

Judges 2:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.

Analysis

Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.

This verse occurs in the crucial second chapter establishing the covenant lawsuit and cyclical pattern of apostasy. The Angel of the LORD's covenant lawsuit exposes Israel's violation of covenant obligations despite God's faithfulness. The cyclical pattern introduced here—sin, servitude, supplication, salvation, silence—repeats seven times through Judges, demonstrating both human depravity and divine mercy.

The theological significance includes understanding God's character as both just judge and merciful deliverer. When Israel sins through idolatry and covenant breaking, God's justice demands judgment, bringing foreign oppression. Yet when Israel cries out in repentance, God's mercy provides deliverance through judges. This cycle reveals human inability to maintain faithfulness (the need for divine grace) and God's patience in dealing with persistent rebellion.

The phrase "the generation that knew not the LORD" (2:10) emphasizes the critical importance of intergenerational discipleship. Joshua's generation served the LORD, but failed to adequately pass on covenant faithfulness to their children. This failure resulted in spiritual amnesia—the next generation forgot both God's mighty acts and covenant requirements. Application to modern believers is clear: faithful

transmission of biblical truth to the next generation is essential for maintaining covenant faithfulness.

Historical Context

Historical Setting: The Book of Judges spans approximately 350-400 years (c. 1375-1050 BCE) during the Late Bronze Age collapse and early Iron Age. This period saw the disintegration of major empires (Hittites, Mycenaeans) and weakening of Egyptian control over Canaan, creating a power vacuum filled by emerging peoples including Philistines (Sea Peoples), Aramaeans, and regional kingdoms. The decentralized tribal structure left Israel vulnerable to external oppression and internal chaos.

Cultural Context: This passage relates to the covenant lawsuit and cyclical pattern of apostasy. Canaanite religion dominated the region, centered on Baal (storm/fertility god), Asherah (mother goddess), and Anat (war goddess). Archaeological discoveries at Ugarit (Ras Shamra) have provided extensive information about Canaanite mythology and religious practices. Baal worship involved ritual prostitution, child sacrifice, and fertility rites tied to agricultural seasons. Israel's persistent attraction to these gods demonstrates the strong cultural pressure to conform to surrounding nations' religious practices.

The material culture of this period shows gradual Israelite settlement in the Canaanite hill country, with simpler pottery and architecture than coastal Canaanite cities. Iron technology was beginning to spread, giving military advantage to peoples who mastered it (note the Philistines' iron monopoly, 1 Samuel 13:19-22). The absence of centralized government during the judges period stands in stark contrast to the bureaucratic city-states of Canaan and the imperial administration of Egypt and Mesopotamia. This political structure reflected Israel's theocratic ideal—God as king—yet the repeated cycles of apostasy showed this ideal required more than political structures; it demanded heart transformation.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does this passage about the covenant lawsuit and cyclical pattern of apostasy reveal God's character in dealing with persistent human rebellion and incomplete obedience?
2. What patterns of spiritual compromise or incomplete obedience in your own life mirror Israel's failures during the judges period?
3. How does understanding the cyclical nature of sin and deliverance in Judges help you appreciate Christ's perfect and final deliverance from sin's power?

Interlinear Text

וְגַם	אֲמַר רְתִי	לֹא	אֶגְרֶשׁ	אֹתָם	מִפְּנֵי
H1571	Wherefore I also said	H3808	I will not drive them out	H853	from before
	H559		H1644		H6440
וְהִיא	לָכֶם	לְצִדֵּי יָם	וְאֱלֹהֵיהֶם	וְהִיא	וְהִיא
H1961	H0	you but they shall be as thorns in your sides	and their gods	H1961	H1961
		H6654	H430		
לָכֶם	לְמוֹקֵשׁ:				
H0	shall be a snare				
	H4170				

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 23:13 (References God): 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.

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.

Psalms 106:36 (Parallel theme): And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them.

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.

Exodus 34:12 (Parallel theme): Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee:

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.

Judges 3:6 (References God): And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

Judges 2:21 (Parallel theme): I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died: