

God and Jeremiah have a dialogue in this chapter in which Jeremiah at first tries to excuse the behavior of the people. Then, Jeremiah seeks to come to terms with the required punishment upon the people. Lastly, Jeremiah learns how to pray based on God's covenant faithfulness. The main point of the sermon is:

God sends the curses of the covenant down on breakers of the covenant, and yet God never breaks His covenant promise to give us life.

1. Judgment: no water (v.1-6)

The supply of water could never be taken for granted in ancient Israel. When there was flash flooding, they needed to collect every ounce of that precious water. So, huge cisterns were carved out of rock and lined. Broken cisterns were ones that the lining of the cistern was damaged and the water escaped. During a drought, the community would use up all other reservoirs of water, and finally would turn to these huge cisterns as a last resort.

By the time community would start to use the water from these emergency cisterns, all other regular sources of water had been used up.

Okay, so the drought described here in Jeremiah 14 was severe and well advanced. Along with the shortage of water came distress for all in the community.

Verse 1 – the word of the LORD came to address the drought.

The scene is tragic and the impact is very weighty, like the opening scene of a movie.

Verse 2 – they mourned and languished, and “*her people lament on the ground...*” You can sense what might happen next. Someone will try to offer comfort to the distressed by saying “Oh, don't worry, we have the water in the cisterns.”

Then verse 3 – “*the nobles send their servants for water; they come to the cisterns; they find NO WATER...*”

The realization of what that means is heavy like a death sentence for the civilization.

Verse 4 – even the ground is dismayed, and the farmers are ashamed

Verse 5 – the does, well known for being tender mothers, forsook their newborns in the fields, because the does had no grass for grazing and so the mothers could produce no milk for their fawns.

Verse 6 – even the wild donkeys would climb to the highest point to look out and spot any green vegetation anywhere. So the donkeys looked and looked until their eyes fail. The obvious and ominous reason that their eyes failed is that there was no vegetation to be found. We get the message. They are all doomed.

Since water is so basic to life, the supply of water is a core covenant blessing. Withholding water was a very great curse. In the list of God's covenant blessings in Deuteronomy 28:12, we read that "*The LORD will open to you His good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands...*" In contrast, over in the list of covenant curses in Deuteronomy 28:24, listen to the opposite condition, "*The LORD will make the rain of your land powder. From heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed.*" Rain was a core covenant blessing.

Within the book of Jeremiah and within Judah's covenant relationship with God, such a thing as a drought must be seen as God's judgment upon them.

2. Judgment: no acceptance of prayers! (v.7-12)

The picture of this harsh judgment of a bad drought caused by sin is followed by Jeremiah's confession of sin and a request to the LORD, using His covenant name, for His help and assistance. Verse 7, "*Though our iniquities testify against us, act, O LORD, for YOUR name's sake; for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against you.*"

In verse 8, the covenant LORD is described with terms of endearment such as, "*hope of Israel,*" and "*Savior in time of trouble.*"

But before we can breathe a sigh of relief that the people are repenting, we get a very, very troubling image in verse 8. The LORD seems to pass by them without responding.

Verse 8, the prayer turns into Jeremiah confronting the LORD based on His uncharacteristic behavior, especially in the light of His covenant bond with the people.

Listen to the question put to the LORD in verse 8, "*...why should you be like a stranger in the land, like a traveler who turns aside to tarry for a night?*"

Instead of a sigh of relief, we get a chill. What is happening here? Why is God not receiving the prayers of confession?

Verse 9 continues to press the case, while the opportunity presents itself to speak to the LORD who is walking, "*Why should you be like a man confused, like a mighty warrior who cannot save? Yet you, O LORD, are in the midst of us, and we are called by Your name; do not leave us.*"

Should the LORD who is known as the God of Israel, take action to receive the repentance of Israel?

The LORD's response is not warm; it feels rather frosty already, and the LORD has not even spoken about it yet.

Verse 10, the LORD speaks to it. "*They have loved to wander thus; they have not restrain their feet; therefore the LORD does not accept them; now He will remember their iniquity and punish their sins.*"

Would it surprise us if God again did in verse 11 what God did previously in this book of Jeremiah – to instruct Jeremiah not to pray for the people?

Would it further surprise us to find that in verse 12, God stated that even if the people fast and pray, that God would not hear them, and even if they offered burnt offerings, God would not accept their sacrifices? In fact, we have a sharp statement at the end of verse 12, “*But I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence.*”

How do we understand God’s rejection. Not that God has gone back on His covenant, but rather, what we understand is that there is no going back on the punishment that this generation needed for its recalcitrant sin pattern.

Here is the key – Jeremiah’s prayers of repentance did not represent the people. Jeremiah’s intercessions were out of line with the people as God saw their hearts. God’s assessment of the people in verse 10 – that they loved to wander. Jeremiah’s prayers according to God’s name and God’s covenant did not match up with the condition of the people, whose fastings and prayers and offerings in verse 12 arose out of hearts with no repentance at all.

They just want to have a few revival meetings or a few “hail Mary’s” and expect that their relationship with God is all patched up.

