

Jeremiah

Chapter 17

The Sin of Judah

“The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of their altars, 2 while their children remember their altars and their Asherim, beside every green tree and on the high hills, 3 on the mountains in the open country. Your wealth and all your treasures I will give for spoil as the price of your high places for sin throughout all your territory. 4 You shall loosen your hand from your heritage that I gave to you, and I will make you serve your enemies in a land that you do not know, for in my anger a fire is kindled that shall burn forever.” 5 Thus says the LORD: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. 6 He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. 7 “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. 8 He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.” 9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? 10 “I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.” 11 Like the partridge that gathers a brood that she did not hatch, so is he who gets riches but not by justice; in the midst of his days they will leave him, and at his end he will be a fool. 12 A glorious throne set on high from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary. 13 O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you shall be put to shame; those who turn away from you shall be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living water.

17:1 *with a point of diamond it is engraved.* The method used to inscribe the most permanent of records (see Job 19:24). (CSB)

Their pattern of evil was ingrained as deeply as an inscription chiseled into stone or metal. The Copper Scroll from Qumran (3Q15) and a metallic bottle from Tell Siran, Ammon, are examples of engraved documents. (TLSB)

pen of iron. One of the hardest of stones known to ancient man (see Eze 3:9; Zec 7:12). (CSB)

tablets of their heart. For the same imagery see Pr 3:3; 7:3. (CSB)

Deep and ineradicable, with a lasting impression. (Kretzmann)

horns of their altars. The people of Judah have backslid so badly that their sins are engraved not only on their hearts but also on their altars—to be remembered by God rather than to be atoned for (see Lev 16:18). (CSB)

The blood of sacrificial offerings, applied in a purely outward ritual of atonement, could not erase their sins. Only penitent worshipers were assured of forgiveness. Cf Lv 4:7; 16:18. (TLSB)

This is where they wrote the names of their idols. (Kretzmann)

The blood of sacrificial offerings, applied in a purely outward ritual of atonement, could not erase their sins. Only penitent worshipers were assured of forgiveness. (TLSB)

17:2 *beside every green tree.* They were so deeply steeped in idolatry that the mere sight of a green tree and of a high hill awoke in them the remembrance of those terrible altars and of the Asherah images which they had erected there. (Kretzmann)

17:3–4 Repeated in large part from 15:13–14 (see notes there). (CSB)

17:3 *on the mountains.* Mount Zion, the location of the temple in Jerusalem (see Ps 24:3; Isa 2:3; Zec 8:3). (CSB)

high places. Locales of idolatrous worship. (CSB)

17:4 *inheritance.* The land of Canaan. (CSB)

Thus the Jews would lose their inheritance by their own fault, and those who persisted in their godless ways would be subject to the eternal wrath of a holy God, in the same way in which the idolaters of our days will experience it. (Kretzmann)

17:5–8 Jeremiah shows the real problem. It lies in the heart of the people. He contrasts the two ways – the way of unbelief and the way of faith. The real difference comes out in the long term. (PBC)

17:5 *Cursed.* *awrar* – Execrate or bitter curse. To bind or restrict as with a law or spell. This term pronounces punishments, threats and restrictions. (QV)

Cursed is the person who puts his hope for the future in something human, who looks for ultimate security in other human beings. (PBC)

Man. The person referred to in this passage parallels the young strong person, or one like him, in full possession and use of all his powers. (CSB)

flesh. The opposite of “spirit” (see Isa 31:3; see also Job 10:4). (CSB)

Cf Is 40:6; Ps 103:15–16. Trust in human resources is foolish idolatry. Ter: “He forbids all implicit trust in man, and likewise in the applause of man” (*ANF* 3:369). (TLSB)

John refers to this feeling of confidence as “boasting” of what he had and does” (1 John 2:16). This refers to the unshakable confidence that there is nothing we are unable to do, no problem that in the end we cannot solve, no force we cannot master and turn to our use. This confidence is the pride that grows from all our accomplishments, the gleaming monuments of our technology. But what is the foundation of all this hope? Man and flesh. Man was made from dust and shall return to dust. The end of one who trusts in flesh will be empty and fruitless. Jeremiah described this condition in terms very familiar to his hearers. (PBC)

whose heart turns away – The heart is the key. (CSB)

Matthew 15:19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”

Luke 6:45 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart, For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.”

