

# Jeremiah 34:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But ye turned and polluted my name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom ye had set at liberty at their pleasure, to return, and brought them into subjection, to be unto you for servants and for handmaids.

## Analysis

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**But ye turned and polluted my name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom ye had set at liberty at their pleasure, to return, to be unto you for servants and for handmaids.** God's response to covenant revocation burns with righteous indignation. The verb "polluted" (techalelu) derives from chalal (profane, defile)—the freed slaves' re-enslavement desecrated God's name. Since the liberation was done invoking God's covenant, revoking it implied God's name/character could be manipulated for human convenience then discarded when no longer advantageous.

The phrase "whom ye had set at liberty at their pleasure" emphasizes the personal nature of the wrong—individual owners recaptured their specific former slaves. The phrase "at their pleasure" (literally "according to their soul/desire") reveals the slaves were set free reluctantly, only while seeming beneficial, then recaptured when convenient. This exposes the hearts: no genuine concern for justice, only self-interested pragmatism dressed as piety.

Theologically, this verse teaches:

1. God's name is profaned when His people act hypocritically
2. treating covenant obedience as situational rather than absolute constitutes covenant treachery

3. God sees motives, not merely actions—false repentance angers Him more than honest unbelief
4. oppression of the vulnerable (recaptured slaves) especially provokes divine wrath.

The Reformed emphasis on regeneration's necessity finds support here—only hearts transformed by grace produce genuine covenant obedience.

## Historical Context

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The recapture of freed slaves occurred when Egypt's temporary intervention lifted Babylon's siege (37:5-11). The brief respite falsely suggested deliverance was secured, making continued obedience seem unnecessary. This demonstrates the dangerous pattern: crisis prompts religious observance, relief produces backsliding. Genuine transformation persists through changed circumstances; false conversion evaporates when pressure lifts.

The historical consequence was immediate and severe: Babylon resumed the siege, eventually destroying Jerusalem (verses 21-22; 39:1-10). The brief hope of Egyptian deliverance proved illusory—Pharaoh's forces retreated, leaving Jerusalem to its fate. God's word through Jeremiah proved absolutely reliable while human calculations and temporary circumstances proved worthless. History repeatedly demonstrates that covenant faithfulness provides the only true security.

## Related Passages

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**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

**Romans 2:1** — Judging others

## Study Questions

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1. In what ways might Christians today 'profane God's name' through inconsistent living that treats obedience as situational?
2. How does understanding that God sees motives challenge seemingly good actions done for wrong reasons?
3. What safeguards prevent 'crisis Christianity' that reforms under pressure but backslides when circumstances improve?

## Interlinear Text

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וְאֵת שְׁמִי וְתִפְשַׁ בָּו וְתִמְלַלְתִּי אֶת שְׁמֵךְ בָּו  
But ye turned and polluted my name But ye turned and caused every man  
H7725 H2490 H853 H7725 H376

אֲתָּה לְעָבֵד יְמִינְךָ וְאֵת שְׁמֵךְ אֲתָּה לְעָבֵד יְמִינְךָ וְאֶשְׁר  
H853 his servant and caused every man H853 and for handmaids H834  
H5650 H376 H8198

וְתִתְכַּבֵּשׁ וְלִנְפְּשַׁ מִשְׁלֵחָתְךָ וְלִנְפְּשַׁ מִקְּפֵשׁ יְמִינְךָ וְתִתְכַּבֵּשׁ וְלִנְפְּשַׁ מִשְׁלֵחָתְךָ  
whom ye had set at liberty at their pleasure and brought them into subjection H3533  
H7971 H2670 H5315 H3533

וְלִנְפְּשַׁ מִלְּעָבֵד יְמִינְךָ וְלִנְפְּשַׁ מִלְּעָבֵד יְמִינְךָ וְאֶת  
H853 H1961 H0 his servant and for handmaids H8198  
H5650 H8198

## Additional Cross-References

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**Leviticus 19:12** (Parallel theme): And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

**Jeremiah 34:11** (Parallel theme): But afterward they turned, and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids.

**Exodus 20:7** (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

**Ezekiel 18:24** (Parallel theme): But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.

**Ezekiel 3:20** (Parallel theme): Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

**1 Samuel 15:11** (Parallel theme): It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the LORD all night.