

Jeremiah 6:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto me.

Analysis

God rejects their worship as meaningless: incense from Sheba (southwestern Arabia) and sweet cane from distant countries cannot compensate for covenant unfaithfulness. The rhetorical question 'To what purpose...?' exposes the futility of religious ritual without obedience. Their offerings are 'not acceptable' and sacrifices give no 'delight.' This illustrates the prophetic principle that God desires obedience over sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22). External religious observance without heart transformation is offensive rather than pleasing to God. Reformed theology emphasizes that true worship must flow from regenerate hearts; otherwise, even biblically prescribed rituals become abominations.

Historical Context

Despite growing moral corruption, Judah maintained temple worship with expensive imported spices and materials. This created false confidence that ritual observance would protect them from judgment.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How can religious activity become a substitute for genuine heart obedience?
2. What makes worship acceptable or unacceptable to God?
3. How should this verse inform our understanding of the relationship between liturgy and lifestyle?

Interlinear Text

לָמָּה	לִי יְהוָה	לְבוֹנָה	מִשֶּׁבַּא	תָּב וָא	
H4100	H2088	H0	there to me incense	from Sheba	To what purpose cometh
		H3828		H7614	H935
הָ	וּבְהֵט	רֶחֶץ	מִרְחֹק	עֲלוֹתֵיכֶם	לֹא
cane	and the sweet	country	from a far	your burnt offerings	H3808
H7070	H2896	H776	H4801	H5930	
וְלֹא	וְזִבְחֵיכֶם	לֹא	עֲדָרְבֹו	לִי:	
are not acceptable	nor your sacrifices	H3808	sweet	H0	
H7522	H2077		H6149		

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 1:11 (Sacrifice): To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.

Isaiah 60:6 (Parallel theme): The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD.

Psalms 40:6 (Sacrifice): Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.

Isaiah 66:3 (Sacrifice): He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he

offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations.

Exodus 30:23 (Parallel theme): Take thou also unto thee principal spices, of pure myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet cinnamon half so much, even two hundred and fifty shekels, and of sweet calamus two hundred and fifty shekels,

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