

Jeremiah 44:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Because of their wickedness which they have committed to provoke me to anger, in that they went to burn incense, and to serve other gods, whom they knew not, neither they, ye, nor your fathers.

Analysis

Because of their wickedness which they have committed to provoke me to anger—the causal Hebrew particle *mippənê* (because of, on account of) establishes clear moral causation. The term **wickedness** (*rā'ātām*) denotes active moral evil, not mere weakness. The phrase **to provoke me to anger** (*ləhaḵ'îsēnî*) uses the Hiphil infinitive, emphasizing deliberate causation—their sin wasn't accidental but intentionally provocative.

They went to burn incense, and to serve other gods—*qəṭar* (burn incense) and *'ābad* (serve) describe comprehensive false worship, combining ritual and devotion. The devastating phrase **whom they knew not, neither they, ye, nor your fathers** emphasizes these gods' fraudulent claims. Unlike Yahweh, who revealed Himself historically to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, these deities had no covenantal history with Israel. The Hebrew *yāda'* (to know) implies covenant relationship—these gods were covenant strangers. The threefold repetition (they, ye, your fathers) creates a damning continuity: each generation persisted in serving entities with no legitimate claim on their worship.

Historical Context

The specific idolatry likely included worship of Egyptian deities and the 'Queen of Heaven' (Jeremiah 44:17-19, 25), probably Ishtar/Astarte. Incense burning was central to ancient Near Eastern worship and explicitly forbidden in Israel's cult except to Yahweh (Exodus 30:37-38). The refugees' idolatry in Egypt represents a tragic irony—they fled to the land that had enslaved their ancestors, now worshiping that land's false gods.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What modern equivalents exist to 'serving gods you knew not'—trusting systems or ideologies with no proven covenant faithfulness?
2. How does the deliberate nature of sin ('to provoke me to anger') challenge contemporary views of sin as weakness or mistake?
3. Why is the historical relationship between God and His people emphasized as the basis for exclusive worship?

Interlinear Text

מִפְּנֵי י	רָעָתָם	אֲשֶׁר	עָשׂוּ	
Because	of their wickedness	H834	which they have committed	
H6440	H7451		H6213	
לְהַכְעִסַּנִי	לִלְבֹּד	לְקַטֹּרֶת	לְעַבֹד	לֵאלֹהֵי יָם
to provoke me to anger	H1980	to burn incense	and to serve	gods
H3707		H6999	H5647	H430
אֲחֵרֵי יָם	אֲשֶׁר	לֹא	יָדְעוּ וְ	אֵת מֵהֶם
other	H834	H3808	whom they knew	H1992 H859
H312			H3045	
וְאֲבֹתֵיכֶם:				
not neither they ye nor your fathers				
H1				

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 29:26 (References God): For they went and served other gods, and worshipped them, gods whom they knew not, and whom he had not given unto them:

Deuteronomy 13:6 (References God): If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers;

Deuteronomy 32:17 (Evil): They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not.

Jeremiah 44:8 (References God): In that ye provoke me unto wrath with the works of your hands, burning incense unto other gods in the land of Egypt, whither ye be gone to dwell, that ye might cut yourselves off, and that ye might be a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth?

Nehemiah 9:33 (Evil): Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly:

Daniel 9:5 (Evil): We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments:

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