
JEREMIAH 17: 1 The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is engraved on the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of your altars;

This chapter begins with setting forth the very strong bias which the people of Judah had to idolatry, with the fatal consequences, Jer 17:1-4. The happiness of the man that trusted in Jehovah is then beautifully contrasted with the opposite character, Jer 17:5-8. God alone knows the deceitfulness and wretchedness of the heart of man, Jer 17:9, Jer 17:10. The comparison of a bird's hatching the eggs of another of a different species, which will soon forsake her, is highly expressive of the vanity of ill-acquired riches, which often disappoint the owner, Jer 17:11. The prophet continues the same subject in his own person, appeals to God for his sincerity, and prays that the evil intended him by his enemies may revert on their own heads, Jer 17:12-18. The remaining part of the chapter is a distinct prophecy relating to the due observance of the Sabbath, enforced both by promises and threatenings, Jer 17:19-27.

Verse 1

The sin of Judah - Idolatry.

Is written with a pen of iron - It is deeply and indelibly written in their heart, and shall be as indelibly written in their punishment. Writing with the point of a diamond must refer to glass, or some vitrified substance, as it is distinguished here from engraving with a steel burine, or graver. Their altars show what the deities are which they worship. There may be reference here to the different methods of recording events in those days: -

1. A pen or stile of iron, for engraving on lead or wood.
2. A point of a diamond, for writing on vitreous substances.
3. Writing on tables of brass or copper.
4. Writing on the horns of the altars the names of the deities worshipped there. This is probable.

In several parts of India, and all through Ceylon, an iron or steel pen is used universally; with these the natives form the letters by incisions on the outer rind of the palm leaf. Books written in this way are very durable. This pen is broad at the top, has a very fine sharp point, and is sharp at one side as a knife, to shave and prepare the palm leaf. A pen of this description now lies before me.

JEREMIAH 17: 2 while their children remember their altars and their Asherah poles by the green trees on the high hills.

Verse 2

Whilst their children remember - Even the rising generation have their imagination stocked with idol images, and their memories with the frantic rites and ceremonies which they saw their parents observe in this abominable worship.

JEREMIAH 17: 3 My mountain in the field, I will give your substance and all your treasures for a plunder, and your high places, because of sin, throughout all your borders.

Verse 3

O my mountain in the field - The prophet here addresses the land of Judea, which was a mountainous country, Deu 3:25; but Jerusalem itself may be meant, which is partly built upon hills which, like itself, are elevated above the rest of the country.

JEREMIAH 17: 4 You, even of yourself, shall discontinue from your heritage that I gave you; and I will cause you to serve your enemies in the land which you don't know: for you have kindled a fire in my anger which shall burn forever.

JEREMIAH 17: 5 Thus says the LORD: Cursed is the man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from the LORD.

Verse 5

Cursed be the man that trusteth in man - This reprehends their vain confidence in trusting in Egypt, which was too feeble itself to help, and, had it been otherwise, too ill disposed towards them to help them heartily. An arm of flesh is put here for a weak and ineffectual support. And he who, in reference to the salvation of his soul, trusts in an arm of flesh - in himself or others, or in any thing he has done or suffered, will inherit a curse instead of a blessing.

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

Verse 6

Be shall be like the heath in the desert - כְּעֵרְעָר kearar; or, like a blasted tree, without moisture, parched and withered.

Shall not see when good cometh - Shall not be sensible of it: the previous drought having rendered it incapable of absorbing any more vegetable juices.

A salt land - Barren; and therefore unfit to be inhabited.

JEREMIAH 17: 7 Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose trust the LORD is.

JEREMIAH 17: 8 For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, who spreads out its roots by the river, and shall not fear when heat comes, but its leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

Verse 8

As a tree planted by the waters - Which is sufficiently supplied with moisture, though the heat be intense, and there be no rain; for the roots being spread out by the river, they absorb from it all the moisture requisite for the flourishing vegetation of the tree.

Shall not see when heat cometh - Shall not feel any damage by drought, for the reason already assigned. It shall be strong and vigorous, its leaf always green; and shall produce plenty of fruit in its season.

JEREMIAH 17: 9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt: who can know it?

Verse 9

The heart is deceitful - עקב הלב akob halleb, "the heart is supplanting - tortuous - full of windings - insidious;" lying ever at the catch; striving to avail itself of every favorable circumstance to gratify its propensities to pride, ambition, evil desire, and corruption of all kinds.

And desperately wicked - ואנש הוא veanush hu, and is wretched, or feeble; distressed beyond all things, in consequence of the wickedness that is in it. I am quite of Mr. Parkhurst's opinion, that this word is here badly translated as אנש anash is never used in Scripture to denote wickedness of any kind. My old MS. Bible translates thus: - Schrewid is the herte of a man: and unsearchable: who shall knowen it?

Who can know it? - It even hides itself from itself; so that its owner does not know it. A corrupt heart is the worst enemy the fallen creature can have; it is full of evil devices, - of deceit, of folly, and abomination, and its owner knows not what is in him till it boils over, and is often past remedy before the evil is perceived. Therefore trust not in man whose purposes are continually changing, and who is actuated only by motives of self-interest.

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

Verse 10

I the Lord search the heart - The Lord is called by his apostles, Act 1:24, Καρδιογνωστης, the Knower of the heart. To him alone can this epithet be applied; and it is from him alone that we can derive that instruction by which we can in any measure know ourselves.

