

Hosea 4:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks and poplars and elms, because the shadow thereof is good: therefore your daughters shall commit whoredom, and your spouses shall commit adultery.

Analysis

Mountain shrine immorality: 'They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks and poplars and elms, because the shadow thereof is good: therefore your daughters shall commit whoredom, and your spouses shall commit adultery.' High place worship (תִּנּוֹת, bamot), condemned throughout Scripture, combined false worship with immorality. The pleasant shade under trees provided setting for ritual prostitution. The ironic reversal: fathers' false worship produces daughters' prostitution, husbands' idolatry results in wives' adultery. Sin begets sin generationally. The phrase 'because the shadow thereof is good' (כִּי־טוֹב צִלָּהּ, ki-tov tsillah) suggests seeking comfort/pleasure in wrong places. Worship must be where God ordains (Deuteronomy 12:2-7), not where humans prefer. Christ fulfills this: true worshipers worship in Spirit and truth, not at particular locations (John 4:21-24).

Historical Context

High places (elevated worship sites) were central to Canaanite Baal worship. Though sometimes initially legitimate (pre-temple Israelite worship occurred at high places), they became associated with syncretism and paganism. The specific trees mentioned—oak (אֵלָה, elah), poplar (לִבְנֶה, livneh), elm/terebinth (אֵלֹן, elon)—

were sacred in Canaanite religion. Archaeological evidence shows these sites throughout ancient Israel, often with Asherah poles and standing stones. The connection between parents' false worship and children's immorality reflects covenant curse patterns: generational consequences of covenant breach (Exodus 20:5). Yet God's promise is greater mercy to those who love Him to thousands of generations (Exodus 20:6).

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How do parents' spiritual choices and priorities affect their children's moral formation for good or ill?
2. What does 'because the shadow thereof is good' reveal about choosing worship based on personal preference rather than God's revealed will?

Interlinear Text

עַל H5921	רָאשֵׁי י H7218	הַהָרִים H2022	יִזְבְּחוּ H2076	עַל H5921	הַגְּבָעוֹת H1389
upon the tops	of the mountains	They sacrifice	upon the hills		
וְקִטְרוּ H6999	תַּחַת H8478	אֶל וְנֹן H437	וְלִבְנֵי הַ H3839	וְאֶל הַ H424	כִּי H3588
and burn incense	under oaks	and poplars	and elms		
ט וְ H2896	צֶלֶה הַ H6738	עַל H5921	כִּי H3651	תִּזְנֶה יָנָה H2181	
thereof is good	because the shadow	shall commit whoredom			
בְּנֹתֶיךָ H1323	וְכָלֹתֶיךָ H3618	תִּנְאָפְנָה H5003			
therefore your daughters	and your spouses	shall commit adultery			

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 1:29 (Parallel theme): For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired, and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen.

Jeremiah 3:6 (Parallel theme): The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot.

Ezekiel 6:13 (Sacrifice): Then shall ye know that I am the LORD, when their slain men shall be among their idols round about their altars, upon every high hill, in all the tops of the mountains, and under every green tree, and under every thick oak, the place where they did offer sweet savour to all their idols.

Amos 7:17 (Parallel theme): Therefore thus saith the LORD; Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land.

