

Jeremiah 17:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And thou, even thyself, shalt discontinue from thine heritage that I gave thee; and I will cause thee to serve thine enemies in the land which thou knowest not: for ye have kindled a fire in mine anger, which shall burn for ever.

Analysis

The severest consequence is introduced: "thou, even thyself, shalt discontinue from thine heritage." The emphatic Hebrew construction stresses personal responsibility—Judah cannot blame circumstances or others. The heritage refers to the promised land, Israel's covenant inheritance from God (Deut 4:21). To be removed from it means exile, the covenant curse for disobedience (Lev 26:27-39, Deut 28:64-68).

Serving "enemies in the land which thou knowest not" reverses the Exodus deliverance. Instead of serving God in the land He promised, they'll serve pagan masters in Babylon. This exile represents spiritual as well as physical displacement—separation from God's presence in the temple. The phrase "ye have kindled a fire in mine anger" uses the very imagery of sacrifice perverted into judgment. Their false worship has ignited divine wrath.

The sobering phrase "which shall burn for ever" emphasizes the enduring nature of God's just anger against sin. While the historical exile lasted seventy years, the theological principle points to eternal consequences for unrepentant sin. Only the new covenant in Christ can extinguish the fire of God's wrath through the substitutionary sacrifice of the Son.

Historical Context

The Babylonian exile (586-516 BC) fulfilled this prophecy precisely. Judah's elite were deported to Babylon, a foreign land with alien culture, language, and gods. They lost access to the temple, the land, and the covenant blessings. This served as the ultimate covenant sanction, demonstrating that God's patience has limits. The exile reshaped Jewish identity and led to the development of synagogue worship, scriptural study, and the preservation of the Hebrew Bible.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the reality of being 'discontinued from your heritage' challenge presumption upon God's covenant promises without genuine faithfulness?
2. In what ways might modern Christians experience spiritual 'exile' through the consequences of persistent sin?
3. How does Christ's bearing the fire of God's wrath on the cross provide the only escape from eternal judgment?

Interlinear Text

וְשִׁמְטָהּ הָ	וְכָרְךָ	מִנְחֶלְתְּךָ	אֵשׁ רָ
And thou even thyself shalt discontinue	H0	from thine heritage	H834
H8058		H5159	
נָתַתִּי לָּךְ	וְהָעֲבָדְתָּ יָכְךָ	אֶת	אֹיְבֵי יָכְךָ
that I gave	H0	thee and I will cause thee to serve	H853
H5414		H5647	H341
בְּאֶרֶץ רָ	לֹא יָדָעְתָּ	כִּי	אֵשׁ מְ
in the land	H834	H3808	which thou knowest
H776		H3045	H3588
			a fire
			H784
			not for ye have kindled
			H6919
בְּאַפִּי	עַד	עוֹלָם	תִּזְקָד:
in mine anger	for	ever	which shall burn
H639	H5704	H5769	H3344

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 15:14 (Parallel theme): And I will make thee to pass with thine enemies into a land which thou knowest not: for a fire is kindled in mine anger, which shall burn upon you.

Lamentations 5:2 (Parallel theme): Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens.

Isaiah 5:25 (Parallel theme): Therefore is the anger of the LORD kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

Jeremiah 7:20 (Parallel theme): Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched.

Isaiah 14:3 (Parallel theme): And it shall come to pass in the day that the LORD shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve,

Jeremiah 16:13 (Parallel theme): Therefore will I cast you out of this land into a land that ye know not, neither ye nor your fathers; and there shall ye serve other gods day and night; where I will not shew you favour.

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