

Jeremiah 7:22

Pulpit Commentary

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An overview of Jeremiah 7:22 taken from various Bible commentaries.

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Verse 22. - I spake not unto your fathers, etc. An important and much-disputed passage, from which Graf, Colenso, and Kuenen derive one of their chief subsidiary arguments for the post-Exile date of the Levitical legislation. The prophet here appears to deny in toto that Jehovah at Mount Sinai had given any injunctions on the subject of sacrifice. But the prophet must at any rate be consistent with himself; he cannot utter anything by Divine command which is fundamentally at variance with other equally authoritative declarations. Do the statements of Jeremiah elsewhere justify us in accepting the words in their literal, superficial meaning? There are three other passages which have a claim to be considered.

In Jeremiah 17:26 the prophet draws a picture of the happy condition in which the Jews might be, were they only obedient. One of the features of this picture is that the Jews would still bring all the various kinds of sacrifices to the house of Jehovah.

In Jeremiah 31:14 a similar description is closed with the promise to "satisfy the soul of the priests with fatness," implying that there would be a great abundance of thank offerings in regenerate Israel.

In Jeremiah 33:11, among other blessings of the future, the prophet mentions the praiseful exclamations of those who would bring the sacrifice of thanksgiving. These passages do not contain any statement respecting the origin of the sacrificial system; but they do expressly assert that Jehovah contemplates that system with pleasure, and apparently that he designs it to be permanent among his people Israel. Let us now turn to Jeremiah 33:17-24. Here the prophet, in the Name of Jehovah, declares that there is a Divine covenant "with the Levites, the priests," who shall never "want a man before me... to do sacrifice continually." A covenant with the priests implies a covenant with the people, the priests being the representatives of the people. This passage, therefore, is more distinct than those previously quoted; it does appear to maintain that the range of the Sinaitic covenant included the duties of the priesthood, i.e. sacrifices. **On the other hand, it should be observed that the genuineness of this latter passage is not beyond dispute, the whole section in which it occurs (Jeremiah 33:14-26) being omitted in the Septuagint.** We have now to inquire, Is there a real discrepancy between the words of Jeremiah (strictly speaking, of Jehovah) in the verse now before us, interpreted literally, and the passages adduced above? Are they more inconsistent than such an utterance as Jeremiah 6:20 (first half of verse), which appears to deny the utility of sacrifices altogether? If the latter may be explained as a forcible oratorical exaggeration, why not also the present passage? Jeremiah sees the people attaching a pernicious importance to the opus operatum of sacrifice. On one occasion he tells them that Jehovah cares not for sacrifices; he means, as the context shows, the sacrifices of men without spiritual sensibilities. On another, that Jehovah never commanded their fathers to sacrifice; he means (may we not presume?) the mere outward forms of the ritual, divorced from the sentiment and practice of piety, which, as Hosea tells us (Hosea 6:6), Jehovah "delights in and not [equivalent to 'more than'] sacrifice." There is, therefore, no fundamental inconsistency between the passage before us and the three passages first quoted, and if so there can be no real discrepancy with the last-mentioned passage, for the priests (as was remarked) perform their functions on behalf of the people, and the permanence of Jehovah's covenant with the priests depended on the spiritual life of the people they represented (read Jeremiah 33, as a whole). This view seems less arbitrary than that of Ewald, who thinks that the

sacrifices spoken of in our passage are merely the free-will offerings of the rich; and than that of Dahler, who interprets, "My chief care was not to prescribe rules for holocausts and sacrifices, but this is what I commanded thee above all," viz. moral obedience. According to it, the prophet's denial is not absolute, but relative - relative, that is, to the notion of sacrifices entertained by the Jews whom he addresses. Of course, Graf's view, that the denial is absolute, will equally well suit the context. The people were surprised at Jeremiah's objurgations, because they thought they had fulfilled the claims of the covenant. Jeremiah's purpose is equally well fulfilled whether his denial is qualified or unqualified, absolute or relative. Our object has been to separate the exegesis of our passage from a still doubtful controversy, and to offer a tenable view of it, based upon grounds purely internal to Jeremiah. It may be suggested, however, to the student of Leviticus, that even if the Levitical legislation in its present form were proved to be of a post-Exile date, it would still be doubtful whether any believing temple-worshipper could help assuming that Jehovah had, from the first existence of the nation, given his direct sanction to the offering of sacrifices. If so, it is comparatively unimportant (except with regard to the progressive revelation of the strictness of the law of truth) whether the Levitical code was given to Moses at Mount Sinai in its present form or not.

Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible

For I spake not unto your fathers,.... Meaning not Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but Moses, Aaron, and others, who were living at the time of the bringing of the children of Israel out of Egypt, as appears by what follows:

nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings, or sacrifices; these are not in the decalogue or ten commands; these are no part of that law or covenant, but are an appendage or addition to it; and though they are of early institution and use, yet they never were appointed for the sake of themselves, but for another end; they were types of Christ, and were designed to lead the faith of the people of God to him; they never were intended as proper expiations of sin, and much less to cover and encourage immorality; whenever therefore they were offered up in a hypocritical manner, and without faith in Christ, and in order to atone for sinful actions, without any regard to the sacrifice of Christ, they were an abomination to the Lord. These were not the only things the Lord commanded the children of Israel; nor the chief and principal ones; and in comparison of others, of more consequence and moment, were as none at all; and which are next mentioned.

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary

22. Not contradicting the divine obligation of the legal sacrifices. But, "I did not require sacrifices, unless combined with moral obedience" (Ps 50:8; 51:16, 17). The superior claim of the moral above the positive precepts of the law was marked by the ten commandments having been delivered first, and by the two tables of stone being deposited alone in the ark (De 5:6). The negative in Hebrew often supplies the want of the comparative: not excluding the thing denied, but only implying the prior claim of the thing set in opposition to it (Ho 6:6). "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice" (1Sa 15:22). Love to God is the supreme end, external observances only means towards that end. "The mere sacrifice was not so much what I commanded, as the sincere submission to My will gives to the sacrifice all its virtue" [Magee, Atonement, Note 57].