

Numbers 33:55

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

God warns: if Israel fails to drive out Canaan's inhabitants, '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.' The vivid metaphors - pricks, thorns, vexation - describe constant irritation and eventual suffering. This prophecy proved accurate: Israel's incomplete obedience led to centuries of idolatry, intermarriage, and warfare with remaining Canaanites (Judg 2:1-3). The principle applies spiritually: besetting sins we fail to mortify become ongoing sources of trouble and stumbling. Paul uses similar imagery for his 'thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor 12:7), though for different purposes - God's disciplining love versus consequences of disobedience.

Historical Context

Israel partially obeyed God's command to drive out Canaanites. Judges details their incomplete conquest and resulting apostasy. The Canaanites' idolatry, immorality, and child sacrifice continually tempted Israel, leading to the cycle of sin, judgment, repentance, and deliverance in Judges. Eventually, this syncretism brought the Babylonian exile. The failure to fully obey demonstrated that partial obedience equals disobedience. God's command for complete conquest seems harsh to modern readers but protected Israel from spiritual corruption that

ultimately destroyed them. The New Testament calls for mortifying sin completely (Col 3:5), not tolerating 'small' sins.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What 'small' sins are you tolerating that will become 'thorns in your side' if not dealt with decisively?
2. How does Israel's incomplete obedience and its consequences warn you about the danger of partial commitment to God's commands?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵם	לֹא	תִּדְרֹשׁ	אֶת	יֹשְׁבֵי יָם	הָאֶרֶץ
H518	H3808	But if ye will not drive out	H853	the inhabitants	of the land
		H3423		H3427	H776
מִפְּנֵיכֶם	וְהָיָה	אֲשֶׁר			
from before	H1961	H834			
H6440					

תֹּת יָרוּ	מָה
you then it shall come to pass that those which ye let remain	H1992
H3498	

לְשִׁכִּים	בְּעֵינֶיךָ	וְלִצְנִינִי	בְּצִדֶיךָ	וְאֶרְרָא
of them shall be pricks	in your eyes	and thorns	in your sides	and shall vex
H7899	H5869	H6796	H6654	H6887

אֶתְּךָ	עַל	הָאֶרֶץ	אֲשֶׁר	אֶתְּךָ	יֹשְׁבֵי יָם	בָּהּ:
H853	H5921	of the land	H834	H859	the inhabitants	H0
		H776			H3427	

Additional Cross-References

Judges 2:3 (Parallel theme): 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.

Deuteronomy 7:16 (Parallel theme): 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.

Deuteronomy 7:4 (Parallel theme): For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.

Exodus 23:33 (Parallel theme): 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.

Ezekiel 28:24 (Parallel theme): And there shall be no more a pricking brier unto the house of Israel, nor any grieving thorn of all that are round about them, that despised them; and they shall know that I am the Lord GOD.

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