (Parallel theme): And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

1 Corinthians 15:33 (Parallel theme): Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

Joshua 23:12 (Parallel theme): 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:

Zephaniah 1:5 (Parallel theme): And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham;