

Jer. 17:1 ¶ The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars;

Jer. 17:2 Whilst their children remember their altars and their groves by the green trees upon the high hills.

This chapter begins with a statement of how entrenched in sin the people of Judah had become. The prophet describes it as being sharply engraved into their very being and clearly evident in the altars they use to sacrifice to their false gods. These practices are being taught to the children by the example of their parents.

The IVP Commentary made the observation that the picture was of very sharp tools needed to make the engraving on such stony hearts.

Jer. 17:3 O my mountain in the field, I will give thy substance and all thy treasures to the spoil, and thy high places for sin, throughout all thy borders.

Jer. 17:4 And thou, even thyself, shalt discontinue from thine heritage that I gave thee; and I will cause thee to serve thine enemies in the land which thou knowest not: for ye have kindled a fire in mine anger, which shall burn for ever.

“my mountain in the field” – I believe this to be a reference to the temple mount.

The LORD is declaring that He intends to give even the greatest treasures of His people to their enemies. He is going to place the people of Judah in bondage to their enemies in Babylon. Why? They have not only angered God; they have continually added fuel to the fire by their continued rebellion and refusal to repent in spite of God’s messages to them through His prophets and the example He made of the Northern Kingdom by allowing them to be conquered and taken captive by Assyria.

Verse 4 I believe is using language meant to emphasize the extent of God’s anger. Sin fuels God’s anger to such an intensity that it cannot be appeased except through the saving grace of His precious Son.

Jer. 17:5 ¶ Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD.

Jer. 17:6 For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.

In these verses the prophet is declaring God’s curse on those who choose to place their trust in men rather than in YHWH. Those men will find their lives hopeless and wanting of fulfillment.

You would think that the people would recognize that their history is replete with the failure of the people to provide for themselves apart from God. The book of Judges is a continual story of rebellion, oppression by the enemy,

repentance and deliverance by God. Their history provides a record of God's miraculous intervention on their behalf many times. Their history is clear—follow God in obedience and experience blessing; turn from God in rebellion and disobedience and experience judgment.

I almost moved on until the phrase “whose heart departeth from the LORD” jumped out at me. The Hebrew for the word *heart* makes reference to the place of man's will and intellect. In other words, those who are trusting in the strength of man have made a choice to follow their own desires in rejection of YHWH as LORD. They would rather experience the pleasures of sin for a season than yield to God's authority in obedience to His law.

Jer. 17:7 Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is.

Jer. 17:8 For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and *that* spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

As soon as I read these verses, I heard echoes from Psalm 1.

Psalms 1:1–3 “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”

In contrast to the previous verse that pronounced a curse on those who choose to reject the LORD, these verses declare a blessing on those who choose to trust in the LORD. They will experience provision in time of need and will be fruitful.

I personally think that the emphasis is on spiritual destitution vs. spiritual prosperity. I think the connection to Psalm 1 was deliberate. The rest of that Psalm states:

Psalms 1:4–6 “The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

To place one's hope in the LORD is to trust that in spite of what life throws at you, you know that your eternal future is secure and will be full of blessing beyond measure. However, I am not discounting an application to material deprivation and prosperity.

As I thought about the spiritual application, I was reminded of the words of the Savior as recorded by John.

John 7:37–39 “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)”

Those who choose to take root in faith in the LORD will find themselves benefitting from the ministry of the Spirit. Though the Old Testament saints were not privileged to experience a permanent indwelling of the Spirit, we can be sure that those who trusted in God and were obedient to His will experienced the provision of the Spirit. It’s one of the things that David most feared losing.

Psalms 51:9–12 “Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.”

Jer. 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

Jer. 17:10 I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

Again the *heart* is a reference to man’s will and intellect, the place in our being from which decisions and choices are made.

It was interesting to note the Hebrew for the word *deceitful*—“fraudulent, crooked, polluted” and Webster adds, “serving to mislead or ensnare.”

The Hebrew for “desperately wicked” makes reference to being sick and incurable. Webster defines *wicked* as “Evil in principle or practice; deviating from morality; contrary to the moral or divine law....”

In other words, because of the sin nature we inherited through Adam, man starts out with two strikes against him.

- The part of our being that guides us in making decisions and choices is naturally hardwired to mislead us and trap us through temptations.
- When following the leading of our heart, our natural proclivity is contrary to God’s law.

Even more alarming is the answer to the closing question in verse 9—God searches our hearts; He knows them inside out. The Psalmist was well aware of this truth.

Psalms 44:20–21 “If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god; Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart.

The Hebrew for *reins* seems to be part and parcel of the *heart*; it makes reference to the “mind, the interior self.” When the LORD searches our heart, He is

examining our thought processes, our motives. His judgments for or against each person are based on that examination.

Thankfully, each person of faith will emerge from that examination declared righteous in Christ Jesus. Heavenly rewards, however, will result from the LORD's examination of our service before the LORD; and I believe that examination will be focused on the motivations of our heart.

2 Corinthians 5:17–18 & 21 “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ.... For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

1 Corinthians 3:13–15 “Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”

Jer. 17:11 As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.

I thought the NLT expressed this verse well: *“Like a bird that hatches eggs she has not laid, so are those who get their wealth by unjust means. Sooner or later they will lose their riches and, at the end of their lives, will become poor old fools.”*

When I was first reading through this chapter several times, I didn't understand the connection of this verse. I see now that it is an example, a direct commentary on the LORD's examination of the heart of the unjust man; in the end he will have nothing.

