

Jeremiah 18:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity, and they have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up;

Analysis

The indictment: "Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity." "Forgotten" isn't mere mental lapse but willful neglect and abandonment of covenant relationship. "Burned incense to vanity" (shav, שָׁב, worthlessness/emptiness) describes idolatry—worshiping what has no reality or power. They've exchanged substantial reality (God) for empty illusion (idols).

The consequence: "they have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up." The "ancient paths" (orach olam, מְלֹאת עַמּוֹת אָמֵן) refer to God's revealed way—Torah, covenant stipulations, and divine instruction passed down through generations. "Not cast up" means unprepared, unmarked roads—dangerous paths leading to destruction. False worship produces false ethics; theological error generates moral confusion.

This verse warns that abandoning biblical truth inevitably leads to practical life chaos. The Reformed principle: doctrine and life are inseparable. False theology produces false living. The "ancient paths" aren't traditions for tradition's sake but tested truth revealed by God and validated through covenant history. Christ identified Himself as the Way (John 14:6)—the ultimate ancient path leading to the Father.

Historical Context

Jeremiah's call to walk in "the old paths" (Jer 6:16) contrasted covenant faithfulness with the innovative syncretism of his day. Rather than maintaining the pure worship established by Moses and the prophets, Judah adopted Canaanite religious practices, Assyrian astral worship, and Egyptian cultic elements. This theological compromise produced the moral chaos the prophets condemned— injustice, oppression, sexual immorality, and covenant violation.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What 'ancient paths' of biblical truth are you tempted to abandon for contemporary religious innovations?
2. How does forgetting God lead inevitably to stumbling into unmarked, dangerous paths?
3. In what ways does Christ as 'the Way' fulfill and personify the ancient paths God revealed?

Interlinear Text

רֹאֶה	לְשֵׁם	עַמּוֹ	שְׁכַח	נִיְמָה	וְ	רָאֶה	לְשֵׁם	רֹאֶה
H3588	hath forgotten	Because my people		to vanity	me they have burned incense			
	H7911		H5971		H7723			H6999
וְ	עַמּוֹ	שְׁבִיל	וְ	דְּרֵה	עַמּוֹ	לְלִכְתָּבָת	וְ	לְ
		paths		in a way	in a way	from the ancient		H1980
		H7635		H1870		H5769		
וְ	דְּרֵה	לְאַתָּה	לְאַתָּה	וְ	וְ	וְ	וְ	וְ
		not cast up	in paths	in a way	not cast up	in paths	in a way	not cast up
		H5549	H3808	H1870	H5410			

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 6:16 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.

Isaiah 57:14 (Parallel theme): And shall say, Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people.

Jeremiah 2:32 (Parallel theme): Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number.

Hosea 11:2 (Parallel theme): As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images.

Jeremiah 2:13 (Parallel theme): For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

Malachi 2:8 (Parallel theme): But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.

Isaiah 41:29 (Parallel theme): Behold, they are all vanity; their works are nothing: their molten images are wind and confusion.

Jeremiah 10:15 (Parallel theme): They are vanity, and the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish.

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.

Jeremiah 16:19 (Parallel theme): O LORD, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org