

Ezekiel 16:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured. Is this of thy whoredoms a small matter,

Analysis

Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured. Is this of thy whoredoms a small matter, The allegory reaches its most horrific accusation: child sacrifice. This represents the ultimate perversion of covenant relationship—offering God own children to foreign deities, the most abominable practice imaginable.

Thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters emphasizes the victims—covenant children, the next generation who should have inherited promises. Whom thou hast borne unto me identifies them as God children through covenant relationship. Israel children belonged to God as covenant people; sacrificing them to other gods represented theft and murder of divine possession.

These hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured describes child sacrifice to foreign deities, particularly Molech worship (Leviticus 18:21, 20:2-5). This was explicitly forbidden and punishable by death. The phrase to be devoured indicates actual killing and possibly burning alive, as suggested by the word "pass through fire" used elsewhere (2 Kings 23:10, Jeremiah 7:31).

Is this of thy whoredoms a small matter? is rhetorical question emphasizing the enormity of the crime. Spiritual adultery was bad enough; murdering covenant

children for idols exceeds all bounds. From Reformed perspective, this represents total depravity depth—humans will sacrifice even their own children to idolatry.

Historical Context

Child sacrifice to Molech occurred in the Valley of Hinnom (Tophet) outside Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:10, Jeremiah 7:31, 19:5-6, 32:35). Archaeological evidence from Carthage and other Phoenician sites confirms this practice existed in ancient Near East, though its extent in Israel remains debated.

Biblical texts indicate kings Ahaz and Manasseh engaged in child sacrifice (2 Kings 16:3, 21:6). Jeremiah condemns the practice repeatedly, indicating it was not isolated but systematic during late monarchy. Josiah reform desecrated the Tophet to prevent further sacrifices (2 Kings 23:10), but the practice evidently resumed afterward.

The metaphor works on multiple levels: literal child sacrifice occurred; additionally, dedicating children to pagan cults through syncretistic religious education sacrificed them spiritually to false gods. Either way, covenant children who should have been raised in Yahweh worship were given to idols.

For Ezekiel audience, this accusation explained judgment severity. Child sacrifice represented crossing a red line that made divine wrath inevitable. God would not tolerate His covenant children being murdered for false gods.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What does child sacrifice teach about the extremes of human depravity when following idolatry?
2. How do modern societies sacrifice children (abortion, exploitation, neglect) for idolatrous ends?
3. In what ways does failing to raise covenant children in the faith constitute spiritual sacrifice to other gods?
4. What is God righteous anger toward those who harm children entrusted to His people (Matthew 18:6)?
5. How does Christ offering Himself as sacrifice end the need for any other sacrificial victims?

Interlinear Text

וְתִקַּח י' Moreover thou hast taken H3947	אֶת H853	בְּנֵי יִרְ thy sons H1121	וְאֶת H853	בָּנוֹת יִרְ and thy daughters H1323	אֲשֶׁר H834
יְלֵ דָתָ whom thou hast borne H3205	לִי H0	וְתִזְבְּחֵ ים unto me and these hast thou sacrificed H2076	לָהֶם H0		
לְאֹכ וְלֵ unto them to be devoured H398	הַמַּעַט a small matter H4592	מִתְזִנוּתְךָ: Is this of thy whoredoms H8457			

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 23:37 (Parallel theme): That they have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands, and with their idols have they committed adultery, and have also caused their sons, whom they bare unto me, to pass for them through the fire, to devour them.

Jeremiah 7:31 (Parallel theme): And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart.

Exodus 13:2 (Parallel theme): Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine.

Ezekiel 20:26 (Parallel theme): And I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they caused to pass through the fire all that openeth the womb, that I might make them desolate, to the end that they might know that I am the LORD.

Ezekiel 20:31 (Parallel theme): For when ye offer your gifts, when ye make your sons to pass through the fire, ye pollute yourselves with all your idols, even unto this day: and shall I be enquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I will not be enquired of by you.

Isaiah 57:5 (Parallel theme): Enflaming yourselves with idols under every green tree, slaying the children in the valleys under the cliffs of the rocks?

Exodus 13:12 (Parallel theme): That thou shalt set apart unto the LORD all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males shall be the LORD'S.

Ezekiel 16:21 (Parallel theme): That thou hast slain my children, and delivered them to cause them to pass through the fire for them?

Ezekiel 23:39 (Parallel theme): For when they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into my sanctuary to profane it; and, lo, thus have they done in the midst of mine house.