

Evil in the Land

Key Verse: *“This thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.”*
—Jeremiah 7:23

Selected Scripture:
*Jeremiah 7:1-11,
21-23*

The command in our Key Verse is a brief restatement of those found in Exodus 19:5, Leviticus 26:3-12, and Deuteronomy 5:33. If Israel would keep the commandments of Jehovah they would live and prosper in the land they had been given. This was true even after Israel was divided into the northern tribes of Israel and the southern tribes of Judah. Obedience was always the most important requirement of the covenant between God and his chosen people, not sacrifice. Having

once again fallen into worship of false gods, the people of Judah sought safety from Jehovah’s judgment by coming to the Temple and offering sacrifice.

In today’s Selected Scripture we read Jehovah’s word spoken through the mouth of Jeremiah, which stated that obedience was superior to Temple sacrifice: “Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the LORD. This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD! If you really change your ways and

your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever. But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless. Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, We are safe—safe to do all these detestable things? Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD.”—Jer. 7:2-11, *New International Version*

These powerful words show that no religious observances or Temple sacrifices would yield benefits if Judah did not amend their evil ways. None could claim an interest in free salvation while practicing known sin or living in neglect of recognized duty. This was the evil in the kingdom of Judah that Jeremiah spoke out against. They thought that the Temple they profaned would be their protection by proclaiming, “This is the temple of the LORD!”

This warning against claiming God’s favor without obedience to his Word is as true today as it was in Jeremiah’s day. We cannot live six days in disobedience each week and then claim salvation on the Sabbath in a church building, asserting Christ is there to save. “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid,” Paul said. (Rom. 6:1,2) The cross of Christ, along with sincere efforts to obey, form the most effectual remedy to such poisonous sentiments. The Son of God gave himself for our transgressions to show the excellence of the divine law, but also the evil of sin. (Rom. 7:13) Let us never think that we may do wickedly without consequences. ■