

Jeremiah 1:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands.

Analysis

This verse explains the reason for judgment: 'And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands.' The phrase 'I will utter my judgments' (debavarti mishpatai, דְּבַרְתִּי מִשְׁפָּטַי) means 'I will speak my verdicts/sentences'—formal judicial pronouncement. The charges follow: 'all their wickedness' (kol-ra'atam, כָּל־רָעָתָם) encompasses comprehensive covenant violation. Specifically: 'they have forsaken me' (azabuni, אָזַבְנִי, from azab, אָזַב)—the fundamental sin of abandoning covenant relationship with Yahweh. The second charge: 'burned incense unto other gods' (qitter le'elohim acherim, קִטֵּר לֵאלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים)—offering worship (incense being a standard ritual act) to deities other than Yahweh, violating the first and second commandments (Exodus 20:3-5). Third: 'worshipped the works of their own hands' (hishtachavu lema'asei yedeihem, הִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לַמַּעֲשֵׂי יְדֵיהֶם)—bowing down to idols they manufactured themselves, emphasizing the absurdity of worshipping human-created objects. The phrase 'works of their own hands' appears frequently as prophetic mockery of idolatry's foolishness—worshipping what you yourself made. These charges define covenant unfaithfulness: relational abandonment of God and religious prostitution to false gods.

Historical Context

Judah's idolatry reached its zenith under King Manasseh (697-642 BC), who rebuilt high places his father Hezekiah destroyed, erected altars to Baal, made an Asherah pole, worshipped astral deities, practiced child sacrifice in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, consulted mediums and spiritists, and even placed idols in the temple itself (2 Kings 21:1-16). Though Josiah's reforms (640-609 BC) temporarily reversed these practices, the spiritual damage was irreversible—most people changed external behavior without heart transformation. After Josiah's death, Jehoiakim and subsequent kings restored idolatrous practices. Archaeological discoveries confirm widespread syncretistic worship: figurines of Asherah found in Israelite homes, altars combining Yahweh worship with pagan elements, and pottery inscriptions mentioning 'Yahweh and his Asherah.' This pervasive idolatry, combined with social injustice, false prophecy, and trust in foreign alliances rather than God, accumulated divine judgment that even Josiah's reforms couldn't avert (2 Kings 23:26-27).

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does the sequence—forsaking God, then turning to false gods—reveal the pattern of spiritual adultery that begins with relational abandonment?
2. In what ways might modern believers create and worship 'works of their own hands'—ideas, achievements, or religious systems of their own making rather than submitted to God's revelation?

Interlinear Text

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|----------------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| וְדִבַּרְתִּי י | מִשְׁפָּטַי | אֹתָם | עַל | כָּל |
| And I will utter | my judgments | H854 | against them touching | H3605 |
| H1696 | H4941 | | H5921 | |
| רָעַתָּהּ | אֲשֶׁר | עָזַב וְנִי | וַיִּקְטְרוּ | |
| all their wickedness | H834 | who have forsaken | me and have burned incense | |
| H7451 | | H5800 | H6999 | |
| יִלְאֵלֶּה יִם | אֲחֵר יִם | וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ ו | לְמַעַשֵׂי י | יְדֵיהֶם: |
| gods | unto other | and worshipped | the works | of their own hands |
| H430 | H312 | H7812 | H4639 | H3027 |

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 7:9 (References God): Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not;

Jeremiah 19:4 (References God): Because they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents;

Isaiah 2:8 (Worship): Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made:

Acts 7:41 (Parallel theme): And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

Deuteronomy 28:20 (Evil): The LORD shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me.

Isaiah 37:19 (References God): And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them.

Jeremiah 44:17 (Evil): But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil.

Jeremiah 4:12 (Parallel theme): Even a full wind from those places shall come unto me: now also will I give sentence against them.

Jeremiah 17:13 (Parallel theme): O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters.

Deuteronomy 31:16 (References God): And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them.

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