17:6 *shrub*. Apart from these two places in Jeremiah, the Hebrew for this word appears elsewhere in the OT only in Ps 102:17, where it is translated “destitute.” (CSB)

To the east of Jerusalem lay the Judean wastelands in which even a scraggly juniper bush had to struggle to live. A little further lay a wilderness in which nothing green lived, the land of salt along the Dead Sea. (PBC)

Literally, "like a naked one in the wilderness," one destitute of all means of subsistence. (Kretzmann)

an good come. Lit. “good.” The Hebrew for this word is translated “bounty” in Dt 28:12, where it refers to rain. (CSB)

The lack of water prevents the maturing of crops. (Kretzmann)

salt land. An evidence of God’s curse also in Dt 29:23. (CSB)

Further out there was nothing green at all because of the salt from the Dead Sea. (CSB)

The soil here is impregnated with alkali. (Kretzmann)

places of the wilderness – Over against such a person the Lord pictures him who conducts himself in agreement with His will. (Kretzmann)

17:7 *blessed* – *bawrak* – To kneel and bless God in adoration. (QV)

trusts ... trust. The same Hebrew root underlies both words. (CSB)

With the confidence of true faith. (Kretzmann)

What a contrast with the blessedness of the person who trusts the Lord! This person places his hope, his faith, his confidence for all things in the Lord.

17:8 Using the figures of Psalm 1, Jeremiah pictures this person as a tree planted by the source of water that does not fail. Therefore it is always green and fruit-bearing. It does not have to fear even in the hardest and hottest times. (PBC)

like a tree planted by water – The following are notes from Psalm 1:3 ...They have roots in something that will always sustain them. The storms of life will not affect them because there hope and

trust is in the Lord. Because they are planted and just accidentally sown, they are special and are nurtured. (PBC)

stream. See Isa 44:4, where the same Hebrew root is used again to illustrate the source of the righteous man's strength. (CSB)

Such is the figure of the believer. He lives by the stream of living water, flowing from Scripture, giving him fellowship with God Himself. Because of this living-giving water, this fountain of life, he can stand up under the toughest times. Jeremiah, no doubt, wants the reader to understand that he too had found such strength in the Lord. It was his faith alone, sustained and nourished from the Word, that enabled him to be true to his calling and to stand up under the fierce opposition he encountered. (PBC)

drought. The stream at which it is located will never dry up. In order to bring this truth home with particular emphasis, the Lord describes the human heart as it is. (Kretzmann)

bear fruit. The Lord's answer to Jeremiah's complaint in 12:1-2. (CSB)

The good that these people do is a natural outgrowth of their faith which in turn is solidly rooted in the Word.

17:9 The prophet makes an observation, then asks a rhetorical question. (CSB)

The heart. The "wellspring of life," in which wickedness must not be allowed to take root (Pr 4:23). (CSB)

deceitful. The Hebrew root for this word is the basis of the name Jacob. (CSB)

One word in Hebrew, translated "incurable" in 15:18; 30:12. Chemnitz says, "It refers to an incurable evil and a disease for which there is no hope of cure." The Augsburg Confessions states, "Our churches teach that naming every sin is not necessary and that consciences should not be burdened with worry about naming every sin...If only sins that can be named are forgiven, consciences could never find peace. For many sins cannot be seen or remembered." (TLSB)

who can understand it – Who can understand and plumb the depths of its wickedness? This alone is reason enough why no man should place confidence in the ideas of his heart. (Kretzmann)

17:10 The Lord responds to Jeremiah's question. (CSB)

search ...test. Augustine says, "From you, O Lord, unto whose eyes the depths of man's conscience are naked, what is me could be hidden though I were unwilling to confess to You? For so should I hide You from myself, not myself from You. But now, because my groaning witnesses that I am dissatisfied with myself, You shine forth, and satisfy, and beloved and desired; that I may blush for myself and renounce myself, and choose You, and may neither please You nor myself, except in You." Johann Gerhard states, "The omniscient God sees the most intimate, most secret recesses of the heart. We must, then, beware of the hypocrisy that veils the secret wickedness of the heart with the external appearance of honesty. (TLSB)

mind. Lit. "kidneys" (see 11:20). The Hebrew for this word is translated "heart(s)" in 12:2. (CSB)

The seat of the innermost desires and feelings. (Kretzmann)

fruit of his deeds. Lit. “the fruit of his deeds” (cf. 6:19). (CSB)

In accordance with his deeds, as the expression of his heart's condition. (Kretzmann)

