



What were the major sins in Judah that led up to the Exile?

According to Jeremiah and the biblical accounts of Judah's fall, the major sins were idolatry, injustice, violence, religious hypocrisy, and persistent refusal to repent. Together, these constituted **unfaithfulness** to God's covenant—not simply isolated moral failures, but an entrenched pattern involving rulers, religious leaders, and the people. Jeremiah 7 offers a particularly clear summary of the charges. ^[1] ^[2]

1. Idolatry and divided loyalty to God

Judah worshiped other gods while continuing to participate in the worship of the Lord. Jeremiah condemns offerings to Baal, devotion to the “queen of heaven,” and the pursuit of gods Israel had not known (Jeremiah 7:9, 18). The problem was not merely abandoning worship altogether; it was combining worship of the Lord with loyalties and practices incompatible with his covenant. ^[3] ^[1]

This reached a particularly horrific expression in child sacrifice at Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom. Jeremiah explicitly condemns the burning of sons and daughters, declaring that God neither commanded nor intended it (Jeremiah 7:30–31). The accounts of Manasseh's reign likewise connect idolatry and child sacrifice with the judgment coming upon Judah (2 Kings 21:1–16). ^[4] ^[1]

2. Oppression and economic injustice

Jeremiah insists that genuine repentance must include just treatment of other people. He specifically names:

- Oppression of foreigners, orphans, and widows.
- Unjust dealings between neighbors.
- Exploitation of those without the power to protect themselves.

These are central charges, not secondary concerns added to the “real” religious issue. In Jeremiah 7:5–7, practicing justice and protecting vulnerable people are directly connected with remaining in the land. Judah's covenant obligations concerned both worship and social life. ^[5]
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3. Violence and the shedding of innocent blood

Jeremiah condemns murder and the shedding of innocent blood alongside theft, adultery, and false oaths (Jeremiah 7:6, 9). Judah's wrongdoing therefore included both public violence and ordinary violations of trust within the community.^[6] ^[3]

The historical books give particular weight to Manasseh's bloodshed. Second Kings 21:16 describes him as filling Jerusalem with innocent blood, placing royal violence alongside idolatry in the explanation of Judah's coming judgment. The failure was institutional as well as individual: leaders helped establish the conditions under which wrongdoing flourished.^[4]

4. Religious hypocrisy and false confidence in the temple

Judah's people continued to enter the temple while practicing the very sins God condemned. Jeremiah exposes the contradiction: they steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, and worship Baal—and then stand before God as though their religious participation guarantees safety (Jeremiah 7:9–10).^[3]

Their repeated appeal to “the temple of the LORD” treated God's sanctuary as protection against judgment regardless of their conduct. Jeremiah's point is not that the temple was worthless, but that its presence could not substitute for repentance and obedience. Sacred institutions were being used to excuse an unchanged way of life.^[5] ^[6]

5. Rejection of God's warnings and refusal to repent

The biblical accounts emphasize that judgment followed repeated opportunities to turn back. God sent messengers, but the people and their leaders mocked them, despised God's words, and rejected prophetic correction (2 Chronicles 36:15–16).^[7]

This helps explain why the exile is portrayed as the culmination of a long history rather than punishment for a single incident. The issue was not only that Judah sinned, but that it persistently resisted correction. Chronicles places the responsibility on both rulers and people and makes their failure to heed the prophets central to the explanation of Jerusalem's destruction.^[2] ^[8]

How these sins fit together

Jeremiah does not separate “religious sins” from “social sins.” Disloyalty to God, mistreatment of neighbors, and deceptive worship reinforce one another:

Dimension	Judah's failure
Relationship with God	Worshipping other gods and rejecting his word
Relationship with neighbors	Exploitation, violence, theft, adultery, and dishonesty
Religious life	Treating temple worship as security without obedience
Response to correction	Refusing to listen or repent

Jeremiah 7 brings these dimensions together in a single indictment: a people cannot claim covenant security while violating the covenant in worship and daily life.^[1] ^[6]

Connection with Jeremiah 1:1–10

This is the background to Jeremiah's commission to "pluck up and pull down" and also "build and plant." His task was not merely to predict a military defeat; it was to expose a deeply rooted pattern of covenant rebellion and summon Judah to change. The historical mechanism of the exile was Babylonian conquest; the biblical theological explanation was Judah's persistent unfaithfulness despite God's repeated warnings.^[9] ^[2]

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