

Jeremiah

Chapter 7

Evil in the Land

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 2 “Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the LORD. 3 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. 4 Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’ 5 “For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, 6 if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, 7 then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever. 8 “Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. 9 Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, 10 and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—only to go on doing all these abominations? 11 Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD. 12 Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel. 13 And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, 14 therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. 15 And I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, all the offspring of Ephraim. 16 “As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you. 17 Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? 18 The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven. And they pour out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke me to anger. 19 Is it I whom they provoke? declares the LORD. Is it not themselves, to their own shame? 20 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, my anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place, upon man and beast, upon the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground; it will burn and not be quenched.” 21 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: “Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. 22 For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. 23 But this command I gave them: ‘Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.’ 24 But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward. 25 From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day. 26 Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers. 27 “So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you. 28 And you shall say to them, ‘This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, and did not accept discipline; truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips. 29 “‘Cut off your hair and cast it away; raise a lamentation on the bare heights, for the LORD has rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath.’

7:1–8:3 The straightforward narrative of this section asserts that Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem will not escape the fate of the earlier sanctuary at Shiloh if the people of Judah persist in worshiping false gods. (CSB)

7:1-15 Jeremiah lays bare the enormity of Judah’s sin. Standing at the entrance to the temple, he charges the assembled people with acting as if the structure they had built could imprison Him whom “heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain” (1 Ki 8:27). They treated the house where the Lord’s name was to be revered like a cave where robbers flee for safety between raids on their hapless victims. There was no excuse for the blasphemous heresy that the temple protected the people from the consequences of their evil deeds. (TLSB)

These words are all the more striking because Jeremiah may have preached them during the reign of pious King Josiah. Josiah had attempted to restore to its fullness the ancient religion of Israel. Josiah himself was a devote believer. In 622 BC he had begun his great reform of the Jewish religion. Through this reform he attempted to bring back the true worship of God. As a part of the reform, Josiah cleaned and redecorated the temple. For most of the people the reform never went beyond decoration. (PBC)

7:1 *the word that came.* Fact that he received his messages by inspiration of God being brought out time and again. (Kretzmann)

7:2 *gate.* In the wall between the inner and outer courts of the temple, perhaps the so-called New Gate (26:10; 36:10). (CSB)

False trust in the security of the temple was one of the basic causes of Israel’s downfall. Jeremiah delivers a shorter but similar sermon “in the court of the Lord’s house” (26:1-6). A second warning, delivered on the very site that gave rise to this fatal heresy, would not have been superfluous. It is also possible that chapter 26 gives a resume of Jeremiah’s dramatic preaching in order to provide the circumstances of the prophet’s brush with death that is described there. (TLSB)

all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship. Perhaps during one of the three annual pilgrimage festivals. (CSB)

The address seems to indicate that the sermon here recorded was held at one of the great festivals of the Jews, when great throngs visited the capital and the Temple. (Kretzmann)

gates. Leading into the outer court. (CSB)

7:3 *Amend.* Lit, “make good.” (TLSB)

this place. The land God had given them (see v. 7; 14:13, 15; 24:5–6). (CSB)

7:4 *deceptive words.* Spoken by false prophets. The idea that God would not destroy Jerusalem simply because his dwelling, the temple, was located there was a delusion, fostered in part by the miraculous deliverance of the city during the reign of Hezekiah (see 2Ki 19:32–36; cf. 2Sa 7:11b–13; Ps 132:13–14). In the light of Judah’s sinful rebellion against the Lord such an idea was “worthless” (v. 8; see Mic 3:11). (CSB)

This is. Lit. “They are,” referring to the buildings that constituted the entire temple complex. (CSB)

temple ... temple ... temple. Vain and repetitious babbling (cf. Mt 6:7). Often such a threefold repeating of a word or phrase is for emphasis. (CSB)

Repeated as a slogan of defiance. (TLSB)

7:6 Rulers and people alike needed to hear and act on these prophetic words (see 22:2–3). (CSB)

sojourner...fatherless ... widow. See Dt 16:11, 14; 24:19–21; 26:12–13; 27:19. (CSB)

innocent blood. See 19:4; 22:17; 26:15; see also the frightening example of King Manasseh (2Ki 21:16). (CSB)

7:7 *place... forever.* For a long period of uninterrupted possession. The Lord is eager to show His kindness and mercy to all those who will hearken to Him; His blessings, also in temporal goods, are upon those that fear Him. (Kretzmann)

7:8–11 They think they can escape punishment for crimes against God and fellow human beings, though they use the temple as robbers who take refuge in a cave, only to emerge from hiding for fresh adventure. (TLSB)

