

Day 210

Broken Covenant and the Prophet's Complaint

Jeremiah 10.1 – 12.17

10.1 – 16 The inanity of idols is that they are made by man, and then worshipped by him, while the ineffability of God is that He is the eternal Creator of all, and yet relates to mortals.

There is no comparison. The idols are a fraud.

10.17 – 22 There is the promise of captivity coming, because of the forsaking of God's ways, by leaders who do not listen to the Lord. For this, Judah will become desolation.

10.23 -25 Here is a plea, a very human plea, for God to spare the nation, but to judge the gentiles for their oppression.

11.1 – 17 The issue is clear; the people of Israel and Judah have broken the covenant which God set out for them. This was to be a people protected by the Lord under His commitment to them. But they have broken that covenant by going after other gods, and therefore the strictures of the covenant come into force. Because of this, the Lord says to Jeremiah, there is no point praying for the people, because they have brought this on themselves.

Right in the Temple, Judah is carrying on with other gods. Because of this, the beautiful olive tree which was Israel is about to be set alight by the anger of God's storm.

Plot Against Jeremiah

11.18 – 23 Jeremiah has uncovered a plot against his life by the men of Anathoth, his home town. They are trying to shut him up because of his hard words. Jeremiah prophesies retribution upon them from the Lord. This must have been terrible for Jeremiah, to have his relatives and fellow-citizens turn against him in this way.

Jeremiah's Complaint

12. 1 – 4 Jeremiah takes the Lord to task about the lack of action to fulfil his words. Far from the people being judged around him, they are prospering! He cannot understand why the wicked are doing so well.

12.5 – 17 First, in reply, the Lord warns Jeremiah not to trust his family and friends in Anathoth. Then he reiterates the promise of devastation coming upon the land for its disobedience. However, there will eventually be compassion shown. And Judah will return and settle the land, if they will foreswear the pagan idols.

Day 211

Coming Destruction

Jeremiah 13.1- 15.9

13.1-11 Jeremiah acts out the word of the Lord through the purchase of a linen belt, which he wears, and keeps dry. Then he has to hide it in the rocks, where it rots away, so that when Jeremiah returns, it is useless. The Lord uses this picture to speak to Judah; the nation has been bound to the Lord, like a belt around the waist, but she has rotted away with her worship of idols. The Lord will bring this false pride of the nation to an end of those who worship the idols.

13.12 – 14 The Lord uses another picture, this time of wineskins full of wine. The Lord is going to allow the continuing abuse of alcohol in the land, which is pervading the whole Judean society, and will bring them down through that, bringing their sorry story of decadence to an end through his judgement.

13.15- 27 The darkness of captivity is coming, which will see the whole royal family imprisoned and Judah carried off in exile, and this captivity will be carried out by those whom Israel trusted as allies, Babylon. Judah's sin has led to this, which they seem to have no way of turning from. 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?' asks the Lord. Judah is entrenched in sin, and her adulterous behaviour with other gods will be fully exposed, to her shame.

14.1 – 12 Natural disaster will also hit Judah, in the form of drought, affecting every level of society. In their crying out to God in the midst of their need, however, the Lord will refuse to hear them. He even tells Jeremiah not to pray for the people of Judah, because He will not listen.

14.13 – 18 Jeremiah complains to the Lord that all the other prophets are seeking to counteract his doom-laden words with words of encouragement and comfort. But the Lord makes it clear that they are speaking lies out of the own delusions, and the end of them will be the same as the rest of the people. This is not pleasing to the Lord, but actually causes Him great sorrow and mourning.

14.19 – 15.2 There is a heartfelt prayer of confession in these verses, as the prophet prays on behalf of his people for mercy. There is even an appeal to the covenant with Judah, asking God not to break it (even though the people have repeatedly broken covenant.) There is a realisation that the idols are useless, and it is the Lord who brings blessing. Yet the Lord's reply is forthright. 'Even if Moses and Samuel were to intercede, my heart would not go out to this people.' There is something very final about the Lord's decision, the people have gone beyond a boundary and the wheels of history are in motion.

