

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

לְכַדְּמָה לְבָזָנָה מִשְׁבָּא תְּבִזְבָּח וְאַלְמָנָה
H4100 H2088 H0 there to me incense from Sheba To what purpose cometh
H3828 H7614 H935

לְאַל עַלְוֹתִיכֶם מִרְאֵת קָרְבָּן מִרְאֵת כָּתָן וְאַל
cane and the sweet country from a far your burnt offerings H3808
H7070 H2896 H776 H4801 H5930

לְאַל שְׁרָבוֹת לְאַל אַזְבְּחִיכָּם לְאַל שְׁרָבוֹת לְאַל
are not acceptable nor your sacrifices sweet H0
H7522 H2077 H3808 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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