

What Will You Do? (Jeremiah 12:5–17)

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Introduction

The fascinating story interwoven in Jeremiah's faithfully proclaimed prophetic words is the prophet's own struggle to understand God, His ways, and the trials which he endured. Although he kept his own heart right, real danger lay before him if he continued to tell his people the truth (Jeremiah 11:18, 19).

The book of Jeremiah is a very intricate and involved presentation of Israel's final days as a peculiar people blessed of God. Their position in the world as representing a people of God living out God's standards in God's way was soon to end. The reason for this sad finish is plainly stated: "*The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant that I made with their fathers*" (Jeremiah 11:10). The judgment ending Israel's apostasy was anything but sudden, demonstrating the great patience of Yahweh (Jeremiah 11:7, 8).

A serious question must be raised: If Yahweh is sovereign, why did He not fix Israel's covenant violations with sovereign grace and enable His old-covenant people to obey and prosper? Yahweh had a greater plan—setting forth Israel's failures to glorify His perfect Son.

I. History

1. This section of Jeremiah (11:18–13:27) covers the last days of Josiah's reign (31 years), the short reign of Jehoahaz (Shallum, 13 months), and the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim (Eliakim, 11 years). The book of Jeremiah was written in Jehoiakim's fourth year.
 - a. The prophet Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, the priest, lived in Anathoth of Benjamin, about 2 miles north of Jerusalem.
 - b. Jeremiah was called by God to prophesy to Judah early in the reign of Josiah. Some have suggested that Jeremiah was 13 when God called him.
2. Although a godly king, Josiah's reign ended when he presumptively engaged Pharaoh Necho of Egypt in battle. He was succeeded by his son, Jehoahaz, a wholly evil man whose short reign ended when he was taken captive to Egypt. Pharaoh Necho replaced him with Jehoiakim, a brother.
3. Judah escaped the fate of her northern neighbor, Israel, because in God's providence Jehoiakim became a vassal to the Egyptian king. Judah paid tribute to Egypt until Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt at which time tribute transferred to Babylon until Jehoiakim rebelled.
4. During these days of intrigue, the people chafed at the foreign influence but were encouraged with false hope by false prophets and pastors (Jeremiah 8:11).

II. Context

1. Against the backdrop of the international struggle, the declining state of Judah's spirituality, and the false assurance of her shepherds, the message of Jeremiah was met with great resistance. Yahweh revealed a very unnerving fact—a plot to silence the prophet by threatening his life, concocted by his own kinsmen (Jeremiah 11:21, 22).
2. Jeremiah responded to this revelation with a sincere complaint (Jeremiah 12:1–4).
 - a. Why would the Lord allow the wicked to prosper in the nation that Yahweh planted, a people who confessed Him with the mouth but wandered far from Him (vv. 1, 2)?
 - b. The tenderhearted prophet also wept over the devastation wrecking his nation and prayed for an immediate removal of the evil destroying it (Jeremiah 12:3b, 4).
3. The Lord's response to the prophet is found in verses 5 and following.
 - a. He did not give the prophet the answers he wanted but rather instructed him to pursue the strength of the Lord (v. 5). There are experiences in life more terrible than death that God calls His to endure. When peo-

ple endure, they glorify God. More severe times were coming—times when Jeremiah would welcome death. The Lord’s method to prepare His servants is revealed in this text.

- 1) In the days of Josiah, the prophet ran with the footmen, so to speak. Harsher service lay before him.
 - 2) God placed His confidence in the prophet, which was meant to encourage him. Yahweh revealed that He called this man, knowing him in all his weakness yet fully determined to use him to accomplish His will. Jeremiah must trust His God and rest fully in His power.
- b. Jeremiah was wearied with past ministry, haunted by the death threats, and fearful of the uncertainty of a perilous future, even those of his own household would betray him (v. 6; Matthew 10:36).
 - c. The Lord advised the prophet that he was engaged in spiritual warfare and must not expect to see its resolution in his time or in the way he preferred (Ephesians 6:10, 11). This is God’s method with His people as they enter His work of destroying the enemy and restoring His righteousness in the earth.

III. The Goal

1. God chose Abraham and his descendants for Himself to make them a nation that He would bless *if* they would to be a righteous and just people.
 - a. He protected the fledgling nation for 400 years, preventing their amalgamation into the idolatrous Canaanite tribes with their abominable sexual practices.
 - b. He preserved them in Egypt, which, because of the racial prejudice of the Egyptians, protected them from that nation’s idolatry and abominations.
 - c. He gave them His holy law, explicitly commanding and threatening them *not* to desire or practice the sexual abominations of the Egyptians and Canaanites.
 - d. The Lord warned that if Israel disobeyed Him, He would bring severe judgment and wrath on His people.
2. On the other hand, there is good news (vv. 14–17).
 - a. The Lord shows great mercy to foreigners who turn from their worship of false gods and abominable practices by wholly identifying themselves with the one true God. To genuine repenters Yahweh promises full pardon and eternal hope (Isaiah 56:1-8).
 - b. It has always been and always will be that those whom the Lord God loves He will bring into His covenant community.
 - c. His covenant community is governed by blessed and glorious standards by which to live —good laws that reflect God’s own holiness and righteousness (Isaiah 42:21).
 - d. God, in saving grace, always instructs His people to turn from what He says is abominable and to pursue and practice what delights Him and blesses the obedient (Titus 2:11-14).
3. The Lord’s original design was to create a new race in His image to reflect His glory in the earth (Colossians 1:9–14).
 - a. What physical Israel would never be, the true children of Abraham, the New-Covenant followers of Jesus, will be—the righteous nation God designed (Jeremiah 12:14–17; Hebrews 10:14–25).
 - b. As in Israel there was a mixed multitude, so in the New Covenant there will be those who profess the Lord but follow Israel’s propensity to provoke Him. They, too, will suffer His wrath without mercy (Jeremiah 12:2; Hebrews 10:26–31).