15.3 – 9 The devastation is coming in different ways, but the end will be shame for Judah before the nations of the world, and the reason is the last straw, Manasseh, in his idolatry.

No one will be there to feel pity for Jerusalem, for the Lord is now bringing the episode of national disgrace to an end. This is not the time for compassion, but for justice, for

right-wising. The obstinate disobedience of His people has brought God to the place of judgement, unleashing the promised curses upon them because of their corporate sin.

These are such harsh words to hear from a loving God; but warnings that are given and not heeded must eventually lead to disaster. This is a deeply sobering and heart-breaking phase of the story of God's people.

Day 212

Jeremiah Under Pressure

Jeremiah 15. 10 – 17.18

Jer.15.10- 21 Jeremiah is feeling the weight of these heavy oracles he has been given to share. Not only is he delivering words of awful judgement, but he is being attacked for sharing them, in obedience to the Lord.

But the Lord gives him hope, and promises strength to endure. There is certainly an apocalypse coming to Judah, and Jeremiah is to remain faithful to the Lord's word. The Lord is with Jeremiah, to be His rescuer and redeemer.

The character of Jeremiah is seen in this passage; he is not a man untouched by the terrible situation of his nation. He is not vindictive and misanthropic. He feels keenly the pain of what is coming upon them.

16.1-9 Like Hosea before him, Jeremiah is called to be personally involved in the words the Lord is bringing through him. He is not to marry, or have children; he is not to party with people, nor to go to funeral wakes. In this way, Jeremiah will be a constant witness to the coming tragedy, and in relationship with people around him, will be a reminder that all is not well, despite their partying and going on with life as normal.

16.10-21 Jeremiah is to be clear when people ask him why he is so down on them, that the reason is because of their unfaithfulness to the promises and covenant they made with the Lord, and the worshipping of idols which are not God. Like fisherman catching fish trapped in a dammed lake, the Lord will catch Judah in her faithlessness.

In case anyone is in any doubt as to whether the pagan idols have any deity, they are called 'false gods' and 'worthless idols.'

17.1-4 Because of their idolatry, Judah is about to lose their national heritage in the Lord.

17.5-8 The alliances they have made with other nations, their trust in man, will be of no help to them at all. In contrast, reliance upon the Lord results in a confidence and supply of life which never fails.

17.9-11 Here are deep and cutting words about the nature of man's core essence, his heart. Man deceives himself constantly into believing he is in the right, when he is in fact doing evil. Sin makes man deaf to the voice of God, searing his conscience so that it cannot function to warn of danger. But the Lord knows the heart perfectly, and

His assessment and evaluation are not tainted with the evil bent which is like poison in man's veins.

Those who grow rich at others' expense will have their riches confiscated, leaving them in shame.

17.12-18 **Jeremiah's Cry** The prophet cries out to the Lord, worshipping His holiness, His uniqueness. He is the spring of eternal life (cf John 7.37) and yet Judah has stopped drinking from Him.

Jeremiah pleads with the Lord to quickly fulfil His word, and vindicate His servant, who is being pursued and persecuted. It reminds us that being the Lord's witnesses are not welcome to the spirit of the age, and we will never be friends to the evil reign of man without God.

Day 213

The Potter's House Jeremiah 17.19 – 20.13

Jer.17.19 – 27 If Judah is to live in accordance with the covenant, then she has to live in the rhythm of covenant. Keeping Sabbath is not just about obeying God to keep out of trouble. It is God's peaceable heartbeat of life which images the nature of the Creator who also knows how to rest from His work. The reasons for not keeping the Sabbath are always linked to fear of being overtaken or of being outsmarted in competition. This attitude bespeaks lack of trust in the one who is the Lord of the Sabbath, the Sabbath which, Jesus says, is made for man.

Sabbath for the New Covenant people is not annulled; it is no longer a legalistic burden, but to live in the path of Christ is to take seriously God's call to six days' creation and one day's recreation. No longer tied to one day (Christians moved their worship day away from the Jewish Saturday Sabbath to avoid confusion.) , there is nonetheless a call to honour God by leaving work and productivity alone for at least one day a week.