7:9 This one verse mentions the violation of fully half of the Ten Commandments (cf. Hos 4:2). (CSB)

go after other gods you have not known. See 19:4. Tragically, such sins would be the cause of their exile to lands they had not known (see 9:14, 16; 16:11, 13). (CSB)

7:10 *house, which is called by my name.* See vv. 11, 14, 30; 25:29; 32:34; 34:15; 1Ki 8:43; 2Ch 6:33; 20:9; Da 9:18. The “Name” of God is equivalent to his gracious presence in such passages (see vv. 12, 15). (CSB)

We are delivered. They believed that, in spite of the threats announced by the prophet, they had nothing to fear, that the calamities which Jeremiah insisted were impending would not strike them, that their hypocritical behavior would have no evil consequences. But the Lord has His rejoinder ready. (Kretzmann)

7:11 Together with the last half of Isa 56:7, part of this verse is quoted by Jesus in Mt 21:13; Mk 11:17; Lk 19:46. (CSB)

den of robbers. As thieves hide in caves and think they are safe, so the people of Judah falsely trust in the temple to protect them in spite of their sins. (CSB)

Hypocrisy in worship, which brought these words to Jesus’ lips, continues to be one of Satan’s masterpieces of deception. (TLSB)

7:12 *place in Shiloh ... see what I did to it.* See v. 14; 26:6, 9; Ps 78:60–61. The tabernacle had been set up in Shiloh after the conquest of Canaan (Jos 18:1) and was still there at the end of the period of the judges. Modern Seilun, near a main highway about 18 miles north of Jerusalem, preserves the name of the ancient site. Archaeological excavations there indicate that it was destroyed by the Philistines c. 1050 B.C. The tabernacle itself was not included in that destruction, since it was still in existence at Gibeon during David’s reign (see 1Ch 21:29). One or more auxiliary buildings had apparently been erected at Shiloh near the tabernacle in connection with various aspects of public worship there (cf. the reference to the “doors of the house of the LORD” in 1Sa 3:15). Such structures would have been destroyed with the city itself, perhaps sometime after the events of 1Sa 4. (CSB)

The Lord reminds the people what He did to Shiloh. In this city 22 mi N of Jerusalem, the ark of the covenant was enshrined for a time. But when the sacred chest was degraded to a good-luck charm, it was captured by the Philistines, and the city was destroyed. (TLSB)

Under the priesthood of Eli and his sons, the people began to treat the tabernacle like a magic charm (1 Sam 3,4). Even though Eli's sons abused their priestly privileges, their father did not restrain them. The people lost much respect for the priesthood and for the Lord. They turned to superstition. Faced with an attack by their ancient enemy, the Philistines, the people asked that the Ark of the Covenant be brought to the battlefield. With the ark among them, they could not suffer defeat. That day they lost thousands of men; the ark was captured; Eli died from shock. Shiloh was never again a worship center. (PBC)

7:13 *persistently*. The Hebrew idiom underlying this phrase is found frequently in Jeremiah (v. 25; 11:7; 25:3–4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14–15; 44:4), but appears nowhere else in the OT. (CSB)

7:14 *did to Shiloh* – As the Lord had ceased to dwell in the midst of the disobedient Israelites, when He took from them His sanctuary, so He would cease to dwell at Jerusalem. (Kretzmann)

7:15 *cast you out my sight*. Into exile (see Dt 29:28). (CSB)

just as I did all your kinsmen. God sent Israel, the northern kingdom, into captivity in 721 B.C. (see 2Ki 17:20). (CSB)

Ephraim. Another name for Israel (see, e.g., 31:9)—and, ironically, the tribal territory in which Shiloh was located. (CSB)

The northern tribes of Israel, exiled to Assyria (cf 2Ki 17). Their fate should serve as yet another warning that God will not forever tolerate the abuse of His goodness. (TLSB)

7:16 Perhaps the events of ch. 26 belong chronologically between vv. 15 and 16 (see Introduction: Outline). (CSB)

do not pray for this people. As a true prophet would (see 27:18; Ex 32:31–32; 1Sa 12:23). See 11:14; 14:11. There is virtually no hope for them. On various occasions, however, Jeremiah prayed for his countrymen (see, e.g., 18:20). (CSB)

The time of grace had elapsed. Because the hour of judgment was at hand, Jeremiah was no longer to pray for them. (TLSB)

I will not hear you – As strong as the prayers of the righteous are in holding back the wrath of God, the time will come when they are unavailing, due to the hardness of men's hearts, which provokes the punishment of the Lord. (Kretzmann)

