

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

This chapter begins with setting forth the very strong bias which the people of Judah had to idolatry, with the fatal consequences, Jeremiah 17:1-4. The happiness of the man that trusted in Jehovah is then beautifully contrasted with the opposite character, Jeremiah 17:5-8. God alone knows the deceitfulness and wretchedness of the heart of man, Jeremiah 17:9, Jeremiah 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, Jeremiah 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, Jeremiah 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, Jeremiah 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.

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.

Verse 3

O my mountain in the field - The prophet here addresses the land of Judea, which was a mountainous country, Deuteronomy 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.

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.

Verse 6

Be shall be like the heath in the desert - כָּאֵרָאֵר (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.

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.

Verse 9

The heart is deceitful - אֲכֹזֵב אֶל־לִבִּי (akob halleb), and the heart is supplanting - tortuous - full of windings - insidious; and 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 - אֲנֹשׁ הוּא (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 אָנָשׁ (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.

Verse 10

I the Lord search the heart - The Lord is called by his apostles, Acts 1:24, ὁ γινώσκων τὰ κρυφὰ τῆς καρδίας, 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.

Verse 11

As the partridge - אֲנֹשׁ (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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Verse 17

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

Verse 18

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

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.

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.

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.

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, Jeremiah 17:25, Jeremiah 17:26.

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!