Jer. 18. 1 – 12 Jeremiah receives another action prophecy; this time the Lord will speak to him through the work of the potter. Perhaps Jeremiah sees him mar a couple of pots, then recast them on the wheel. The Lord tells him that Judah is clay in His hands, but if they would repent, He could remake them so differently. As it is, like a pot that has been dried and fired, the only way to deal with them is to break them.

The Lord knows that Judah will ignore Him.

18.13 – 17 The Lord appeals to those listening, against His wayward people. How can this people turn to the inanity of idols? How can they forget the salvation God has brought them? For this, they will become an example to the nations of the Lord's willingness to visit the consequences of actions upon His people.

18.18 – 23 In a reaction to the powerful warnings and denunciations of Israel, the Jews affirm their intention to direct propaganda against Jeremiah to discredit him, and to preserve the credibility of the religious establishment. Jeremiah cries to the Lord in his frustration at this campaign against him, and actually prays for the downfall of

this people, because of their harmful intentions towards the prophet. Here once again, Jeremiah's humanity surfaces, he gets angry and fearful.

19.1 – 13 The clay pot is used again in the image of the destruction of Jerusalem which Jeremiah presents publically, in the Tophet valley, also known as the Valley of Hinnom (in Hebrew, גֵּיאַ בֶּן-הִנּוֹם *Gey Ben Hinnom*), used for the worship of the idols and in particular for child sacrifice. From the name of this valley, and its later reputation as a place of disposal of the dead and the rejected, comes the term Gehenna (*Gey-hinnom*) linked to the concept of hell. For Judah, this will be the place where the dead will be brought.

19.14 – 20.6 When Jeremiah continues to pour out warnings of destruction, the priest, Passhur Ben-Immer has him beaten and put in the stocks to be pilloried. The campaign against the Lord's voice has taken a very physical turn. When Jeremiah is released, he speaks a harsh word to Passhur, saying that his name will become 'Magor-missabhibh' (Heb מַגּוֹר מִסָּבִיב), meaning, 'terror surrounding', because he will become a hub of fearful things going on.

20.14 – 18, 7 -13. Jeremiah's anger turns to self-pity and remorse as he curses the day of his birth, which has brought him to this pass. It is a bitter cry, and he accuses the Lord of betraying him and walking him into trouble.

Yet the prophet cannot but deliver what the Lord gives him to speak. Even when it is a hard word, if Jeremiah keeps it hidden, it just eats him up inside. Yet he knows that when he delivers it, there will be more trouble caused, and it will backfire on him.

However, the prophet finds his strength even in this in the Lord. He knows the God of justice will act justly, and commits his way again to the ability of the Lord to rescue Him.

Day 214

King Josiah Leads a National U-Turn (621BC)

2 Kings 22.3 -8; 2 Chron. 34.8- 33; 2 Kings 23.4 – 20; 24.2; 2 Chron 35. 1 – 19, 26-27

2 Kgs 22.3-7, 2 Chr.34.8-13 Although there has been public outcry against Jeremiah's messages, it seems that the king, Josiah, finally comes to a place of being willing to turn the nation around to follow the Lord (YHWH) wholeheartedly. After ruling eighteen years, at the age of twenty-six, he orders the repair and re-sanctification of the Temple, and work forges ahead to bring it back to its former glory.

2 Kgs 22.8; 2 Chron.34.14-15 In the process of bringing out the collection taken for the repair of the Temple, Hilkiah the Priest finds the abandoned scrolls of the Law, the *Torah*, the Lord's rule for life. It is passed over to Shaphan, who is able to read and explain it.

2 Chron.34.16 – 21 (mirrored in 2 Kgs.22.9 – 13) Shaphan the Scribe brings a report on the works to Josiah, but also reads to him from the *Torah* scrolls. As Josiah listens, he is filled with fear and remorse that the people of the Lord have rejected this teaching, and are living in danger of God's judgement, as Jeremiah has been saying.

