

Journey through Jeremiah Part 14 The Prophet Complains

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney, Th.D. – Wednesday, March 22, 2017

† Jeremiah 12:1-17

We continue with our studies in Jeremiah with Chapter 12. Last week we looked at Chapter 11 which detailed the broken covenant and the conspiracy of the people of Judah against the Lord. Tonight, Lord willing we will look at all of Chapter 12 which details a complaint from the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lord's answer to his complaint.

(1) Righteous *art* thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of *thy* judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? *wherefore* are all they happy that deal very treacherously?

All through our studies of Jeremiah thus far, we have seen that the Prophet is very respectful and meek. He has come to tears many times already over what is going on in his Land of Judah. But now it seems that Jeremiah has come to a point in his ministry that he is having difficulty understanding what is happening in light of God's power.

Notice he is still very respectful to God. He makes the statement that the LORD is righteous. He fully believes in the righteousness of God but he wants to ask him a question so he can try and grasp some kind of understanding for himself. He says: "yet let me talk with thee of thy judgements." Again, he is not questioning God's right to judge the people, that goes without saying.

He says, "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? *wherefore* are all they happy that deal very treacherously?" Remember, in our last studies in Chapter 11 we saw that Jeremiah's own countrymen of Anathoth had plotted to kill him. Yet they were living high on the hog and Jeremiah couldn't make sense of it.

I think it is only natural that we would question that. I have questioned that myself. In fact, it used to really bother me that those that didn't live for the LORD seemed to have things much better. Why should a man be allowed to be rich and have everything life affords when he doesn't even know God while so many of God's faithful people seem to do without? How come a sinner can go through life with perfect health yet people like my sister or my dad had to suffer so? And, like I said, it used to really bother me until one day the Lord revealed to me that this life down here on earth is very very short. While the sinner may appear to have it made and prosper, this short time on earth is the only pleasure they will ever know. If they leave this life unsaved they will spend eternity burning in hell where there is no pleasures. Yet, the saved will be living in the riches and splendor of Heaven. That made me feel much better about it. – But so far my own countrymen have not tried to kill me, that I know of...

(2) Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: thou *art* near in their mouth, and far from their reins.

He described the wicked men of Anathoth. They are prospering and they lay claim to the LORD and from their mouth they speak the things of the LORD yet they are far from His reins. They are only paying lip service, it's not real.

(3) But thou, O LORD, knowest me: thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee: pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter.

Jeremiah in his sincerity tells the Lord that He knows his heart. And we know that to be true because in the very beginning of the Book of Jeremiah we read this:

Jeremiah 1:5 Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, *and* I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.

Jeremiah is much like the Psalmist who cried out, **Psalm 139:23-24**: Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: 24 And see if *there be any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

"pull them out like sheep for the slaughter," here Jeremiah is urging God to pull those worst offenders out and give the rest of the land and people a reprieve.

(4) How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? the beasts are consumed, and the birds; because they said, He shall not see our last end.

Jeremiah asks the Lord how long the land would have to continue to suffer because of the wickedness of the people? Because of their wickedness, the Lord has withheld the rains needed for crops, even the animals are suffering because of their sin.

(5) If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, *wherein* thou trustedst, *they* wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?

And now we get to the LORD's reply to Jeremiah and it's not the reply that Jeremiah wanted to hear. The LORD asks him the question, "***if the footmen have wearied thee, how in the world will you be able to contend with the horses?***" That was my translation... In other words, if you think things are bad now when the foot soldiers are attacking you, what will you do when the powerful warriors on horseback come at you? These are symbols of war. Jeremiah is in battle against his own people and they have wearied him to the point that he is complaining to God about it.

He also asks him, "***if you are weary in a land of peace, how will you hold up in the swelling Jordan?***" Again, my translation... Yes, things have been bad but this is a cakewalk compared to what is in store for you. It's time to toughen up and face the battle. There is no room for sissies.

