

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Jeremiah: Prophet Of Judgment Followed By Blessing

Part XXXV: The Great Contrast Between Holding To God Or Idolatrous Substitutes (Jeremiah 17:1-8)

I. Introduction

- A. Idolatry was ancient Israel's chief sin, but 1 John 5:21 warns us Christians to avoid it as well, for an idol is "anything that substitutes for God," Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to 1 John 5:21.
- B. Israel not only worshiped idolatrous images, she also made an idol out of Egypt, trying to rely on that nation to protect her from Babylon, a form of idolatry that God critiqued, and we do well to learn from that critique:

II. The Great Contrast Between Holding To God Or Idolatrous Substitutes, Jeremiah 17:1-8.

- A. God pronounced Judah's coming punishment by Babylon due to her flagrant sins of idolatry, Jer. 17:1-4:
 - 1. After predicting the Gentiles would turn from idols to the Lord in the Messianic Kingdom, God claimed that Judah was currently "permeated with idolatry," Jer. 16:19-17:1; Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 1151.
 - 2. The Lord described that sin as figuratively being written with an iron pen, with a point of a diamond, with the sin being engraved on not only the tablet of the people's hearts, but even on the horns of the altars where they worshiped false gods even in Jerusalem and in the temple itself, Jeremiah 17:1 ESV.
 - 3. Even the children were involved in worshiping at the pagan altars and Asherah poles all over the land, poles that were carved into the naked image of the Canaanite fertility goddess, Jeremiah 17:2-3a; Ibid.; Merrill F. Unger, Archaeology and the Old Testament, 1973, p. 172-175.
 - 4. For such widespread, overt, lewd idolatry by all the people, including the children, God promised to give Judah's wealth and treasures for spoil as the price for Judah's idolatrous high places in the land, Jer. 17:3b.
 - 5. Judah's people would loosen their grip on the heritage that God had given them, and He would make them serve their enemies in a foreign land when they were taken into captivity, Jeremiah 17:4.
- B. However, Judah was also guilty of often trying to gain Egypt's help against Babylon, what angered God since such action replaced faith in Himself, so the Lord addressed that variant form of idolatry in Jeremiah 17:5-8:
 - 1. The "background" for Jeremiah 17:5-8 "was Judah's periodic attempts to seek the help of Egypt against Babylon," Ibid., Ryrie, fn. to Jer. 17:5-8. Since these efforts bypassed Judah's seeking God's help, what the Lord had indicated He wanted even Judah's kings to do when facing Gentile threats (Deut. 17:16), a subtle form of idolatry, God pronounced a "curse" on not only the nation, but on any person who trusted in man, making human flesh his source of strength (lit. "arm") instead of trusting in the Lord, Jer. 17:5 ESV.
 - 2. Indeed, one who trusted in man versus relying on the Lord for protection would be like the "tamarisk," a "dwarf juniper which has a stark appearance" out in the wilderness, Ibid., Ryrie. That person would not see any good come in his life, and he would dwell in parched places of the wilderness in an uninhabited salt land like land around the Dead Sea, living a dismal life, Jer. 17:6; Ibid., Bible Know. Com., O. T.
 - 3. However, in striking contrast to this lack of blessing, the man who kept trusting in the Lord instead of shifting to trust in man would be like a tree that had been "transplanted" (*shatal*, B. D. B., A Heb. and Eng. Lex. of the O. T., p. 1060) by the Lord beside water, that sent out its roots by the stream and would not fear when the heat came as its foliage would stay green, not being anxious in the year of drought, and he would not cease to bear fruit, or be productive even in times of calamitous drought, Jeremiah 17:7-8.
 - 4. Thus, in striking contrast to one who departed from trusting the Lord to trust in man, the one who stayed dependent upon the Lord would flourish not only in good times, but remain vibrant and productive even when trials of life arrived that would otherwise threaten to harm him because he had come under the protective care of God, his Overseer. The Lord would provide so he would be blessed even under duress!

Lesson: *God promised to punish Judah's overt, lewd, widespread idolatry of even her children in their worship of idols and to punish her act of replacing Him with dependence on Egypt to save her from Babylon. Also, God said anyone who ceased relying on Him to rely on other men for help would have a dismal life, but he who kept relying on the Lord without turning to man for security would have a vibrant, productive life even when life's trials arose.*

Application: *(1) May we avoid all forms of idolatry where one looks to anything but the Lord for his help. (2) May even we as children realize our accountability to God to avoid idols, for the Lord holds us all accountable. (3) May we especially avoid relying on other people for fulfillment or protection, for that is the sin of idolatry that God will severely punish, though He will richly reward our continued reliance on Him instead of our reliance on others.*