Josiah now wants the Lord consulted on what they should do as a nation to put things to rights.

2 Chron.34.22 – 28 (mirrored in 2 Kgs 22.14-20) A woman of God emerges onto the scene at this point, Huldah, wife of Shallum Ben Tokhat. She confirms all that Jeremiah has been saying, except that she brings the comfort that because Josiah has taken notice and sought the Lord, he will not see the disaster that is to come in his lifetime, although it surely will come.

2 Chron.34.29 – 32 (mirrored in 2 Kings 23.1 – 3) The people of Judah are called together, and the *Torah* is read to them, following which the King renews the covenant with the Lord and His people.

It is an amazing day in Judah's story – a king who actually takes seriously the Lord's covenant.

2 Kings 23.4 – 14, 24; 2 Chron 34.33 Josiah now proceeds to cleanse and purge the nation of the idolatry which has dogged it for so long. He gets rid of the Ba'al and Asherah artifacts, and has their priests executed. He removes the shrine brothels where male and female prostitutes were operating, and desecrates all the places where anti-God worship has been going on. He is not much of a multi-culturalist!

2 Kings 23.15-20 Josiah does not limit his action to Judah. Since Israel has been removed from the land, he has Jeroboam's shrines at Bethel and Samaria destroyed and desecrated, as had been prophesied by the prophet in 1 Kings 13.1-3. When Josiah discovers the burial place of this man of God, he orders that his grave be left alone, in honour of his faithfulness to the Lord in the face of Jeroboam's disgusting rebellion. According to the prophecy, Josiah has the priests of these shrines executed, and their bodies burned on the altars, a sign of the total execration of these deceiving spirits.

2 Chron. 35.1-19, 26-27 (mirrored in 2 Kgs.23.21-23,28) To crown the restoration of the Lord's covenant with His people, Passover is celebrated at its proper time and the memorial feast of Israel's deliverance by the mighty and only God is kept. The ark is put back in the Temple, instead of being carried about the country. Everything is carried out in strict accordance with the law of Moses. The commentator on this event states that the Passover had not been observed so meticulously since the days of the prophet Samuel, a link back to the days before the monarchy. More pointedly, he says, 'No king of Israel had ever celebrated such a Passover as Josiah did.'

This then, is the zenith of the kings of Israel; the terrible nadir, the lowest point is not far away, however, as Huldah and Jeremiah have both avowed from the Lord.

Day 215

Judah's Decline Continues (c609-608BC)

2 Chronicles 35.20-25 ; 2 Kings 23.30b – 37; Jeremiah 22.10-17; 26.1 - 23

2 Chron.34.20-25 (mirrored in 2 Kgs 23.29-30) Having led such a renewal of faith in the land of Judah, it might have been hoped that Josiah would understand the ways of God. When Pharaoh Neco of Egypt passes through the valley of Jezreel en route to

support the fading Assyrian empire against the rising Babylonians at Carchemish on the Euphrates, Josiah takes exception and goes out to face the Egyptians in battle.

Neco asserts that it is God who is telling him to go and take on the Babylonians, and that he has no quarrel with Judah. He warns Josiah that if he pursues this fight, it will be disastrous for him. But Josiah, disguising himself to make it harder to spot him, presses on to battle.

The Judean king is wounded and later dies of his wounds in Jerusalem, a sad end for a Godly king. Jeremiah the prophet composes songs of sadness, laments for the dead Josiah, which become a part of the hymnody of the nation. We do not have any record of these songs today, unfortunately.

2 Kings 23.30 – 37 (mirrored in 2 Chron 36.1 – 5) The new King is Jehoahaz, also known as Shallum by Jeremiah. He reverts to ancient type for the kings, and rejects his father's ways, bringing the nation back into idolatry.

