

Jeremiah 17:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.

Analysis

The imagery of "heath in the desert" (Hebrew ar'ar, אֶרְעָר—likely a juniper or tamarisk shrub) depicts barrenness and isolation. This scraggly bush survives in harsh desert conditions but never flourishes. The person who trusts in human strength becomes spiritually stunted, unable to recognize or receive divine blessing even when it arrives ("shall not see when good cometh").

The "parched places in the wilderness" and "salt land and not inhabited" emphasize desolation and fruitlessness. Salt lands were proverbial for curse and judgment (Deut 29:23, Judg 9:45). Unlike the blessed person compared to a fruitful tree by water (v. 8), the cursed person inhabits spiritual wasteland—disconnected from life-giving relationship with God.

This passage illustrates the doctrine of common grace and its absence for the persistently rebellious. God may send temporal blessings, but those whose hearts have departed from Him cannot perceive or enjoy them as divine gifts. They remain in self-imposed exile from the fountain of living waters (v. 13). Only Christ can transform our wilderness into streams (Isa 35:6-7), making spiritual flourishing possible.

The desert imagery would resonate powerfully with Jeremiah's audience, living in a land where water sources determined survival and prosperity. The wilderness represented chaos, death, and divine judgment—the opposite of the promised land flowing with milk and honey. To inhabit the salt lands recalled Sodom's judgment (Gen 19:24-25) and Israel's warnings about covenant curses (Deut 29:22-28).

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

1. Have you experienced seasons of spiritual dryness because you trusted in human resources rather than God?
2. How might someone 'not see when good cometh' due to hardness of heart or spiritual blindness?
3. In what ways does Christ offer living water that transforms our wilderness into flourishing life?

Interlinear Text

וְהָיָה H1961	כְּעֵרָץ H6176	בְּעֵרְבָה H6160	וְלֹא H3808	יֵרָאֵה H7200	כִּי H3588	וְאֵל H935
		in the desert		and shall not see		cometh
טוֹב H2896	וְשָׁכַן H7931	מְדָבָר H4057	מְדָבָר H4057	וְשָׁכַן H7931	טוֹב H2896	אֶרֶץ H776
when good	but shall inhabit	the parched places	in the wilderness	in the wilderness	when good	land
מִלֵּךְ H4420	וְלֹא H3808	יִתְּשֵׁב H3427				
in a salt		and not inhabited				

Additional Cross-References

Job 20:17 (Parallel theme): He shall not see the rivers, the floods, the brooks of honey and butter.

Psalms 1:4 (Parallel theme): The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

Deuteronomy 29:23 (Parallel theme): And that the whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein, like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath:

Job 39:6 (Parallel theme): Whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings.

Jeremiah 48:6 (Parallel theme): Flee, save your lives, and be like the heath in the wilderness.

Judges 9:45 (Parallel theme): And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt.

Zephaniah 2:9 (Parallel theme): Therefore as I live, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them.