

Isaiah 66:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens behind one tree in the midst, eating swine's flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse, shall be consumed together, saith the LORD.

Analysis

Specific sins are condemned: "They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens behind one tree in the midst, eating swine's flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse, shall be consumed together, saith the LORD." The Hebrew describes syncretistic worship—self-sanctification rituals (mitqadshim umittaharim) in gardens (pagan sacred groves), following cultic leaders ("behind one tree/in the midst"), eating unclean foods (swine, mouse, abominable things). These practices mixed Yahwism with pagan fertility cults. The judgment: "consumed together" (yachad yasu'fu)—corporate destruction, not individual. "Saith the LORD" confirms certainty. From a Reformed perspective, this condemns religious syncretism and self-sanctification—attempting to make oneself holy through rituals rather than trusting God's provision. Self-sanctification always incorporates falsehood because unregenerate humans can't make themselves acceptable to God. True sanctification comes from God through Christ's work applied by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 1:30, 6:11, Hebrews 10:10, 14). Syncretism—mixing true worship with false religion—remains spiritually deadly, warranting divine judgment.

Historical Context

These practices plagued Israel throughout their history—Canaanite fertility cult elements infiltrating worship (Judges 2:11-13, 1 Kings 14:23, 2 Kings 17:10, Jeremiah 2:20, Ezekiel 6:13). Despite reforms, syncretism persisted into the post-exilic period (Ezra 9:1-2, Nehemiah 13:23-27). The early church faced similar dangers—Judaizers adding law to grace (Galatians), Gnostics mixing Greek philosophy with Christianity (Colossians). The danger continues—cultural Christianity mixing biblical truth with worldly philosophy, prosperity gospel mixing mammon with God, nominalism mixing religious form with secular living. All syncretism faces divine judgment.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What forms of religious syncretism threaten contemporary Christianity?
2. How does self-sanctification (through rituals, works, disciplines) differ from Spirit-wrought sanctification?
3. Why is God so severe in judging syncretistic worship?

Interlinear Text

אֵם רַהֲגָה וְתַחַת אֶלְעָזֶר
the hedge and behind Elazar

They that sanctify themselves and purify themselves in the gardens behind

H6942

H2891

H413

H1593

H310

וְפָנֶשׁ קְרֵז בְּשֵׁר אַכְלִי
and the abomination of swine's flesh eating

אֶחָד עֵץ בְּמִתְּרַדְּבָּר אֶתְּנָא
one tree in the midst and the abomination

H259 H8432 H398 H1320 H2386 H8263

וְלֹא יִהְיֶה כָּלֵב וְמִשְׁנֶה
and the mouse together

וְלֹא יִבְשֶׁלֶת וְלֹא יִבְשֶׁלֶת
shall be consumed

H5909 H3162 H5486 H5002 H3068

וְלֹא יִהְיֶה כָּלֵב וְמִשְׁנֶה
and the abomination

saith the LORD

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