Neco of Egypt now moves in and, perhaps to provide himself with a buffer against the northern Babylonians, takes Judah as a vassal state. Jehoahaz is taken captive and exiled, and puts Eliakim, Josiah's son, in place as a puppet king. In an interesting move, the Pharaoh stops Eliakim using the *El* (Heb עֵל) prefix to his name, which signifies God, and makes him change to Jehoiakim, the prefix signifying the Lord (YHWH). J. Mauchline in Peake's Commentary suggests this was done as a conciliatory gesture, to acknowledge the integrity of the Jewish God. H L Ellison on the other hand, in IVF's New Bible Commentary, suggests it was a move to show that Pharaoh had the power now over the land, even to change names.

The fact is, we are not told the reason for the change, but can be sure that it would be to Neco's advantage. Jehoahaz is taken away to Egypt, and dies there.

Jehoiakim's reign is no better than his brother's, and Judah pays heavily for its vassal status to Egypt – about 3.4 tons of silver and 34kg of gold are handed over, paid for by increased taxes on the people.

Jer. 22. 10 -17 Jeremiah speaks into the national situation after Josiah's death. He urges not mourning for the dead, but for the exile, Jehoahaz, whom he calls Shallum. He says he will never return. He also inveighs against Jehoiakim who is busy enriching himself and improving his property, at a time when the people are hard-pressed by the tax demands they were under. Jeremiah recalls the justice and contentment of Josiah, and contrasts it with Shallum's corrupt and hedonistic reign.

Jer. 26. 1 – 23 Jeremiah the prophet now faces the full retaliation of the antagonistic nation as he delivers again his words of warning if they do not follow the Lord.

After delivering his words, he is arrested by the leaders and people, and a demand made for his death. The officials take their places to judge, and the case is put against him. He proceeds to defend himself by saying that he has spoken what the Lord has given to him to speak, and others rally to him saying that he should not be killed for delivering words from the Lord. There is also a reminder given of the words of Micah in his prophecy during Hezekiah's reign, in Micah 3.12, that Zion would become a

heap of rubble. Jeremiah is not the first to say these things and Hezekiah didn't have Micah killed.

Because of these interventions, Jeremiah is released and allowed to leave. In a parenthesis, Jeremiah mentions what happened to Uriah Ben-Shemaiah, another prophet who was bringing the same message. He fled for safety to Egypt, but he was arrested there by Jehoiakim's officials, returned to Jerusalem and executed for his words, being thrown into a common grave in disgrace.

Day 216

Judah's Oppressor, Egypt, Will Be Judged

Jeremiah 46.1 – 47.7

With Egypt now oppressing Judah, Jeremiah has words of warning for them. Despite their using the Jews as a buffer, and installing Jehoiakim as their puppet, they will not be able to withstand the new power of Babylon, whose rising star, Nebuchadnezzar, has defeated them at Carchemish.

Jer. 46.1 – 11 Jeremiah speaks of the flight of the Egyptian armies, defeated from the battle. The Lord is pursuing them, and will bring retribution for their daring to touch Judah. Even though they seek refuge on the eastern banks of Jordan, in Gilead, there will be no protection for them there.

46.12-26 Not only have the Egyptians been defeated in the battle in Syria, but the Babylonians are going to rain down on them in destruction and defeat from the north. Although Egypt is 'a beautiful heifer', a horse-fly is coming to bite her. Those from other parts of Africa who are being paid to swell her armies will leave her, and she will be defenceless. There will be judgement on Egypt's gods, including Pharaoh, who is seen as a living deity. However, Egypt will survive to continue as a nation in her land. (46.26)

46.27 – 28 Given the inability of Egypt to stand against Babylon, Judah must have felt like they were going to be obliterated in the coming deluge. However, the Lord promises deliverance from exile and re-establishment in the land. Their coming suffering will be correction, not annihilation.(46.28) The Lord's global purpose through His people has not altered since the promise to Abraham.

47. 1 – 7 Israel's old enemy, the Philistines, are also being invaded by Egypt, as part of their buffer-state arrangement. They will be taken off the map, with great mourning for the remnant of Gaza and Ashkelon, the Philistine cities.

Jeremiah is again seen in his pain and remorse as he calls upon the Lord to turn from all this destruction.(47.6) However, He realises that this is the Lord's purpose, and God will not be diverted from it.