

Jeremiah 17:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Whilst their children remember their altars and their groves
by the green trees upon the high hills.

Analysis

This verse reveals the tragic intergenerational transmission of idolatry. The children's remembrance of "altars and groves" (asherim, אֲשֵׁרִים—wooden poles representing the Canaanite goddess Asherah) demonstrates how false worship becomes culturally embedded. The parents' compromise has shaped their children's spiritual formation, creating cycles of covenant unfaithfulness.

The locations specified—"by the green trees upon the high hills"—reference classic sites of Canaanite fertility cult worship that Israel was commanded to destroy (Deut 12:2-3). Instead of eliminating these pagan shrines, Judah adopted them, blending Yahweh worship with nature-based polytheism. This syncretism violated the first and second commandments, provoking God's covenant wrath.

Theologically, this passage emphasizes the covenantal principle that God visits "the iniquity of the fathers upon the children" (Ex 20:5)—not arbitrary punishment, but the natural consequence of sin's social transmission. Parents who compromise their faith inevitably shape their children's spiritual trajectory. This underscores the Reformed emphasis on covenant nurture, catechesis, and the vital importance of maintaining doctrinal purity for future generations.

Historical Context

High places (bamot) were elevated worship sites pre-dating Israel's settlement in Canaan. Though sometimes used for legitimate Yahweh worship before the

temple's construction, they became associated with idolatrous practices. The "groves" or Asherah poles represented the consort of Baal in Canaanite religion. Despite repeated warnings from prophets and occasional reforms, these sites persisted throughout Judah's history, demonstrating the tenacity of cultural syncretism and the human tendency toward idolatry.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What spiritual compromises might we be transmitting to the next generation through our worship practices and priorities?
2. How does this warning about children remembering their parents' idolatry inform our approach to family discipleship?
3. In what ways do modern Christians create 'high places'—locations or practices where worship of God is mixed with worldly values?

Interlinear Text

זָכֹר	בְּנֵיהֶם	מִזְבְּחוֹתָם	וְאֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם	עַל	עֵץ
remember	Whilst their children	their altars	and their groves	H5921	trees
H2142	H1121	H4196	H842		H6086
רֶעֶן	עַל	גְּבֻעַת	הַגְּבוּהוֹת:		
by the green	H5921	hills	upon the high		
H7488		H1389	H1364		

Additional Cross-References

2 Chronicles 24:18 (Parallel theme): And they left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass.

Jeremiah 2:20 (Parallel theme): For of old time I have broken thy yoke, and burst thy bands; and thou saidst, I will not transgress; when upon every high hill and under every green tree thou wanderest, playing the harlot.

Isaiah 17:8 (Sacrifice): And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his hands, neither shall respect that which his fingers have made, either the groves, or the images.

Isaiah 1:29 (Parallel theme): For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired, and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen.

Jeremiah 7:18 (Sacrifice): The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger.

2 Chronicles 33:3 (Sacrifice): For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, and he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.

Judges 3:7 (Parallel theme): And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves.