

Ezekiel 20:39

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord GOD; Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter also, if ye will not hearken unto me: but pollute ye my holy name no more with your gifts, and with your idols.

Analysis

As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord GOD; Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter also, if ye will not hearken unto me: but pollute ye my holy name no more with your gifts, and with your idols. This shocking verse employs biting irony and divine sarcasm to expose Israel's spiritual hypocrisy. The phrase "Go ye, serve ye every one his idols" is not permission but prophetic irony—if you insist on idolatry, at least be consistent rather than hypocritical. The Hebrew *lekhu ivdu* (לכו עבדו, "go serve") uses imperative forms that sound permissive but function as rhetorical condemnation.

The devastating indictment comes in the second half: **"pollute ye my holy name no more with your gifts, and with your idols."** Israel's sin was not merely serving idols but attempting to worship both Yahweh and idols simultaneously—offering sacrifices to God while maintaining household idols, observing festivals while consulting pagan shrines. The Hebrew *chillelu* (חלל, "pollute" or "profane") indicates treating sacred things as common or defiling what should be holy. Their syncretistic worship profaned God's name more than pure paganism would have.

This passage reveals God's hatred of religious hypocrisy and half-hearted devotion. **Divided loyalty is more offensive than open rebellion** because it presumes to use God while refusing to submit fully to Him. The verse anticipates Jesus' teaching that no one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24) and His rebuke of

lukewarm Laodicea (Revelation 3:15-16). God demands wholehearted allegiance or none at all.

Historical Context

Ezekiel prophesied among the exiles in Babylon (593-571 BC), following the first deportation in 597 BC but before Jerusalem's final destruction in 586 BC. Chapter 20 recounts Israel's long history of rebellion, from Egypt through the wilderness to the promised land and exile. **The elders of Israel came to Ezekiel seeking a prophetic word from God** (v. 1), but God refused to be inquired of by them (v. 3) because of their persistent idolatry.

Archaeological discoveries confirm widespread syncretism in pre-exilic Judah. Excavations at Israelite sites have uncovered Asherah poles, foreign altars, and fertility cult objects alongside evidence of Yahweh worship. Jeremiah and Ezekiel both condemned the people for worshiping "the queen of heaven" (Jeremiah 44:17-19) while claiming loyalty to God. **They wanted God's blessings without His lordship, His protection without His precepts, His favor without their faithfulness.**

God's ironic command to serve idols exclusively rather than mixing idolatry with Yahweh worship exposed the absurdity of their position. Either acknowledge Yahweh as the only true God and serve Him alone, or admit you've chosen idols and abandon pretense. The half-hearted syncretism insulted both God's holiness and their own intelligence. Within years, Jerusalem's destruction would end the nation's double-mindedness by removing both temple and idols.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. In what areas of life are you attempting to serve both God and an idol (materialism, approval, comfort, control), thereby profaning His name?
2. How does offering God religious activities (church attendance, Bible reading, prayer) while maintaining idolatrous priorities parallel Israel's offense?
3. What specific "gifts" or religious practices might you be using to assuage conscience while avoiding full surrender to God's lordship?
4. How does Christ's exclusive claim to be "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) confront all forms of spiritual syncretism in your heart?
5. What would it look like practically to eliminate the divided loyalty in your most stubborn area of compromise?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵתְּ H859	בֵּית H1004	יִשְׂרָאֵל H3478	כֹּה H3541	אָמַר H559	אֲדָנִי H136	יְהוָה H3069
As for you	O house	of Israel	thus saith	the Lord	GOD	
אֶשׁ H376	וּבְגִלּוּלֵיכֶם H1544	לָכֵן H1980	עֲבֹדוּ H5647	וְאַחֲרָי H310	אִם H518	אֵינְכֶם H369
ye every one	and with your idols		ye serve	and hereafter		
שְׁמַע יִם H8085	וְאֵת אֵלֵי H413	שֵׁם H8034	קִדְשִׁי H6944	לֹא H3808		
also if ye will not hearken		name	ye my holy			
תִּחַלְלֵנִי H2490	עֲוֹנוֹתֶיךָ H5750	בְּמִתְּנוּתֶיךָ H4979	וּבְגִלּוּלֵיכֶם H1544			
unto me but pollute		no more with your gifts	and with your idols			

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 43:7 (Holy): And he said unto me, Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and my holy name, shall the house of Israel no more defile, neither

they, nor their kings, by their whoredom, nor by the carcasses of their kings in their high places.

Hosea 4:17 (Parallel theme): Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.

Judges 10:14 (References God): Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.

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