It makes me think of people these days that claim they have been called to preach or called to a foreign mission field yet they can't even take share the Gospel in their own home or workplace or community. Look, if you can't handle it where you are, you can't handle it on the foreign mission field.

(6) For even thy brethren, and the house of thy father, even they have dealt treacherously with thee; yea, they have called a multitude after thee: believe them not, though they speak fair words unto thee.

Now we get the insight that Jeremiah's own family members were up against him. If you can't trust your own family, who can you trust? To Jeremiah's face they pretended all was well and they were in agreement with him, but behind his back

they were consorting with the enemy. Jeremiah is going to have a tough time of it his entire ministry.

(7) I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies.

This is still the LORD speaking. He is stating that He had to cut loose the people that he loved because of their sins. He is no longer in the Temple because they defiled it. He gave them over to the hands of their enemies as the direct result of their willingness to sin and their continued disobedience.

(8) Mine heritage is unto me as a lion in the forest; it crieth out against me: therefore have I hated it.

Judah's disobedience and sin is so strong in their life that they have become fierce about it, like a lion is fierce. They love their sin so much that they are willing to kill to protect it, even if it means killing the Prophet of God. So, the LORD says that he hates it.

(9) Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird, the birds round about are against her; come ye, assemble all the beasts of the field, come to devour.

This verse can be somewhat confusing but from my studies what I understand about this is that the Lord is comparing sinful Judah with bird of prey. A speckled bird is considered a bird of prey like a vulture. The birds around her have come to attack her and the LORD has allowed it.

(10) Many pastors have destroyed my vineyard, they have trodden my portion under foot, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. (11) They have made it desolate, and being desolate it mourneth unto me; the whole land is made desolate, because no man layeth it to heart.

The word "pastors" here can be translated as "rulers or governors," and not necessarily as "shepherds," such as how we use the word pastor today. It is talking about the many different ones that have attacked Judah and turned it into a desolate wasteland.

(12) The spoilers are come upon all high places through the wilderness: for the sword of the LORD shall devour from the one end of the land even to the other end of the land: no flesh shall have peace.

This is another description of how bad it will be when the LORD pours out His holy wrath upon Judah and allow their enemies to invade and conquer them. It will be a slaughter and bloodbath.

(13) They have sown wheat, but shall reap thorns: they have put themselves to pain, but shall not profit: and they shall be ashamed of your revenues because of the fierce anger of the LORD.

This is an example of the land suffering because of their sins. They will plant crops but they will fail. The land which God had given to them and blessed them with will no longer be fertile and productive but will be worthless.

(14) Thus saith the LORD against all mine evil neighbours, that touch the inheritance which I have caused my people Israel to inherit; Behold, I will pluck them out of their land, and pluck out the house of Judah from among them.

This is an interesting passage. We find here that the LORD is going to punish those pagan countries that participated in the destruction of Israel and cause them too to be "plucked" out of their lands. That word "plucked," means "to tear away violently, or to pull up by the roots." This is symbolic of how fast and violent they will all be carried off into captivity, the people of Judah and their neighboring enemies of the Ammonites and Syrians.

(15) And it shall come to pass, after that I have plucked them out I will return, and have compassion on them, and will bring them again, every man to his heritage, and every man to his land.

This of course is describing how the LORD will keep His promise to the inhabitants of Israel and Judah that He would be their God and they would be His people. He will always love and protect His chosen people Israel. They will have to spend 70-years in captivity but He will allow them to come back and they will receive their rightful inheritance.

Not only will Israel be returned to their land but so will the gentile nations that he punished as well, however, there is a condition on them as we see in the last 2 verses:

(16) And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, The LORD liveth; as they taught my people to swear by Baal; then shall they be built in the midst of my people. (17) But if they will not obey, I will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation, saith the LORD.

These foreign nations are to learn the ways of God's people and live for him and he will give them safety but if they do not do what He says then he will pluck them up again and destroy them from the face of the earth. We know that is exactly what happened to most of their neighboring enemies.