

Psalms 78:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law;

Analysis

They kept not the covenant of God (לֹא שָׁמְרוּ בְרִית אֱלֹהִים, lo shamru berit Elohim)—The verb shamru means "to keep, guard, observe," the same word used for Adam's charge to "keep" the garden (Genesis 2:15) and Israel's duty to "keep" the law (Deuteronomy 7:12). Covenant-breaking wasn't passive neglect but active abandonment. The term berit (covenant) specifically recalls the Sinai covenant (Exodus 19-24), where Israel pledged "All that the LORD hath spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8, 24:3, 7). Their failure was willful treaty violation.

And refused to walk in his law (וּמֵאֲנוּ לָלֶכֶת בְּתוֹרָתוֹ, ume'anu lalechet betorato)—The verb me'anu ("refused") intensifies the charge beyond mere failure to determined rebellion. They didn't simply stumble but deliberately rejected God's torah (instruction/law). The metaphor "to walk in" (lalechet be) describes lifestyle obedience, the entire pattern of life, not isolated acts. Asaph is describing the Ephraim generation (v. 9) who, despite being "armed and carrying bows," turned back in battle—spiritually equipped but morally faithless. This sets the pattern for understanding Israel's recurring apostasy: covenant privileges without covenant faithfulness, religious form without heart loyalty. Hebrews 3:7-19 applies this warning to Christians: privileges (hearing God's word) without persevering faith lead to exclusion from rest.

Historical Context

Psalm 78 traces Israel's history from Egypt through the wilderness to David's reign, emphasizing the pattern of divine grace and human rebellion. Verse 10 specifically references the Ephraim generation (v. 9), likely the wilderness generation who saw God's miracles yet refused to enter Canaan (Numbers 14). Despite being "armed and carrying bows"—militarily equipped—they turned back in cowardice and unbelief. This became paradigmatic of covenant unfaithfulness: possessing privileges (the law, God's presence, military strength) while lacking faith and obedience. The Sinai covenant (Exodus 19-24) established Israel's relationship with Yahweh through explicit treaty stipulations. Covenant-keeping defined Israel's identity; covenant-breaking resulted in exile (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). Asaph's generation witnessed the northern kingdom's increasing apostasy, making this historical rehearsal both warning and explanation for contemporary judgment.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does Ephraim's pattern—possessing spiritual privileges but refusing obedience—manifest in contemporary church life?
2. In what ways might professing Christians 'keep not the covenant' while maintaining religious externals?
3. What is the relationship between 'refusing to walk in his law' and the New Testament concept of 'walking in the Spirit' (Galatians 5:16)?

Interlinear Text

א	ל	שְׁמָרוּ	בְּרִית	אֱלֹהֵי	וּ בְּתוֹכָתָו	וּ	מֵאַן
H3808		They kept	not the covenant	of God	in his law		and refused
		H8104	H1285	H430	H8451		H3985

לִלְכֹתָ:
H1980

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 31:32 (Covenant): Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD:

Deuteronomy 31:16 (Covenant): And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them.

Deuteronomy 31:20 (Covenant): For when I shall have brought them into the land which I swear unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant.