

Jeremiah 17:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD.

Analysis

This verse establishes a fundamental antithesis between two ways of life: trusting in human strength versus trusting in the LORD. The Hebrew *arur* (אָרַר, "cursed") is the opposite of *baruch* (blessed) in verse 7, framing a wisdom contrast similar to Psalm 1. The curse falls upon those who "trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm"—relying on human ability, alliances, or wisdom rather than God.

"Maketh flesh his arm" is a vivid idiom depicting human strength as the source of security and power. The arm symbolizes might and protection in Hebrew thought (Ex 6:6, Deut 4:34). To make flesh one's arm is to replace divine omnipotence with human frailty. The phrase "whose heart departeth from the LORD" reveals that external reliance on human resources stems from internal apostasy—the heart has turned away from covenant loyalty.

This verse articulates the Reformed principle that true faith and trust in God are inseparable. Practical atheism—living as if God were irrelevant while maintaining religious forms—is the essence of apostasy. The New Testament echoes this warning: confidence in the flesh is opposed to confidence in Christ (Phil 3:3-4). Only those whose hearts cling to the LORD avoid the curse of self-reliance.

Historical Context

Jeremiah spoke this oracle during a period when Judah constantly faced geopolitical pressure from Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. Kings and officials regularly formed military alliances with these powers rather than trusting God's protection (Isa 30:1-3, 31:1). King Zedekiah's rebellion against Babylon, trusting in Egyptian aid, exemplifies this cursed trust in man (Jer 37:5-10, Ezek 17:15-18). Such political pragmatism, divorced from covenant faithfulness, led to Judah's destruction.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. In what areas of life are you most tempted to trust in human wisdom, strength, or resources rather than God?
2. How does this verse challenge the modern idolatry of self-reliance and therapeutic self-help?
3. What does it mean practically for your heart to depart from the LORD while maintaining outward religious observance?

Isaiah 59:15 (References Lord): Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment.

Hosea 1:2 (References Lord): The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD.

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