

Isaiah 57:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes, and didst send thy messengers far off, and didst debase thyself even unto hell.

Analysis

"Going to the king with ointment" likely refers to diplomatic missions seeking foreign alliances, particularly with Assyria or Egypt. The Hebrew melek can mean "king" or, with different vowel pointing, "Molech" (the god to whom children were sacrificed). Both interpretations fit the context: political alliances requiring religious compromise, or direct worship of pagan deities. "Increasing perfumes" suggests lavish gifts or the aromatics used in pagan worship. "Sending messengers far off" depicts desperate attempts to secure help from distant powers rather than trusting Yahweh. Most striking is "didst debase thyself even unto hell" (ad-sheol hishpalti)—you descended to Sheol itself. This hyperbolic language expresses the depths of degradation in abandoning God for false securities. From a Reformed perspective, this illustrates humanity's natural trajectory apart from grace: descending ever lower in pursuit of autonomy, seeking salvation everywhere except from God. It parallels the prodigal son's descent (Luke 15:13-16) and foreshadows Christ's descent to the grave to redeem such wayward souls.

Historical Context

Judah's foreign policy during Isaiah's era was characterized by vacillating alliances with regional powers. Kings like Ahaz and Hezekiah (in moments of weakness) sought security from Assyria or Egypt rather than trusting Yahweh's protection (Isaiah 30:1-5, 31:1-3). These alliances typically required adopting the patron nation's religious symbols as signs of fealty (2 Kings 16:10-16). The language of

descent to Sheol may also allude to necromancy and divination practices, consulting the dead for guidance—practices explicitly condemned in Scripture (Deuteronomy 18:11, Isaiah 8:19) but apparently practiced even by King Saul (1 Samuel 28).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. Where do we seek security and significance apart from God's provision?
2. How do political or social pressures tempt us to compromise biblical conviction?
3. What does Christ's descent to the grave accomplish for those who have descended into sin?

Interlinear Text

רָקַעַ יְהֹוָה	וְתִרְבֵּבָה	בְּשָׂמָן	לֹמֶרֶת	וְתִשְׁאַלְתָּךְ	וְתִשְׁלַחַ	עַד	וְתִשְׁפַּחַיְלָה	מִרְחָקָךְ	אֶלְכָבְדָלָךְ	וְתִשְׁלַחַ	וְתִשְׁאַלְתָּךְ	וְתִשְׁאַלְתָּךְ	
And thou wentest	to the king	with ointment	and didst increase	thy perfumes									
H7788	H4428	H8081	H7235	H7547									
and didst send	thy messengers	H5704	H7350	H8213									
H7971	H6735												
שָׁאֹל:													
thyselv even unto hell													
H7585													

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 23:16 (Parallel theme): And as soon as she saw them with her eyes, she doted upon them, and sent messengers unto them into Chaldea.

Colossians 2:18 (Parallel theme): Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

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