

JUDAH'S SIN WRITTEN WITH A PEN OF IRON

TEXT: JEREMIAH 17:1-18

INTRODUCTION:

1. Here in Jeremiah 17:1, we are told that the sin of Judah was "written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond." It was "graven upon the table of their heart," and upon the horns of their altars.
2. Merrill Unger says, "So sin-hardened were their stony hearts, so ingrained their sin, and so insensitive to it had they become that only the iron stylus and diamond, employed for engraving on the hardest substances, were sufficient to write their sin so they could realize it" (*Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*).
3. The LORD wanted them to write His commandments upon the table of their heart (Proverbs 7:3).
4. But instead of doing that, they disregarded the Word of God and pursued after sin, and so sin was engraved indelibly upon the table of their heart (17:1).
5. Their worship had become corrupted so God had to engrave their sin upon the horns of their altars (17:1, 2).

I. THE SIN OF IDOLATRY (17:1-4)

1. The people of Judah were guilty of the sin of idolatry. At the groves, and by the green trees, and upon the high hills, and up on the high places the people worshipped idols.
2. They would burn incense unto Baal, and then go into the temple to worship Jehovah God (7:9, 10).
3. They provoked the LORD to anger by making cakes to the queen of heaven, and pouring out drink offerings unto other gods (7:18).
4. They defiled the land by their idolatry, and because of their idolatry their substance and all their treasures would be taken from them by the invading Babylonian army (17:3).
5. Furthermore, they would be taken away into captivity (17:4).

II. THE SIN OF UNBELIEF (17:5-10)

1. This is the only sin that will send a man to hell. John 3:18 says, "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."
2. John 3:36 says, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

3. Mark 16:16 says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."
4. Jeremiah 17:5 says, "Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD."
5. In II Chronicles 32:7, 8, we read that King Hezekiah told the people, "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him: With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah."
6. People trust in the arm of flesh, but they do not trust in the LORD. More and more people today are putting their trust in the government, rather than in God. Or they are putting their trust in their money, etc.
7. The people in Jeremiah's day were trusting on the arm of flesh (political allies like Egypt and military strength, etc.), instead of the power of God (Jer. 17:5; cf. Isaiah 31:1-3).
8. Psalm 146 says, "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help... Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God: Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth for ever" (Ps. 146:3, 5, 6).
9. The word "heath," as the context suggests (17:6), refers to an area of open uncultivated land, typically on acid sandy soil, with coarse grasses.
10. Some dictionaries define it as a "shrub," and that is how it is translated in the NKJV and some of the other modern Bible versions.
6. Merrill Unger says this shrub "grows in the barren desert and has a gloomy, stunted appearance" (*Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*).
11. This certainly describes many Christians -- barren, gloomy, and stunted!
12. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is" (17:7). "My hope is in the Lord, Who gave Himself for me, And paid the price of all my sin at Calvary." (Norman J. Clayton)
13. In contrast to the godless man, who is like a gloomy shrub, the godly man is like a fruitful a tree planted by the waters (17:8).
14. Psalm 1:3 says, "he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."
15. One preacher said, "Unbelief turns life into a parched wasteland; faith makes it a fruitful orchard" (Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*).
16. The problem is deceitful heart (the inner man) of man (17:9, 10).

17. Oftentimes we hear worldlings say they know God because their heart tells them they are doing fine, but this is very misleading (17:9).
18. Jeremiah 5:23 says, "But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart."
19. There are many similar warnings throughout the Bible. The Bible speaks of a deceived heart, a proud heart, a haughty heart, a hard heart, a dissembling heart, a wicked heart, an evil heart, a perverse heart, a divided heart, a whorish heart, a spiteful heart, a foolish heart, and a deceitful heart!
20. Mormons refer to a "burning in the bosom" as a confirmation of the truth of the Mormon gospel. But the doctrines of Mormonism are contrary to Scripture, so their unholy heartburn is not a reliable way to find the truth!
21. People who are led by their feelings and emotions often go off the deep end (Jer. 17:9, 10).

III. THE SIN OF COVETOUSNESS (17:11-27)

1. Jeremiah has already addressed this. He says in 6:13, "For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness."
2. The rich and covetous man is likened to the partridge that sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not (17:11). Jeremiah's message: their ill-gotten wealth will not help them once the Babylonian army arrives.
3. As we see often in the book of Jeremiah, after a message of impending judgment, the prophet would pray (17:12-18).
4. After Jeremiah's prayer, the rest of Jeremiah chapter 17 deals with the sin of desecrating the sabbath day (17:19-27).
5. This message was so important that the LORD told Jeremiah, "Go and stand in the gate of the children of the people, whereby the kings of Judah come in, and by the which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem" (17:19).
6. Today many Christians do not consider the Lord's Day important, but it is very important. While these verses deal with the sin of Judah, we can make an application for today because the same principles underlie our day of rest.
7. D.L. Moody said the Lord's Day rest "is just as practicable and as necessary for men today as it ever was – in fact, more than ever, because we live in such an intense age." If it was "such an intense age" 100 years ago in D.L. Moody's time, what about this crazy, hectic day and age in which we live?
8. D.L. Moody and Charles Haddon Spurgeon and the other old-time preachers preached hard against people dishonoring the Lord's Day. To them desecrating the Lord's Day was just as bad as getting drunk or stealing!
9. Like people today, the people in Jeremiah's day treated the sabbath like any other day.
10. "Their sin was evidence that their hearts were devoted to material gain and not to the Lord" (Wiersbe).

11. The sabbath was a sign between the LORD and Israel (cf. Exodus 31:12-17).
12. But unfortunately, the people disregarded the LORD'S instructions regarding the sabbath (17:21-23). They were covetous and materialistic.
13. God offered them a choice: they would be blessed if they hallowed the sabbath day, but they would be severely judged if they did not (17:24-27).

CONCLUSION:

1. Jeremiah 17:13 says, "They that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters."
2. H.A. Ironside says, "What a vivid light this casts upon the striking scene in the eighth of John! There, when the scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus the poor woman taken in adultery, He stooped down and wrote upon the ground. In their lofty pride they pressed Him for judgment. He, looking into man's heart, bade the one without sin among them cast the first stone, and once more stooped down to write them in the earth - the sentence of death is upon them all! Feeling the exposure of His Word, they went forth from the convicting light of His presence one by one, leaving the sinner alone with the Saviour. In Psalm 22 the Lord says, 'Thou hast brought Me into the dust of death.' 'Death,' says the apostle, 'passed upon all men because all have sinned' (Romans 5:12). The Lord in grace stooped to the dust of death to save all who turn to God in repentance. Those who refuse His grace must be 'written in the earth;' that is, they are appointed to death from which they might have been saved had they but accepted the Lord Jesus as their Deliverer from the wrath to come. He is 'the fountain of living waters,' where all who will may drink and have life forevermore" (*Jeremiah*).