17:11 The prophet uses a proverb to make his point (as in v. 9); see especially Pr 23:5. (CSB)

partridge. Mentioned elsewhere in the OT only in 1Sa 26:20. (CSB)

in the midst of his days. as in Ps 102:24. (CSB)

fool. Morally and spiritually reprobate (see note on Pr 1:7). (CSB)

17:12–18 The fourth of Jeremiah’s “confessions.” (CSB)

17:12 *glorious throne.* The Lord is often represented as sitting on a throne between the cherubim on the ark of the covenant in the temple (see, e.g., Ps 80:1; 99:1). (CSB)

Or, in the form of an address directed to the seat of God's majesty, "Thou throne of glory, loftiness from the beginning, place of our Sanctuary!" Zion, where God revealed Himself to His people, where His glory was enthroned above the lid of the Ark, is here regarded as a person, in order to heighten the effect of the appeal, which now turns directly to God. (Kretzmann)

set on high. Mount Zion is the “high mountain of Israel” (Eze 20:40). (CSB)

from the beginning. From time immemorial, Zion had been chosen by God as the place of his sanctuary (see Ex 15:17). (CSB)

17:13 *hope of Israel.* The God of the covenant being the only one in whom the Jews might expect redemption. (Kretzmann)

in the earth. Lit. “earth,” sometimes referring to the netherworld (see note on Ps 61:2; see also note on Job 7:21), as also in Canaanite and Mesopotamian literature. “Written in the dust” would then mean “destined for death,” the opposite of “written in the book” of life (see Ex 32:32; Da 12:1; see also Ps 69:28 and note; Lk 10:20; Rev 20:12; 21:27). (CSB)

Their sin is recorded in stone (v. 1), but their memorial is merely scratched in the dust and so soon forgotten. Yet the Lord writes the names of the repentant in the Book of Life and engraves them on His palms (Is 49:16). (TLSB)

17:1–13 The Lord explains to Jeremiah and His people the severity and magnitude of their sin. Those who turn away from the Lord must perish; only the person who trusts God and follows His Word will survive in eternity. Today, God continues to offer hope to people who turn away from sin and seek His forgiveness. They will be blessed and will flourish by His grace. • Father, do not let the enticements and pressures of the world separate us from You and Your love for us in Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

Jeremiah Prays for Deliverance

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

15 Behold, they say to me, “Where is the word of the LORD? Let it come!” **16** I have not run away from being your shepherd, nor have I desired the day of sickness. You know what came out of my lips; it was before your face. **17** Be not a terror to me; you are my refuge in the day of disaster.

18 Let those be put to shame who persecute me, but let me not be put to shame; let them be

dismayed, but let me not be dismayed; bring upon them the day of disaster; destroy them with double destruction!

17:14 *Heal me.* Both making him whole in his distress and keeping him so. (Kretzmann)

you are my praise. The object of his confident boasting. (Kretzmann)

17:15–16 Jeremiah pleads for the Lord's understanding while his accusers brand him a false prophet. (TLSB)

17:15† See 20:8. Jeremiah's enemies accuse him of being a false prophet (see Dt 18:21–22). (CSB)

The enemies challenge the prophet to produce proofs of the truth which he declared he was proclaiming in the name of the Lord. (Kretzmann)

17:16 *shepherd.* Symbolic of leadership, and therefore of Jeremiah's role as a prophet. (CSB)

He had not left his duties as shepherd in his home town, in precipitous haste for the sake of being Jehovah's special minister, or, he had not withdrawn himself hastily from the Lord's service. (Kretzmann)

17:17 *day of disaster.* His Refuge in the time of distress. (Kretzmann)

17:18 *my persecutors.* See 15:15. (CSB)

day of disaster. When Babylon takes Jerusalem. (TLSB)

double. see 16:18; Isa 40:2 and note. (CSB)

Literally, "with a double portion in ruin." This was not a prayer of vindictiveness, but of zeal for the honor of the Lord, which was at stake in the attacks made upon His servant. A prayer that the Lord would avenge His honor in punishing His enemies is altogether in order to this day. (Kretzmann)

17:14–18 Jeremiah prays for vindication from God and for justice against his accusers. He bristles against the injustice of being punished for doing God's will. God's Word often creates opposition in this world, as it did for Jeremiah and even for Jesus (Jn 7:7). Yet God does not abandon His faithful servants, though sometimes they must suffer and even die for their faith. Even then, the Lord is our refuge and strength. • Do not let us become afraid or discouraged Father, but fill us with courage from Your Holy Spirit. Amen. (TLSB)

