

Ezekiel 18:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

That hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, hath not defiled his neighbour's wife,

Analysis

That hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, hath not defiled his neighbour's wife, This verse appears within Ezekiel's powerful discourse on individual moral responsibility, listing characteristics of a righteous person. The phrase "eaten upon the mountains" (el-heharim lo akhal, לא אכל) refers to participating in idolatrous feasts at high places, where Israelites worshiped false gods and consumed sacrificial meals in pagan rituals.

"Lifted up his eyes to the idols" uses the Hebrew *nasa einayv* (נִשְׁאֵנָיו), meaning to regard with desire, reverence, or devotion. This phrase condemns not merely external worship but internal affection and trust directed toward false gods. The specification "idols of the house of Israel" (gillulei beit-Yisrael, גִּלְוָלִי בֵּית־יִשְׂרָאֵל) emphasizes covenant unfaithfulness—these were fellow Israelites who should have known better, yet embraced idolatry.

The third element, not defiling a neighbor's wife, addresses sexual purity using *tame* (תָּמֵא, "defiled"), emphasizing ritual and moral defilement. Together, these prohibitions address the two tables of the Law: vertical relationship with God (no idolatry) and horizontal relationships with neighbors (no adultery). Ezekiel establishes that righteousness involves both proper worship and ethical conduct—authentic faith produces holy living.

Historical Context

Ezekiel prophesied during the Babylonian exile (593-571 BC) to Jewish captives living in Mesopotamia. The exiles struggled with a theological crisis: why had God's people suffered such catastrophic judgment? Many blamed their fathers' sins or questioned God's justice. Chapter 18 directly addresses this crisis by emphasizing personal accountability.

The 'high places' (bamot) were elevated worship sites throughout Israel and Judah where syncretistic worship flourished. Although originally used for Yahweh worship, these locations became centers of Canaanite fertility cult practices, including ritual meals, sacred prostitution, and child sacrifice. Kings like Hezekiah and Josiah repeatedly attempted to eliminate these sites (2 Kings 18:4; 23:8), but they persistently resurfaced.

Archaeological excavations have uncovered numerous high places with stone altars, standing stones (masseboth), and Asherah poles. Idolatry remained Israel's besetting sin throughout the monarchy period, contributing directly to both Israel's fall to Assyria (722 BC) and Judah's exile to Babylon (586 BC). Ezekiel's emphasis on avoiding these practices challenged exiles to embrace covenant faithfulness in their new context.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does this verse challenge contemporary forms of idolatry that may not involve physical images but still compete for our heart's devotion?
2. What is the relationship between worship practices (eating upon mountains, lifting eyes to idols) and ethical behavior (not defiling a neighbor's wife)?

3. How does Ezekiel's emphasis on personal righteousness inform our understanding of individual accountability before God?
4. In what ways might believers today 'eat upon the mountains' by participating in cultural practices that compromise biblical faithfulness?
5. How does this standard of righteousness drive us to Christ, who alone perfectly fulfilled these requirements and imputes His righteousness to believers?

Interlinear Text

עַל	לֹא	בְּכָרִים	אָכַל	לֹא	וְעִינָיו
H5921	upon the mountains	H3808	That hath not eaten	his eyes	H3808
	H2022		H398	H5869	
נִשְׁאָל	אָל	גָּלֹל	בְּ יִת	אִשְׁרָא	אִשְׁתָּחָת
neither hath lifted up	H413	to the idols	of the house	of Israel	H853
H5375		H1544	H1004	H3478	wife
					H802
לֹא	כִּעְלָה	טָמֵא			
his neighbour's	H3808	hath not defiled			
H7453		H2930			

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