

Ezekiel 20:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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. This profound and difficult verse reveals God's judicial hardening of Israel through their own idolatrous practices. The Hebrew verb *va'atamei* (וַאֲתָמֵי, "I polluted") indicates divine permission for Israel to defile themselves through abominable practices, specifically child sacrifice—the most horrific expression of Canaanite worship.

The phrase "caused to pass through the fire all that openeth the womb" refers to the practice of Molech worship, where firstborn children were sacrificed by burning. God had explicitly forbidden this practice (Leviticus 18:21, 20:2-5), yet Israel adopted it from surrounding nations. The theological principle here is judicial abandonment: when people persistently reject God's truth, He gives them over to their sin's destructive consequences (Romans 1:24-28). This isn't arbitrary cruelty but the natural outworking of moral rebellion.

The purpose clause "that I might make them desolate, to the end that they might know that I am the LORD" reveals God's redemptive intention even in judgment. Desolation serves to strip away false securities and idolatrous substitutes, forcing recognition of Yahweh's unique deity. This demonstrates that even divine judgment

aims toward restoration and acknowledgment of God's sovereignty, not mere punishment.

Historical Context

This verse occurs within Ezekiel's historical recounting of Israel's idolatry, delivered during the Babylonian exile (circa 593-571 BCE). The practice of child sacrifice to Molech had infiltrated Judah despite explicit Torah prohibitions. Archaeological evidence from Carthage and other Phoenician sites confirms the widespread practice of child sacrifice in the ancient Near East, with tophet sites containing urns of cremated infant remains.

King Manasseh had actively promoted this abomination in the Valley of Hinnom (Tophet) outside Jerusalem (2 Kings 21:6, 2 Chronicles 33:6), making it so entrenched that Josiah's reforms could only temporarily suppress it (2 Kings 23:10). By Ezekiel's time, the exiles needed to understand why such catastrophic judgment had fallen on Jerusalem. This verse explains that God had allowed their apostasy to run its full course, demonstrating the utter bankruptcy of idolatry.

For the exiles, this revelation would have been both shocking and clarifying—God had not lost control but had permitted their rebellion to fully manifest its consequences. The phrase "to the end that they might know that I am the LORD" (occurring over 70 times in Ezekiel) emphasizes that even in exile, God's purpose remained the restoration of true knowledge of Himself.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does God's judicial hardening in this passage relate to His sovereign grace and human responsibility?

2. What modern idolatries might God allow us to pursue to their bitter end so we recognize their emptiness?
3. In what ways does severe discipline demonstrate God's commitment to His people rather than abandonment?
4. How does this verse challenge our assumptions about God's immediate intervention against evil practices?
5. What does this passage teach us about the progressive nature of both sin and judgment?

Interlinear Text

וְאָטַמְתִּי אֶתְכֶם	אֹתְכֶם	בְּמִתְנוֹתָם	בְּהַעֲבֹר יָרֵךְ
And I polluted		them in their own gifts	in that they caused to pass through
H2930	H853	H4979	H5674
כָּל	פֶּה טָר	בֶּרֶם	לִמְעַן
	the fire all that openeth	the womb	
H3605	H6363	H7356	H4616
			that I might make them desolate
			H8074
לִמְעַן	אֲשֶׁר	יָדְעוּ	אֲשֶׁר
		to the end that they might know	
H4616	H834	H3045	H834
			H589
יְהוָה:			
that I am the LORD			
H3068			

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 6:7 (References Lord): And the slain shall fall in the midst of you, and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

Leviticus 18:21 (References Lord): And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

Isaiah 63:17 (References Lord): O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance.

Ezekiel 20:31 (References Lord): 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.

2 Kings 17:17 (References Lord): And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.

Jeremiah 19:9 (Parallel theme): And I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they shall eat every one the flesh of his friend in the siege and straitness, wherewith their enemies, and they that seek their lives, shall straiten them.

Jeremiah 32:35 (Parallel theme): And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

Exodus 13:12 (References Lord): 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.

Luke 2:23 (References Lord): (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;)

2 Kings 21:6 (References Lord): And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.