

**Jeremiah 17:1-4, Judah's Sin and Judgment**  
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**A. Overview**

How does this fit into 14-17?

1. Proposed chiastic analysis: 14-17 may be chiastic, ABCDCBA.

- a) **A** deals with the violation of the covenant.
  - 1) 14:1-15:9, Judgment is coming with no hope of intercession. Emphasis on the "four kinds", cf. Deut. 28; Lev. 26.
  - 2) 17:19-27 YHWH -> Jer: quote p: Don't profane the Sabbath, the sign of the covenant at Sinai, Exod. 31:13.
- b) **B** focuses on Jeremiah's sufferings and his plea for the Lord's help.
  - 1) 15:10-21 Jeremiah's suffering
  - 2) 17:14-18 Jer: Deliver me from my adversaries.
- c) **C** opens the hope of restoration for the faithful, Gentiles as well as Jews.
  - 1) 16:1-21 YHWH <> Jer: Judgment and Restoration, for Judah and Gentiles
  - 2) 17:5-13 YHWH <> Jer : interchange p: the rewards of faith and penalties of unbelief.
- d) **D**: 17:1-4 YHWH: Judah's sin is great, and her judgment sure.

2. Technical details

- a) 17:1-4 is clearly a distinct section:
  - 1) begins with disjunctive clause;
  - 2) following section has new IF.
- b) The chiasm depends largely on finding a correspondence between 14-15a and end of 17. This would work if we can credibly claim that the "judgments" of 14-15a and the sabbath of 17:19ff both point back to the covenant, so that these sections both emphasize the people's failure under the covenant. To check this out, do rough density check on occurrences of references to multiple judgments (sword, famine, death, pestilence, beasts). Big three (marked by \*) is sword, famine, pestilence. 11:22; 14:12\*,13,15,16,18; 15:2,3; 16:4; 18:21; 19:7; 21:7\*,9\*; 24:10\*; 27:8\*,13\*; 29:17\*,18\*; 32:24\*,36\*; 34:17\* (cf. 20); 38:2\*; 42:16,17\*,22\*; 43:11; 44:12,13\*,18,27
- c) Note repetition of the theme of the Lord's wrath as a fire that is kindled in 15:14 (passive); 17:4 (by Judah), 27 (by God). Cf. Lund's law of repetition at the center and extremes, and emphasis on judgment in both these. The only misfit is that 15:14 is not really at the end of the judgment section, but midway through the next section, about Jeremiah's sufferings. But 15:10-14 could credibly be considered a transition.

- d) Based on the application of Lund's third law, should expect 17:1-4 to be like the outermost members:
- 1) repetition of fire
  - 2) Strong similarity between 17:3-4 and 15:13-14
  - 3) "table" and "horn" have strong pentateuchal associations.
  - 4) *cprn* is "fingernail" in Deut. 21:12; cf. Exod. 31:18; Deut. 9:10, the law was written with the finger of God on stone tables. (Allusion to their stony hearts? Ezek. 36:26) Cf. 31:33, where the law will be written one day on their heart.
  - 5) 17:4 *\$m+* is the root of "sabbatical year," Exod. 23:11, Deut. 15:1-2.
  - 6) v.2; "remember" as an exhortation to Israel is most common in Deut. Instead of remembering what they were supposed to remember, they remember their idols.

3. What to present? Basic survey of themes:

a) Covenant jdgmnt	14:1-15:14	17:1-4	17:19-27
b) Jer. & the Lord	15:15-21		17:14-18
c) Jdgmnt & restoration	16:1-21		17:5-13

The big difference is that while 14:1-15:14 expressly disavows any chance for repentance and restoration, 17:19-27 suggests that obedience (contrasted with empty prayer, as in 14) would avail.

To appreciate the fit of 17:1-4 with the outer members (Lund's Third Law), note the "fire" in the last verse of each. We will also emphasize covenant themes as we go through the verses.

4. The basic structure of this short section is itself chiasmic: outer sections describe what they have done, the center describes the judgment that results.

**B. 17:1-2, The People's Sin (Detail)**

This verse drips heavily with allusions to God's covenant with Israel on Mount Sinai.

1. The facts:

- a) After leading the children of Israel out of Egypt, God met with Moses on Mount Sinai and gave him
  - 1) two tablets of stone
  - 2) containing the law
  - 3) engraved
  - 4) with the finger of God
- b) Then God told them to build a tabernacle to deal with the sins that would arise when they deviated from the law. Central to this tabernacle was an altar with horns, on which the sacrifice could be tied.

- c) Then, in Deut., God repeatedly tells them to remember their experiences in coming out of Egypt, receiving the law, and following him. Specific things they are to remember:
- 1) 5:15; 15:15, God delivered them from Egypt
  - 2) 7:18, what God did to Pharaoh
  - 3) 8:2, how God led them through the wilderness
  - 4) 8:18, that God enables them to get wealth
  - 5) 9:7, their sin (and its consequences)
  - 6) 16:3, the day of exodus
  - 7) 16:12; 24:18,22, that they were bondmen in Egypt
  - 8) 24:9, how God judged Miriam
  - 9) 25:17, how God judged Amalek
  - 10) 32:7, general exhortation at the start of Moses' blessing:  
 DEU 32:7 Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee.

