

## For the Sake of Your Lives (Jeremiah 17:12–27)

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### Introduction

*“The backslider in heart will be filled with the fruit of his ways”* (Proverbs 14:14).

1. Jeremiah 17:9 and 10 state the *basic problem* of human existence—the condition of the heart and the only reliable source to evaluate it. The human heart is deceitful and incurably sick in an evil sense. The heart is adept in the art of pursuing the evil while appearing to prefer what is right, and so must be viewed with great suspicion.
2. The eternal transcendent God is all-knowing (*omniscient*), all-powerful (*omnipotent*), and all-wise (*omni sapient*). All who forsake Him will be *shamed* and *“written in the earth,”* a euphemism for dying and returning to dust (v. 13). Only the eternal covenant God is *“the fountain of living water,”* and only He can heal and restore sinners.
3. In the text before us, the prophet provides an example (v. 11) of those who foolishly live as though the glorious omniscient God can neither see nor reward the avarice of one who acquires his wealth by dubious means. Their folly is heightened by failure to understand that what they have set their hearts on is an unfaithful lover who will eventually desert them.
4. This fact prompted a solemn invocation by the prophet. The Hebrew of verses 12 and 13 suggests this: *“O throne of glory set on high from the beginning . . . O Yahweh, hope of Israel.”* While the throne, representing divine justice, should strike terror in the guilty, Jeremiah appeals to this holy throne. The grace of salvation makes it a sanctuary for His people through His covenantal relationship with them. It is to this God of *chesed* (faithful loving kindness) that the prophet now appeals.

However, in this exchange, we find another example of the deceitfulness of the human heart. Jeremiah complains to God that his present predicament is out of keeping with what he understands of the justice of His God. We acknowledge God’s sovereign right and justice to inflict suffering on the wicked who forsake the Lord. However, should the godly also suffer? They do suffer; indeed, they suffer more. Thus, Jeremiah prays, “O throne of glory, O Covenant Lord, heal me from my evil heart and save me from my persecutors.”

### I. Jeremiah’s Complaint

1. His complaint (to paraphrase it): “Those to whom you sent me with your message keep asking, ‘Why isn’t God doing what you claim in your message that He threatens to do? Let Him bring it on (v. 15). Isaiah reflected a similar concern: *“Woe to those . . . who say: ‘Let him be quick, let him speed his work that we may see it; let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near, and let it come, that we may know it!’*” (Isaiah 5:18, 19).
  - a. As a result of God’s apparent slowness, Jeremiah was accused of being a false prophet based on warnings in Deuteronomy 18:21 and 22. The scorn of the people was understandable if he, like other contemporary prophets, gave a false message, claiming it was from God, such as is recorded in Jeremiah 28:6–9.
  - b. Jeremiah had been reluctant to do this—he was a prophet against his will. The reason for his reluctance was his fear that he would suffer savage treatment, preaching truth (Jeremiah 20:7–10).

2. Despite his reluctance, the prophet affirmed his zeal in defending the Lord and His righteous judgment of the sinful nation (v. 16). Again, to paraphrase, “I have sincerely sought to follow you fully, so, why have you not defended me against their malicious attacks?”
  - a. Although reluctant to answer Yahweh’s call, he nevertheless quickly responded, fearing his “*day of sickness*”—his own depravity.
  - b. Jeremiah appealed to the Lord’s omniscience as evidence of his sincerity, knowing the Lord heard every word from his lips. Again, this statement reflects verse 12.
3. Tired of the persecution from his fellows, Jeremiah pled for God to end their tyranny by putting them to shame and destroying them with the double disaster He had threatened (remember 16:18).
4. We all naturally want to see justice done and things put right. The reality is that we hostile world controlled by an evil being who hates the Lord and takes his hatred out on His people (John 16:33; Revelation 2:10; John 15:20, 21; Acts 20:18–21; Philippians 3:7–9).

## II. Yahweh’s Response

1. The Lord’s response to the prophet’s complaint was silence. His word on the matter was clear in Scripture: “*I am the LORD; in its time I will hasten it*” (Isaiah 6:22; Isaiah 55:8, 9, 11; Ezekiel 12:21, 25).
  - a. The Lord gave no explanation, nor did He directly answer the prophet’s complaint. Instead, the Lord commands Jeremiah to do his job, stand in the gate, and preach His Word to the people.
  - b. It is not the purpose of the Lord to make the people who serve Him happy and comfortable in this world. They are to pursue holiness and serve the Lord for the sake of His glory. They are to be salt and light in a hostile, dark, and corrupt world. Believers are not served by the Lord; they are servants of the Lord.
2. Jeremiah was ordered to preach a very unpopular message to the people (vv. 21–27).
  - a. They were to listen to God’s message “*for the sake of their lives*” (v. 21). The Lord knew that they would not listen nor incline themselves to obey His instruction (v. 23).
  - b. The Lord cites lack of *observance of the Sabbath* to demonstrate their resistance and rebellion. Sabbath observance was especially important because it revealed the true spiritual attitude of the people for their God. The NT supports Sabbath observance (Acts 20:7; Revelation 1:10; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Isaiah 56, a chapter prophesying the gospel age).

## What Can We Take Away?

1. The saints need to learn perseverance and endurance (Hebrews 10:31–39).
2. The saints need to consider the example of Jesus (Hebrews 12:1–4).
3. The saints need to remember that this world is passing away and that the Lord is preparing for them something far greater (Hebrews 12:26–29).