7:17 *do you not see* – The wickedness which Jeremiah was obliged to witness wherever he looked was bound to convince him that the course of the Lord was right, that He was fully justified in rejecting all prayers made in behalf of the apostate Jews. The extent of their idolatry is now described. (Kretzmann)

7:18 Describes division of labor in the family. (TLSB)

children ... fathers ... women. Entire families participate in idolatrous worship. (CSB)

Queen of Heaven. A Babylonian title for Ishtar, an important goddess in the Babylonian pantheon (see 44:17–19, 25). (CSB)

An astral deity and goddess of fertility (possibly Ishtar) in whom the people had put their trust (cf 44:15–19, 25). (TLSB)

Female (fertility) goddess Ashtoreth, or Astarte, the counterpart of the male idol Baal, in whose honor the cakes, made of honey, fine flour, and other ingredients, bore a round, flat surface to resemble the disk of the moon. (Kretzmann)

drink offerings to other gods. And sometimes to the Queen of Heaven herself (see 44:19, 25). (CSB)

provoke me to anger. The expression implying design on their part, the deliberate intention to arouse His wrath. (Kretzmann)

7:19–20 Their idolatry does not harmfully affect the transcendent Lord, but because it moves Him to punish them for insulting Him, they will suffer. (TLSB)

7:19 *their own shame.* That is ever the consequence of sin: the perfect blessedness of God is not reduced by man's transgression, but his own peace of mind is disturbed, and he loads grief and sorrow upon himself. (Kretzmann)

7:20 All nature suffers when God judges sinners (see 5:17; Ro 8:20–22). (CSB)

7:21–29 Judah's false sense of security stemmed not only from the notion of an inviolate temple but also from a perversion of the purpose of the ceremonies performed there by divine decree. Firmly entrenched in their hardened hearts was the pernicious belief that the rites of burnt offerings and sacrifices, mechanically performed, caused God to overlook their refusal to obey all commands. Though Jeremiah used drastic language to dislodge this heathen distortion of worship forms, he was no more successful than his predecessors, whom God had sent persistently to His stiff-necked people (cf Is. 1:11; Am 5:21). (TLSB)

7:21 *eat the flesh.* Unlike other sacrifices, all the meat of the animals sacrificed in burnt offerings was to be burned up by fire (see pp 170–71). But since the people's sacrifices had become an abomination to the Lord, it was of little consequence whether or not they refrained from eating what the law prohibited. (TLSB)

Because of your sinful deeds your sacrifices are worthless, so you might as well eat them yourselves. (CSB)

It is a cry of disgust: So far as I am concerned, you may treat the one the same as the other; they are both equally loathsome to Me, since I despise your entire worship. (Kretzmann)

7:22–23 Sacrifices are valid only when accompanied by sincere repentance and joyful obedience (see 6:20; Isa 1:11–15 and note). (CSB)

Jeremiah is not denying the divine origin of Israel's sacrificial rites but is trying to arouse his hearers to the danger of attributing magical power to the mechanical offering of sacrifices. The point he categorically denies is that God prescribed ritual worship as a substitute for keeping His Commandments. For similar emphatic rhetoric on the pronouncement that God did not make a covenant with Israel's fathers. "God clearly gave the fathers commands about burnt offerings and victims. But Jeremiah

condemns the opinion about sacrifices that God had not delivered, namely, that these services please Him by the outward act. Concerning faith, he adds that God had commanded this: ‘Hear Me,’ that is, ‘believe Me that I am your God, and that I wish to be known when I care for you and help you. I do not need your sacrificial victims. Believe that I want to be God the Justifier and Savior, not because of works, but because of My Word and promise. Truly seek and expect help from Me from the heart’ ” (Ap XXIV 28). “Such passages do not condemn works, which God certainly had commanded as outward exercises in this government. They condemn the godless opinion that people thought, that by their works they appeased God’s wrath, and so cast away faith” (Ap V 86). (TLSB)

7:23 *you shall be my people.* The most basic summary of the relationship between God and Israel implied in the covenant at Sinai. (CSB)

7:24 *their evil hearts.* Literally, "they were to the back and not to the face," that is, they turned their backs to the Lord. (Kretzmann)

7:25 *my servants the prophets.* God had promised that Moses would be the first in a long line of prophets who would speak in the Lord’s name and serve him faithfully. (CSB)

7:26 *stiffened their neck.* Like a stubborn ox under the yoke. (Kretzmann)

worse than their fathers – The later generations, particularly that now addressed, being much farther removed from the true service of Jehovah than the generation of the Exodus. (Kretzmann)