2. Now note how they go against this.

- a) What characterizes this people is not the written law, but their written sin against this law, recorded as a testimony against them.
- b) The law was written with the finger of God; their sin is written with "the point of a diamond," literally "a diamond fingernail."
- c) The law was written on tables of stone. Their sin is written on the tables of their heart. This is where the law will one day be written, 31:33, but for now their hearts are just as stony as the law's tables, Ezek. 36:26.
- d) Their sin is also written on the horns of the altar. Thus the altar, which ought to be an instrument of forgiveness, bearing sacrifices to atone for their sin, has instead become a testimony against them. Instead of proclaiming forgiveness, it proclaims their sin.
- e) Their children do not remember their experiences of the exodus, but rather the pagan sanctuaries.

**C. 17:3-4a, The Coming Judgment**

As a result of this sin, the Lord brings judgment. This is very close to what God told Jeremiah he would have to bear in 15:13, but subtle changes in the wording make a tremendous difference. Jeremiah would suffer with the people, but not in punishment for sin, and God would ultimately remove the enemy from him; the people are being punished for their sin, and will go into captivity with the enemy.

Three sentences; the first, in particular, is convoluted in Hebrew, and I will suggest a clearer translation. Each of the sentences describes a different facet of the coming

judgment.

1. They will lose their property. "I will give my mountain in the field, your substance, all your treasure, for spoil; even your high places, because of sin, in all your borders." This describes the things the invaders will take from them. These things are grouped into two classes: one corresponding to the sanctuary of the Lord on Mount Zion, the other, their pagan sanctuaries.

a) "My mountain in the field" describes Zion, and is in apposition with "your substance" and "all your treasure." That is, the temple is their jewel, their prized possession, not only as God's dwelling among them, but also for the gold and silver it contains. God will give it to Nebuchadnezzar as spoil in the coming invasion.

b) God will also give Neb. possession of their pagan high places, throughout all the land. Having forsaken God's sanctuary, they will be deprived as well of the ones they have chosen as replacement.

c) *Application*: If we reject God's way and choose our own, he may deprive us of both.

2. They will let their land lie fallow. "Discontinue" is used in Exod. 23:11 to describe what one does to the land during the sabbatical year; the noun form of this word means "sabbatical year" in Deut. 15:1,2,9; 31:10. This thus links with 17:19-27, which condemns the people for violating the sabbath.

Cf. 2 Chr. 36:21, one purpose of the 70 year captivity was to let the land enjoy her sabbaths, which had not been observed during the monarchy. Chron. attributes this theology to Jeremiah, but elsewhere Jer. speaks only of 70 years, not of the sabbatical year. Perhaps Chr. has this passage in mind, which does say that the captivity has the effect of giving the land its sabbath rest.

3. They will be slaves in a distant land.

#### D. **17:4b, The People's Sin (Summary)**

Cf. 15:14; 17:27. This is the most formal indication of the three sections. Note subtle changes in the three "fire" statements.

1. First, in 15:14, the verb is passive.

2. Here, the people are the ones who kindle the flame.

3. Finally, in 17:27, the Lord lights the fire that burns Jerusalem.

#### E. **Summary**

The function of this section is to bring to a focus the covenant ideas of the outer members, and show how both the

conduct and the punishment of Judah marks her as an "uncovenant" people.

1. 17:1-2 contrasts her conduct at every turn with that expected under the covenant of Sinai. Instead of remembering the Lord, the law graven on tablets of stone and the sacrifices he gave them for sin, their law is sin, their altars are defiled, and they remember their pagan rites.
2. Similarly, 17:3-4 relate the coming judgment to the covenant. They will be deprived both of the temple God gave them and of the high places for which they forsake it, and the land will enjoy the sabbaths they denied it, while they return into the captivity from which Sinai delivered them.
3. *Application*: Do not take the blessings of God for granted. Israel assumed that those born of covenant parents were under the covenant, but Paul shows that it is the children of promise, not the children of the flesh, who receive the blessings. If we take lightly what God has given to us, we may find him taking it away from us.

F. Ps. 119. Let us hold close to the law of God, that we be not governed by our own sin.

### **Analysis**

Judah's sin is great, and her judgment sure.  
chiastic reason p

1. reason-1: temporal p
  - a) text: coordinate p
    - 1) 17:1 XAT.A)T Y:HW.DFH K.:TW.BFH B.:/("+ B.AR:ZEL B.:/CIP.OREN \$FMIYR
    - 2) X:ARW.\$FH (AL-LW.XA LIB./FM W./L:/QAR:NOWT MIZ:B.:XOWT"Y/KEM
  - b) time: 2 K.I/Z:K.OR B.:N"Y/HEM MIZ:B.:XOWT/FM WA/):A\$"R"Y/HEM (AL-("C RA(:ANFN (AL G.:BF(OWT HA/G.:BOHOWT
2. text: prophetic sequence p
  - a) (cf. 15:13) 3 H:ARFR/IY B.A/&.FDEH X"YL/:KF KFL-)OWC:ROWTEY/KF LFBZ )ET."N B.FMOTY/KF B.:/XA+.F)T B.:/KFL-G.:BW.LEY/KF
  - b) 4 W:/\$FMA+:T.FH W./B/:KF MI/N.AX:ALFT/:KF ):A\$ER NFTAT.IY L/FK:
  - c) W:/HA(:ABAD:T.IY/KF )ET-)OY:BEY/KF B.F/)FREC LO)-YFDF(:T.F
3. reason-2: coordinate p
  - a) K.IY-)"\$ Q:DAX:T.EM B.:/)AP./IY
  - b) (AD-(OWLFM T.W.QFD S