

A WORK ON THE WHEELS

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In the days of the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah, the people were very wicked. That they were the covenant people of God was no protection for them. God sent the nation of Assyria, more wicked than Israel, to conquer them. The people of the kingdom of Judah did not learn from the example of their northern brothers, and they continued in their rebellion against God. Jeremiah was one of the prophets God sent to prophesy to Judah. On one occasion, God told him to go to the potter's house, and there He would have a word for him. The prophet went to the potter's house as God said, and there he saw him working at his wheel. The vessel he made was flawed, so he began anew. Then God spoke to Jeremiah:

O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them. Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. (Jeremiah 18:6-11)

A potter takes a lump of clay, he puts it on the pottery wheel, and he fashions it into a vessel, as he likes. If the vessel is flawed, if it does not turn out to his liking, then he begins again. God would ask Israel if He can do with them as the potter did with the clay. The answer is that, of course, he can. He is the creator. He created the world out of nothing, and He made the first man out of the dust of the ground. (Genesis 1:26, 27) He not only created mankind, but he also sustains them. He gives them life, and breath, and all things. (Acts 17:25) He is God Almighty. (Genesis 17:1; Exodus 6:3) He is the sovereign God who works His will in the world. By His providence, all things come to pass. Through Isaiah the prophet, He said, "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." (Isaiah 46:9, 10) This includes the rising and falling of nations. Daniel the prophet said, "And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings." (Daniel 2:21) God's purposes may be mysterious, but the fact of His providence is no mystery.

God is great, but He is also good. He is almighty and He works His will in the world. He is not capricious, however; He is perfectly good and perfectly righteous. Moses sang of Him, "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." (Deuteronomy 32:4) God is not arbitrary; He does nothing without good reason. He can do no wrong, for His nature is the very foundation of goodness. God is just, and so He repays men according to their works. When He revealed Himself to Moses, He said to him:

The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. (Exodus 34:6, 7)

In the Psalms, King David wrote to God, “Thou renderest to every man according to his work.” (Psalm 62:12) Through the Jeremiah the prophet God said, “I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” (Jeremiah 17:10) If a man would have God bless him, then he should obey God. If he would not have God curse Him, then he should repent of his sins.

Jeremiah appealed to people to repent, but they would not. They rather persecuted the prophet. The Scriptures say:

Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words. Give heed to me, O LORD, and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me. Shall evil be recompensed for good? for they have digged a pit for my soul. Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, and to turn away thy wrath from them. (Jeremiah 18:18-20)

The people of the kingdom of Judah did not repent of their sins, so God sent the Babylonians to destroy them. Jeremiah prayed:

Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee: Thou shewest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the LORD of hosts, is his name, Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. (Jeremiah 32:17-19)

Men answer to God, and nations comprise men. A nation may be good or evil, righteous or unrighteous, according to the men it comprises. So, God may say that He will bless a nation; but if the people do evil, then God will not bless them as He said He would; He will rather destroy them. If God threatens to destroy a nation because of their evil ways, but the people repent, then God will not destroy them as He threatened; He will rather bless them. Nations are not subject to fate, but to providence. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because the people were wicked, and would not repent, but He spared Nineveh because the people did repent in sackcloth and ashes.

Let us repent of our sins. Let us call sinners to repent of their sins. Let us proclaim both God’s justice and His mercy, and pray that our nation will repent and turn to God.

Now unto the God of all grace, who hath called us into His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, be glory and dominion for ever and ever. *Amen.*