7:28 *Truth has perished...from their lips.* No one seeks the truth. (CSB)

Instruction in God’s Word. (TLSB)

There is a fine bit of sarcasm in this phrase, for the Jews confessed the Lord with their mouths only, and not with their hearts. The use of God's name for the purpose of mouth-worship only is a flagrant offense against the Second Commandment and is bound to bring down the wrath of God upon the offenders. (Kretzmann)

7:29 Addressed to Jerusalem. (CSB)

Cut off your hair. A sign of mourning (see Job 1:20; Mic 1:16). The Hebrew for the word “hair” is related to the word “Nazirite” (see Nu 6:2) and referred originally to the diadem worn by the high priest (see Ex 29:6). The Nazirite’s hair was the symbol of his separation or consecration (Nu 6:7). As the Nazirite was commanded to cut off his hair when he became ceremonially unclean (Nu 6:9), so also Jerusalem must cut off her hair because of her sins. (CSB)

generation of His wrath. People whose measure of iniquity is full to overflowing (cf Mt 23:32; 1Th 2:16). (TLSB)

7:1–29 God warns His people that mere possession of the temple and ritual observance of its worship laws will not save them. Without genuine, living faith, it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6). He creates such faith through His Word. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we are acceptable to Him, and so is our worship. • Father, grant us your Word and Spirit, that our entire lives reflect the saving faith You have given us in Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

The Valley of Slaughter

30 “For the sons of Judah have done evil in my sight, declares the LORD. They have set their detestable things in the house that is called by my name, to defile it. 31 And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind. 32 Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when it will no more be called Topheth, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter; for they will bury in Topheth, because there is no room elsewhere. 33 And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth, and none will frighten them away. 34 And I will silence in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, for the land shall become a waste.

7:30 *set their detestable things.* Manasseh had put a carved Asherah pole in the temple (2Ki 21:7). Jeremiah’s contemporary, the good King Josiah, removed the pole and other accessories to idol worship (2Ki 23:4–7). But less than 20 years after Josiah’s death, Ezekiel reported that there were numerous idols in the temple courts (see Eze 8:3, 5–6, 10, 12). (CSB)

7:31 *high places.* Pagan cult centers, usually (but not here) located on natural heights (see 1Sa 9:13–14; 10:5; 1Ki 11:7). (CSB)

Topheth. The word may be of Aramaic origin with the meaning “fireplace,” though in cultures outside Israel it was used as a common noun meaning “place of child sacrifice.” Hebrew *bosheth*, “shameful thing” (see note on Jdg 6:32), often used in connection with idol worship. The OT Topheth had a fire pit (see Isa 30:33), into which the hapless children were apparently thrown. (CSB)

Valley of Ben Hinnom. It was used as a trash dump and also as a place for sacrificing children to pagan gods. From the abbreviated name “Valley of Hinnom” (see Ne 11:30), Hebrew *ge’ hinnom*, came “Gehenna” (Greek *geenna*), consistently translated in the NT as “hell,” the place of eternal, fiery punishment for all who die without having trusted Christ as Savior (see, e.g., Mt 18:9; Mk 9:47–48). (CSB)

burn their sons and daughters in the fire. A horrible ritual, prohibited in the law of Moses but practiced by Ahaz (see 2Ki 16:2–3) and Manasseh (2Ki 21:1, 6). (CSB)

7:32 *Valley of Slaughter.* Repeated almost verbatim in 19:6. Their place of sacrifice would become their cemetery when the people of Judah were slaughtered by the Babylonian invaders. (CSB)

Where they sacrificed their children, they themselves will be slaughtered and buried. (TLSB)

7:33 The punishment announced here is one of the curses for covenant disobedience (see Dt 28:26). (CSB)

The dead are cursed because of their wickedness. Desecration of corpses was considered a grievous calamity. (TLSB)

food for the birds ...beasts of the earth. See 16:4; 19:7; see also 34:20, where the same judgment is the result of violating God’s covenant (34:18–19). To remain unburied was an unspeakable abomination in ancient times. (CSB)

Evidence of how thorough the slaughter is, since no one is left to care about the dead. (TLSB)

7:34 *voice of gladness* – The reference being made to the joyous processions in the Orient in which the bride and the bridegroom are led through the streets, accompanied by bands of musicians and singers. (Kretzmann)

land shall become a waste. Another covenant curse (Lev 26:31, 33). (CSB)

So completely was the punishment of the Lord carried out upon reprobate Judah for having rejected Him and His mercy. (Kretzmann)