

Jeremiah 17:1-14 • The Deceitful Heart

Introduction

One of the proofs of the existence of God is that every human fills the same void in their life, whether by engaging in a right relationship with the One True God, or replacing Him with someone and/or something else. This can be tested by and for each individual by determining what is most important to us, to whatever we place of higher value than all other things. When we want to fulfill our personal desires at the expense of obedience to God's Word, we are well on the path to being an "idolater", one who has replaced the One True God with another.

¹The sin of Judah is written down with an iron stylus;

With a diamond point it is engraved upon the tablet of their heart

And on the horns of their altars,

²As they remember their children,

So they remember their altars and their Asherim

By green trees on the high hills.

³O mountain of Mine in the countryside, I will give over your wealth and all your treasures for booty,

Your high places for sin throughout your borders.

⁴And you will, even of yourself, let go of your inheritance

That I gave you;

And I will make you serve your enemies

In the land which you do not know;

For you have kindled a fire in My anger Which will burn forever.

[Read v.1-4]

Q: What is Judah's sin that makes God so angry, and how is it described?

A: It is the continual sin of idolatry. It is described as having been written in their lives like a stylus (v.1) as a diamond point writes into solid rock. (This is a really interesting simile because even today diamonds are used for drilling, cutting into or engraving hard substances since diamonds are the hardest of all stones.) Their sin is also described as being as much on their mind as their own children. (v.2)

Q: What is meant by "their altars and their Asherim by green trees on the high hills"?

A: Because Baal worship was a fertility cult, their temples were frequently located in the hills on the outskirts of Judah (aka the "boondocks"). That's why they were difficult to entirely eradicate from Judah, for it was stated during Hezekiah's and Josiah's spiritual reforms that they tore down the Asherim "except for the high places." These shrines (where religious prostitution occurred and fertility gods were worshipped by sexual orgies) were located near or under large trees, which were phallic symbols. The Asherim were either shrines or poles with carvings on them with the names of Baal or other male gods.

The problem was that Judah's leaders frequented these places, and wicked kings allowed or actually incorporated Baal worship in the cities, even Jerusalem. Worshipping fertility gods such as Baal and Molech— as well as Jehovah— was a way, in their deceived minds, of "hedging their bets." If one god failed, another might come through.

Q: What is God planning to do about Judah's continued idolatry?

A: They will lose everything. This the earthly consequence of choosing sin.

Application: Can you think of someone you've known who, because of their persistence in sin, lost everything? Perhaps someone who was going through a so-called "mid-life crisis," or an alcoholic, or someone on drugs, or gambling? Have you ever reached that kind of a low point in your own life? Did it every occur to them (or to you) that the resultant state may have been allowed, if not directed, by God?

⁵Thus says the LORD,
“Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind
And makes flesh his strength,
And whose heart turns away from the
LORD.

⁶For he will be like a bush in the desert
And will not see when prosperity comes,
But will live in stony wastes in the
wilderness,
A land of salt without inhabitant.

⁷Blessed is the man who trusts in the
LORD
And whose trust is the LORD.

⁸For he will be like a tree planted by the
water,
That extends its roots by a stream
And will not fear when the heat comes;
But its leaves will be green,
And it will not be anxious in a year of
drought
Nor cease to yield fruit.

⁹“The heart is more deceitful than all else
And is desperately sick;
Who can understand it?

¹⁰I, the LORD, search the heart,
I test the mind,
Even to give to each man according to his
ways,
According to the results of his deeds.

¹¹As a partridge that hatches eggs which it
has not laid,
So is he who makes a fortune, but
unjustly;
In the midst of his days it will forsake
him,
And in the end he will be a fool.”

[Read v.5-8]

Application: Apply verses 5 & 6 to anything from the Academy Awards Ceremony (the entertainment business in general, including popular Christian recording artists) to politics, to academic praise, even to pastors or Christian leaders you have known or heard about (Paul & Jann Crouch, Benny Hinn, etc.). What will be the eventual outcome from God’s perspective?

Application: Compare verses 7 & 8 with Psalm 1:1-3 below. Apply verses 7 & 8 to those whom you know or have heard about who have not been recognized by the world or by a worldly standard, and yet have been the incarnation of these verses? (E.g., Elisabeth and Jim Elliot, David Wilkerson, a pastor or a missionary.) Compare with 1 John 2:15-17 below.

“How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.”
—Psalm 1:1-3

“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”
—1 John 2:15-17

[Read v.9-11]

Note: According to *The John MacArthur Study Bible*, the “partridge” refers to “a sand grouse which invaded and brooded over a nest not its own, but was forced to leave before the eggs hatched. It depicted a person who unjustly took possession of things he had no right to take and couldn’t enjoy the benefits, despite all the efforts.”

Q: What is the meaning of verse 9?

A: The basis for this is original sin. There’s a propensity in mankind to be led astray from the truth. The reason is the flesh wishes to be in control of its own destiny and not accountable to God. Therefore, the tendency of the flesh is to move out from under God’s authority and is easily deceived in regard to spiritual things. [See Romans 1:18-32.]

Note: The word “desperately” is translated “beyond cure” in the NIV. It basically means “incorrigible.” That is why anything the world has to offer in order to change the heart will always fall short. Only the Holy Spirit indwelling within a person can result in changing the heart, and the change happens only by replacing the lies and deception with the truth— the Word of God taken by faith.

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”
—Jeremiah 31:31-34

Q: What are some examples of how we can be deceived, or even deceive ourselves?

A: Consider the following:

“This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”
—1 John 1:5-10

“So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,”
—Ephesians 4:17-22

“Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for

teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

—2 Timothy 3:10-17

Application: Comment on the statement, “Infatuation is a form of temporary insanity.” (For leader: When we’re “infatuated” by someone, or sexually attracted to someone, certain chemicals are released in our brains that effectively “numb” the centers for higher thinking. Therefore, good judgment, rational thinking, and right moral choices are not always functioning. Therefore, people do “stupid” things when they’re infatuated by someone or “head over heels in love.” So often it is some form of worldly or fleshly lust that causes us to be deceived, whether it’s lust for sex, for power, for money, or for fame.)

Q: What is the meaning of verse 10, and why is it that our “deeds” are judged by God?

A: God knows the core of who we really are regardless of how others perceive us or even how we perceive ourselves. David was special to God because, even though he made huge mistakes, he was “a man after My own heart.” Therefore, we’d better get our act together spiritually because God can’t be fooled. It is our deeds that are judged because our behaviors, our lifestyle, our attitudes and our relationships reflect the true us; that is, our hearts. The more we allow God’s Word to be “incarnated” in us, the more our hearts change, and therefore, our behaviors.

¹²A glorious throne on high from the beginning

Is the place of our sanctuary.

¹³O LORD, the hope of Israel,

All who forsake You will be put to shame.

Those who turn away on earth will be written down,

Because they have forsaken the fountain of living water, even the LORD.

¹⁴Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed;

Save me and I will be saved,

For You are my praise.

[Read v.12-14]

Q: What is the hope that God offers in verse 14 if we face our sins and acknowledge before God who we really are on the inside?

A: He heals us and He saves us. Such is the nature of salvation; such is the beauty of sanctification.

The leader might want to spend a few moments in silent prayer before closing the study with open prayer, allowing members to silently confess their sins and make a commitment to seek God through His Word with a whole heart.