JEREMIAH 17: 11 As the partridge that sits on eggs which she has not laid, so is he who gets riches, and not by right; in the midst of his days they shall leave him, and at his end he shall be a fool.

Verse 11

As the partridge - קרא kore. It is very likely that this was a bird different from our partridge. The text Dr. Blayney translates thus: - (As) the kore that hatcheth what it doth not lay (So is) he who getteth riches, and not according to right. "The covetous man," says Dahler, "who heaps up riches by unjust ways, is compared to a bird which hatches the eggs of other fowls. And as the young, when hatched, and able at all to shift for themselves, abandon her who is not their mother, and leave her nothing to compensate her trouble, so the covetous man loses those unjustly-gotten treasures, and the fruit of his labor."

And at his end shall be a fool - Shall be reputed as such. He was a fool all the way through; he lost his soul to get wealth, and this wealth he never enjoyed. To him also are applicable those strong words of the poet: - "O cursed lust of gold! when for thy sake

The wretch throws up his interest in both worlds.

First starved in this, then damned in that to come."

Blair.

JEREMIAH 17: 12 A glorious throne, set on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary.

Verse 12

A glorious high throne - As he is cursed who trusts in man, so he is blessed who trusts in God. He is here represented as on a throne in his temple; to him in the means of grace all should resort. He is the support, and a glorious support, of all them that trust in him.

JEREMIAH 17: 13 LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you shall be disappointed. Those who depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the spring of living waters.

Verse 13

Written on the earth - They shall never come to true honor. Their names shall be written in the dust; and the first wind that blows over it shall mar every letter, and render it illegible.

JEREMIAH 17: 14 Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for you are my praise.

Verse 14

Heal me - and I shall be healed - That is, I shall be thoroughly healed, and effectually saved, if thou undertake for me.

Thou art my praise - The whole glory of the work of salvation belongs to thee alone.

JEREMIAH 17: 15 Behold, they tell me, Where is the LORD's word? let it come now.

Verse 15

Where is the word of the Lord? - Where is the accomplishment of his threatenings? Thou hast said that the city and the temple should both be destroyed. No such events have yet taken place. But they did take place, and every tittle of the menace was strictly fulfilled.

JEREMIAH 17: 16 As for me, I have not hurried from being a shepherd after you; neither have I desired the woeful day; you know: that which came out of my lips was before your face.

Verse 16

I have not hastened from being a pastor - Dr. Blayney translates thus: "But I have not been in haste to outrun thy guidance." I was obliged to utter thy prediction; but I have not hastened the evil day. For the credit of my prophecy I have not desired the calamity to come speedily; I have rather pleaded for respite. I have followed thy steps, and proclaimed thy truth. I did not desire to be a prophet; but thou hast commanded, and I obeyed.

JEREMIAH 17: 17 Don't be a terror to me: you are my refuge in the day of evil.

Verse 17

Be not a terror unto me - Do not command me to predict miseries, and abandon me to them and to my enemies.

JEREMIAH 17: 18 Let them be disappointed who persecute me, but let not me be disappointed; let them be dismayed, but don't let me be dismayed; bring on them the day of evil, and destroy them with double destruction.

Verse 18

Let them be confounded - They shall be confounded. These words are to be understood as simple predictions, rather than prayers.

JEREMIAH 17: 19 Thus said the LORD to me: Go, and stand in the gate of the children of the people, through which the kings of Judah come in, and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem;

Verse 19

The gate of the children of the people - I suppose the most public gate is meant; that through which there was the greatest thoroughfare.

JEREMIAH 17: 20 and tell them, Hear the LORD's word, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that enter in by these gates:

Verse 20

Ye kings of Judah, and all Judah - This last clause is wanting in eight of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS., in the Arabic, and some copies of the Septuagint.

JEREMIAH 17: 21 Thus says the LORD, Be careful, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem;

Verse 21

Take heed to yourselves and bear no burden - From this and the following verses we find the ruin of the Jews attributed to the breach of the Sabbath; as this led to a neglect of sacrifice, the ordinances of religion, and all public worship, so it necessarily brought with it all immorality. This breach of the Sabbath was that which let in upon them all the waters of God's wrath.

JEREMIAH 17: 22 neither carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, neither do any work: but make the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers.

JEREMIAH 17: 23 But they didn't listen, neither turn their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, and might not receive instruction.

JEREMIAH 17: 24 It shall happen, if you diligently listen to me, says the LORD, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but to make the Sabbath day holy, to do no work therein;

Verse 24

If ye diligently hearken unto me - So we find that though their destruction was positively threatened, yet still there was an unexpressed proviso that, if they did return to the Lord, the calamities should be averted, and a succession of princes would have been continued on the throne of David, Jer 17:25, Jer 17:26.

JEREMIAH 17: 25 then shall there enter in by the gates of this city kings and princes sitting on 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 forever.

JEREMIAH 17: 26 They shall come from the cities of Judah, and from the places around Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the lowland, and from the hill country, and from the South, bringing burnt offerings, and sacrifices, and meal offerings, and frankincense, and bringing sacrifices of thanksgiving, to the LORD's house.

JEREMIAH 17: 27 But if you will not listen to me to make the Sabbath day holy, and not to bear a burden and enter in at the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day; then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.

Verse 27

But if ye will not hearken - Then their sin lay at their own door. How fully were they warned; and how basely did they reject the counsel of God against themselves!