Jer. 17:12 ¶ A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary.

Jer. 17:13 O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters.

“a glorious high throne” = the throne of God as represented by the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant

“from the beginning” – I believe in context would be the beginning of the nation of Israel

It would seem that the following verses from Exodus would support that conclusion.

Exodus 15:2 & 15-17 “The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will

exalt him.... all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased. Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established."

Verses 12-13 seem to be an interjection of praise from the heart of Jeremiah. He knows that only positioned in faith and obedience before the throne of the LORD can the people of Judah find true *sanctuary*—spiritual cleansing and a place of refuge.

2 Chronicles 30:8–9 "Now be ye not stiffnecked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the LORD, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever: and serve the LORD your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you. For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him."

Ezekiel 11:16 "Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come."

He recognizes the truth that only in YHWH can the people of Israel find hope in their future. The Hebrew for *hope* comes from a root that means to be bound together—a reference to the restoration of the nation as a whole before the LORD. Those who choose to forsake the LORD will face shame and disappointment in their future; their only expectation is to be "written in the earth."

This is in direct contrast to the future of the man of faith whose name is written in the "book of the living" in heaven.

Psalms 69:28 "Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous."

Revelation 20:12 & 15 "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works....And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

Having one's name in the Book of Life gives a picture of permanence vs having one's name written in the earth and subject to destruction.

It is only in the LORD, the fountain of living waters, that man can have a true hope for the future. That provision comes in the person of Jesus Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

John 7:37–39 “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive:”

Jer. 17:14 Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou *art* my praise.

Jer. 17:15 Behold, they say unto me, Where *is* the word of the LORD? let it come now.

I can so connect with Jeremiah as he comes to these verses. In his heart he is in love with the LORD and so desires to serve him. Confronted with the circumstances, he is feeling in need of healing and salvation. He feels weak in ministry and he wants to be made whole. He feels threatened by the people and knows that only in the LORD can he find deliverance. The people are questioning Jeremiah’s message because nothing has happened yet. This seems to mirror the attitude that is a reflection of our times as prophesied by Peter.

2 Peter 3:3–4 “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.”

Jer. 17:16 As for me, I have not hastened from *being* a pastor to follow thee: neither have I desired the woeful day; thou knowest: that which came out of my lips was *right* before thee.

Jer. 17:17 Be not a terror unto me: thou *art* my hope in the day of evil.

Jer. 17:18 Let them be confounded that persecute me, but let not me be confounded: let them be dismayed, but let not me be dismayed: bring upon them the day of evil, and destroy them with double destruction.

It’s like Jeremiah is building a case for the LORD to answer his prayer. He has been obedient and faithful to his calling as a pastor or spiritual shepherd to his people. Jeremiah’s heart has been grieved at the message of coming judgment and the lack of repentance on the part of his people, but he has faithfully declared the message the LORD has put in his mouth.

But it seems Jeremiah has finally had enough. He wants the LORD to bring shame to his persecutors. He is ready for the people to experience the righteous judgment of the LORD, but he wants to be spared. The last part of verse 18 seems to indicate that Jeremiah wants God to judge them to the fullest extent.

Jer. 17:19 ¶ Thus said the LORD unto me; Go and stand in the gate of the children of the people, whereby the kings of Judah come in, and by the which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem;

Jer. 17:20 And say unto them, Hear ye the word of the LORD, ye kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that enter in by these gates:

Jer. 17:21 Thus saith the LORD; Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the sabbath day, nor bring *it* in by the gates of Jerusalem;

Jer. 17:22 Neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers.

Jer. 17:23 But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction.

The LORD answers Jeremiah by giving him a new message to declare at all the gates of Jerusalem, beginning with the gate that is used by the kings of Judah. This message is for everyone regardless of social position.

This is an interesting message. The focus of the message is obedience in keeping the Sabbath. God is issuing a call to the people to turn from their evil ways and keep the Sabbath according as God had commanded their fathers through Moses.

Exodus 20:8–11 “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.”

Point is made that the fathers had refused to obey God’s law.

Jer. 17:24 And it shall come to pass, if ye diligently hearken unto me, saith the LORD, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but hallow the sabbath day, to do no work therein;

Jer. 17:25 Then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and this city shall remain for ever.

Jer. 17:26 And they shall come from the cities of Judah, and from the places about Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the plain, and from the mountains, and from the south, bringing burnt offerings, and sacrifices, and meat offerings, and incense, and bringing sacrifices of praise, unto the house of the LORD.

The LORD is declaring that if the people will humble themselves and choose to once again hallow the Sabbath as a day of rest before the LORD, He will establish them in prosperity before the nations. Verse 26 is a call for all the people of Judah to participate—not just those in Jerusalem.

I think the NIV Commentary made an important observation regarding the reason the keeping of the Sabbath was singled out: “...the Sabbath recognizes God as Creator, which is a witness against idolatry, and it marks the special covenant relationship between God and Israel.”

Jer. 17:27 But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.

If they, however, choose to follow in the footsteps of their fathers and continue to reject God in disobedience and desecrate His Sabbath, they will surely experience the refining fires of His judgment that will not be quenched.