Keep the Sabbath Holy

19 Thus said the LORD to me: "Go and stand in the People's Gate, by which the kings of Judah enter and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem, 20 and say: 'Hear the word of the LORD, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who enter by these gates. 21 Thus says the LORD: Take care for the sake of your lives, and do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. 22 And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers. 23 Yet they did not listen or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck, that they might not hear and receive instruction. 24 "But if you listen to me, declares the LORD, and bring in no burden by the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but keep the Sabbath day holy and do no work on it, 25 then there shall enter by the gates of this city kings and princes who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their officials, the men of Judah and the

inhabitants of Jerusalem. And this city shall be inhabited forever. 26 And people shall come from the cities of Judah and the places around Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin, from the Shephelah, from the hill country, and from the Negeb, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings and frankincense, and bringing thank offerings to the house of the LORD. 27 But if you do not listen to me, to keep the Sabbath day holy, and not to bear a burden and enter by 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 shall not be quenched.”

7:19–27† An extended application of the Sabbath-day commandment (the covenant sign of God’s relationship with Israel; see Ex 31:13–17; Eze 20:12), probably the version recorded in Dt 5:12–15. (CSB)

17:19 *People’s Gate*. Likely refers to an entrance to be used by all, whether prince or pauper, priest or layperson. Some commentators and translators have confused this gate with the Benjamin Gate (20:2; 37:13) because the Hbr spellings are similar. (TLSB)

17:20 *kings of Judah*. The current king and all subsequent ruling members of David’s dynasty (see, e.g., v. 25; 1:18; 2:26; 13:13; 19:3). (CSB)

17:21 *take care*. See Jos 23:11. The Hebrew underlying this phrase is translated “watch yourselves ... carefully” in Dt 4:15, and a similar expression is translated “guard yourself in your spirit” in Mal 2:15, stressing the urgency and solemnity of the Lord’s command. (CSB)

Literally, “preserve your souls,” guard over your souls, namely, on account of the danger which otherwise threatened their lives. (Kretzmann)

do not bear a burden – Likely consisted of articles to be offered for sale by greedy merchants (cf 6:13; 22:17). (TLSB)

17:22 *Do not*. The Hebrew for this negative expression is stronger than that in v. 21. (CSB)

not ... do any work ... keep the Sabbath day holy. Specific references to the Sabbath-day commandment of Ex 20:8, 10; Dt 5:12, 14. (CSB)

The keeping of this commandment served as a touchstone of obedience. Chemnitz says, “The general principle is: Do not perform works which hinder the ministry or stubbornly carry on needless labor. For if we are to support the practice of public worship, then we must give up those activities which hinder this worship. (TLSB)

carry a burden out of your houses. The Hebrew underlying this phrase is unique to the Ten Commandments as recorded in Deuteronomy (see Dt 5:12, 15–16; see note on vv. 19–27). (CSB)

17:25† Repeated in part in 22:4. King David’s dynasty will last forever in the reign of David’s Son and Lord (see 23:5–6; 30:9; 33:15; 2Sa 7:12–17), and the new Jerusalem will be inhabited for all time (Zec 2:2–12; 8:3; 14:11). (CSB)

17:26 *Negev*. The great steppes west and southwest of the Dead Sea. (Kretzmann)

thank offerings. Lit. “bringing thank offerings.” The repetition here of “bringing” from earlier in the verse separates the thank offerings from the other specific sacrifices mentioned and gives them the more general designation of offerings of thanksgiving (as intended also in 33:11). (CSB)

17:27† Disobedience will bring disaster and will negate the promises of vv. 24–26. (CSB)

That is, if their deliberate desecration of the Sabbath would continue. (Kretzmann)

kindle ... fire ... devour the palaces. Common prophetic language for divine judgment against rebellious cities (see 49:27; 50:32; Am 1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5; cf. Jer 21:14). (CSB)

Thus the warning of the Lord called the Jews to repentance again and again, for He does not desire the death of sinners, but wants all men to repent of their sins and be saved. (Kretzmann)

17:19–27 The Sabbath was a day of rest and worship under Mosaic Law (cf Ex 20:8–11; Dt 5:12–15). God set it aside as a blessing for His people. By continuing commerce on the Sabbath just as on any other day, God’s people broke the covenant and turned their backs on Him. Rest and worship are essential for the spiritual health and welfare of God’s people. The Gospel of Jesus Christ draws us together in public worship so that we might rejoice in our salvation and return to our callings with renewed confidence. • Our souls are restless, Lord, until they rest in You. Refresh us through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen. (TLSB)