God would not accept Jeremiah’s prayers of repentance on behalf of the people, when the people were not repenting. If that sort of prayer worked, many parents and grandparents would pray prayers on behalf of their children and grandchildren, and many pastors and elders would pray prayers of repentance on behalf of their congregants.

The people had not repented and moved toward God. Instead, the people still loved to wander away from God.

3. Judgment: no truth in preaching! (v.13-19)

In verse 13, we are introduced for the first time in Jeremiah to the false prophets. There were prophets who assured the people that their suffering did NOT equate to covenant curses.

Verse 14, the LORD made it very clear “*the prophets are prophesying lies in My name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds.*”

What will happen to those false prophets?

I have good news and bad news about what will happen to those false prophets. The good news from verse 15 is that the false prophets would be consumed by sword and famine.

The bad news of verse 16 is that the false prophets would bring the people down with them. Verse 16 reveals, “*And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem, victims of famine and sword, with none to*

bury them – them, their wives, their sons, and their daughters. For I will pour out their evil upon them.” There is no curse worse in the ancient mind than to not have a burial. This is painful for the LORD to do and say.

Verses 17 shows the grief of the LORD through Jeremiah His prophet – that his eyes will run down with tears night and day without ceasing. In verse 18, if Jeremiah were to go out to the field, he would see those killed with the sword, and if Jeremiah were to go into the city, he would see those killed by the famine. All because the prophets spoke as false prophets – spoke as those without knowledge of God.

Verse 19 – the people were rejected. Without the truth in preaching, they were without healing, without peace. They were stuck in a deadly cycle of falsehood and fear. They did not have truth in preaching from the false prophets.

4. Then life: covenant breakers learn to pray for blessing anyway, setting their hope on The Covenant Keeper. (v.20-22)

So, now that Jeremiah is learning. Jeremiah is better understanding what prayers are needed. Jeremiah is learning to pray differently.

What is really needed?

Verse 20, “*WE ACKNOWLEDGE OUR WICKEDNESS, O LORD...*”

The theme of praying for others is renewed.

Now Jeremiah stands in the tradition of Abraham, of Moses, and of Samuel, who prayed on behalf of God’s people, as their representative.

Jeremiah is learning to pray more and more exclusively for the glory of God.

Jeremiah prayed for a people who were surrounded by devastation and judgment. They were about to receive the grim penalty for their idolatry.

Jeremiah brought a prayer of confession acknowledging their prolonged period of apostasy. Jeremiah came to understand at a new level that if God abandons God’s own covenant love for His people, then all is lost for Judah.

As this 14th chapter progresses, Jeremiah pleads more and more consistently and exclusively based on God’s end of the covenant needing to be upheld by God Himself. We read in verse 21, Jeremiah pleading in prayer, “*Do not spurn us, for your name’s sake; do not dishonor Your glorious throne; remember and do not break Your covenant with us.*”

On what basis can Jeremiah pray for covenant breakers? On the basis of God the covenant keeper! Only on the basis of God.

Where does Jeremiah set his hope for an end of judgment and the beginning of rain that provides the needed water that brings life? The last verse tells us.

Verse 22, “*Are there any among the false gods of the nations that can bring rain? Or can the heavens give showers? Are you not He, O LORD our God? We set our hope on You, for You do all these things.*”

God is the only hope for Jeremiah. God is the only hope for His people.

CONCLUSION:

False prophets are promised to be a problem in the New Testament age also. Mark 13:22, "*False prophets and false Christs will arise...be on guard.*"

False preachers say that judgment can be averted, and lead us into a false sense of security. 2 Timothy 4:3, "*...the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions and will turn away from listening to the truth...*"

True preachers preach that judgment cannot be averted, and that forces us to reckon with our sin.

Since we are sinners, and judgment cannot be averted, how can God uphold His covenant promises - to give us life - to be our God - and that we can be His people?

The answer only becomes clear when we look at the cross.

Jesus was perfect, and yet when He simply bore our sins, He needed to suffer the sentence of death. Matthew 16:21, "*...Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.*"

Because He rose again, we have a new covenant in His name. Because Jesus was willing to suffer the judgment of God for us, we receive life in His name.

False prophets teach that God will be soft on people. But Jesus taught in Matthew 25 that only those people whose sins are covered by Jesus will receive blessing. The rest, will receive judgment of God eternally. Matthew 25:46, "*those will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*" And in John 3:36, "*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*" False preachers are liable to the judgment of God, and their congregations with them.

Paul referenced the prophets, which includes the prophet Jeremiah, when Paul was preaching in Acts 26:23, "*...I stand here testifying both to small and great [people], saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, He would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.*"

Judgment cannot be averted, but it can be re-assigned. If someone will take our place, God would receive that re-assigned judgment.

Our substitute would need to be someone who is perfect.

The only thing that ties this all together is the cross of Christ. There, the sins of the people can be fully punished, so that the covenant curses are poured out with everything that the sins deserved. Since judgment is accomplished in that way,

then life follows. After judgment at the cross, and the resurrection of Christ, then the people themselves can receive the blessings of the covenant.

How do we know that we will be received by this God? 1 John 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

Praise God that He is faithful and never breaks His covenant promise to give us life, even when it cost the life of His Son.