

## Triad of Terror (Jeremiah 14:1–22)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (3/29/2020)

### Introduction

1. It was very surprising to me, considering our present coronavirus crisis, to read the following verse in preparation for this Lord's-day sermon.

*“Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence”* (v. 12).

Pestilence is an infectious disease that spreads throughout a city or country.

2. The *sword-famine-pestilence* trio is found 27 times in the OT (17 in Jeremiah and 7 in Ezekiel, with 1 each in Leviticus, First and Second Chronicles).

The first mention of this triad of terror is in Leviticus, which is the source of its use in subsequent passages (Leviticus 26:25). Notice that the purpose for this judgment is *“vengeance for the covenant.”* The context of this verse is the curses threatened for disobedience and covenant breaking. Covenant breaking was the cause of God's wrath on Judah in Jeremiah. Break the covenant and the Lord will break you.

3. The Lord chose Israel to be the kingdom of God on earth in the pursuit of the fulfilment of Genesis 3:15. Three things are involved in this purpose and the threats mentioned above as found in the OT: (1) *people* (the nation) that God chose for Himself to honor His name, (2) a *covenant* (the law) to bind and regulate His people, and (3) a *place* (the temple) for His people to worship Him.
4. The number 3 also symbolizes divine completion and perfection through resurrection. What seemed like a failure for Israel, ending in judgment, was but a part of the plan to destroy Satan and end the reign of sin and death through a Second Adam. Here is a principle: God gives a vision of something; but He kills the vision beyond earthly hope of restoration. Then, when all seems impossible, He resurrects the vision in glorious power and brings it to completion in perfection. This applies to the judgment on Israel in order to bring Jesus onto the stage of history to establish the new covenant with a new people of God who would be fit citizens for the eternal kingdom.

### I. Adam and Death

1. Death is the natural consequence of Adam's sin.
  - a. All humans are under the curse of death because of Adam's sin (Romans 5:12). The OT focuses on death as a consequence of sin and rebellion, the natural consequence of the sin of Adam as the federal head of the race.
  - b. The tendency of fallen humans is to think that God owes them life, success, happiness, and whatever. When an epidemic or other tragic circumstance befalls them, His seeming distance is noticed. His goodness and even His existence is questioned. They reason, “If God truly exists and loves us, why didn't He stop the plague and spare people such loss, suffering, and even death?” The truth is, we all deserve death, but we live and enjoy many good things. We are under this curse of death by virtue of our descent from Adam. That we are allowed to live at all is a mercy. He owes us nothing.

2. Israel was chosen to demonstrate the goodness of God to the nations.
  - a. *Israel* demonstrated the need for and hope of redemption from Adam's curse. God chose out of the nations a people for His name. God then entered covenant with this people, promising to be their God and dwelling among them (Exodus 15:26).
  - b. However, as a largely unregenerate people, Israel walked in Adam's rebellion. She also demonstrated the futility of the natural man to achieve redemption through obedience, even when that obedience was encouraged by promises and threats from prophets God sent to plead with the nation.
  - c. Israel's earthly kingdom existence ended with her covenant breaking and refusal to repent. This is plainly stated in Jeremiah: "*Do not pray for the welfare of this people. Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence*" (Jeremiah 14:11, 12). This was "*vengeance for the covenant.*"

## II. The Descent to Doom

1. Though Israel often failed, deliverance was promised when a spiritually attentive people stood on God's promises, repented and turned from their evil ways.
  - a. For example, the sword threatened Judah when a great multitude of Moabites and Ammonites, and Meunites invaded the land when Jehoshaphat was king (he was Judah's fourth king after the division under Rehoboam, reigned 24 years (872–848 BC). Jehoshaphat sought the Lord, proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah, and assembled the nation to seek help from their covenant Lord (2 Chronicles 20:1–9).
  - b. Jehoshaphat reflected Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, in which Solomon asked for a path to mercy and deliverance if people disobeyed and came under judgment. God answered: "*If my people who are called by my name, humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land*" (2 Chronicles 7:14). Notice the one thing that conditioned His response: His people must humble themselves, pray, seek His face, and repent of their sin.
  - c. The prophet Jahaziel gave Jehoshaphat the Lord's promise of deliverance: "*Thus says the LORD to you, 'Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God's'*" (v. 15). The next morning, the people of Judah went into the wilderness of Tekoah, and as they sang praises, the Lord delivered them by setting an ambush against the enemy.
2. Why was it different in Jeremiah's day?
  - a. First, although the people sinned, they obstinately refused to *repent* and *turn from their wicked ways* (14:10).
  - b. Second, the Lord warned them repeatedly throughout their existence, but, in the end, they would not *listen*. That pattern of warning began when the spies returned with their evil report, the people stubbornly refused the pleadings of Moses, Joshua, and Caleb (Numbers 14:10–12).
3. Third, they preferred false prophets who told them what they wanted to hear (14:14).

### III. The Greater Hope

1. As noted in the introduction, the number 3 promises greater hope that God's plan would be completed in perfection.
  - a. This hope is realized in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Christ rose the third day). Christ has a new people for His name (followers of the way; Acts 9:2). These people are bound to Him by covenant (the law of Christ), and they worship Him in the true temple (the church [assembly] of the living God).
  - b. The difference between the old covenant people and the new covenant people is that in the second Adam, Jesus Christ, *perfection* is assured as His salvation will be fully completed in the resurrection of His people. Until that time, saints have the Spirit to enable them to defeat self and sin and to sanctify them in holiness. An unrepenting Christian is a contradiction.
2. The end of the age and the transition to the eternal state are described in Revelation. Nevertheless, the age is to close with judgment eerily like the one ending Israel's age (Ezekiel 14:21; Revelation 6:7, 8; This is the only time the triad of terror appears in the NT).
  - a. Revelation is a letter to the *churches*, not Israel. But at the end of the age, like Israel, many churches will also follow Israel's pattern of rebellion. They will neither glorify Christ nor pursue His will in the world. "*Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared*" (1 Timothy 4:1, 2). They love the world far more than they love Christ.
  - b. Many church members obstinately refuse to repent and turn from their wicked ways. They will not *listen* to or acknowledge the truth, but, like Israel, they "*accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions*" (2 Timothy 4:3).
  - c. Our current Covid-19 crisis is either a warning or a judgment on the world. Is the erring church somehow responsible? May God grant us grace to hear, respond in humble repentance, and plead revival in these terrible days.