

The Broken Covenant

Jeremiah 11

Jeremiah 11:1-13 - *“The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, ²“Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; ³and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel: “Cursed is the man who does not obey the words of this covenant ⁴ which I commanded your fathers in the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and do according to all that I command you; so shall you be My people, and I will be your God,’ ⁵ that I may establish the oath which I have sworn to your fathers, to give them ‘a land flowing with milk and honey,’ as it is this day.”” And I answered and said, “So be it, Lord.”*

⁶ Then the Lord said to me, “Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying: ‘Hear the words of this covenant and do them. ⁷ For I earnestly exhorted your fathers in the day I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, until this day, rising early and exhorting, saying, “Obey My voice.” ⁸ Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone followed the dictates of his evil heart; therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but which they have not done.”

⁹ And the Lord said to me, “A conspiracy has been found among the men of Judah and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁰ They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers who refused to hear My words, and they have gone after other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers.”

¹¹ Therefore thus says the Lord: “Behold, I will surely bring calamity on them which they will not be able to escape; and though they cry out to Me, I will not listen to them. ¹² Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the gods to whom they offer incense, but they will not save them at all in the time of their trouble. ¹³ For according to the number of your cities were your gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem you have set up altars to that shameful thing, altars to burn incense to Baal.”

Background Notes

After his call by the Lord in chapter 1, Jeremiah gave two prophetic messages (chapters 2-6). His message in chapters 7-10 is often called Jeremiah’s “Temple Address,” because the content of these four chapters was probably given in the Temple area of Jerusalem, soon after the tragic death of King Josiah in 609 BC. Chapter 7 is the more well-known of these four chapters. It is called the “Temple Sermon” because of Jeremiah’s rebuke to the people. They thought that they were safe from God’s judgment because they had God’s Temple in Jerusalem, and all they had to do was just repeat this mantra: “The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord” (7:4).

Jeremiah's fourth sermon, in regard to the broken covenant, was recorded in chapter 11. Chronologically, it seems that this fourth sermon was given before the "Temple Sermon." It may have been given soon after a copy of God's Law was found in the Temple complex in 621 BC. This discovery led to the revival during the reign of King Josiah.

Unfortunately, this revival, like many others, was short-lived. It was only a short time before the people returned to their sinful ways. In verse 10 the Lord told Jeremiah, *"They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers who refused to hear My words, and they have gone after other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers."*

Doctrinal Points

1. Idolatry results in broken covenants.

The covenant mentioned in Jeremiah 11:2, 3, 6, 8 & 10 was obviously the Mosaic Covenant. God made this covenant with His people at Mount Sinai after He brought them out of the furnace of slavery in Egypt at the time of the Exodus (v4). The Mosaic Covenant was a **conditional covenant** because it was *conditional* on Israel's obedience to God's Law. It would be broken if the people didn't keep their side of the agreement.

In contrast, the Abrahamic covenant was an **unconditional covenant**. Under the Abrahamic covenant, God made an *unconditional* promise to Abraham and his descendants - a nation, a land, and a Messiah. That's why Israel is a nation today, and that's why Israel still has a divine claim to the Land. The Messiah has come, and the unconditional Abrahamic covenant is still valid today.

But the Mosaic Covenant was conditional - and the people of Israel did not live up to their side of the conditions. There were blessings and cursings associated with this conditional Covenant. (See Deuteronomy 28.) The people of Israel would be blessed in the Land if they kept the covenant, but they would be cursed and put out of the Land if they broke the covenant. *"Cursed is the man who does not obey the words of this covenant"* (v3).

But Israel broke the covenant. *"Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone followed the dictates of his evil heart; therefore, I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but which they have not done."* And the end of verse 10, *"The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers"* (v8).

The first half of verse 10 revealed that **idolatry was the underlying cause** of the broken covenant - for the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. *"They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers who refused to hear My words, and they have gone after other gods to serve them."* And verse 13, *"For according to the*

number of your cities were your gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem you have set up altars to that shameful thing, altars to burn incense to Baal.”

Therefore, the people would reap what they had sown - and the false gods would not be able to save them: *“Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the gods to whom they offer incense, but they will not save them at all in the time of their trouble.”*

Idolatry always results in broken covenants. Think of how today’s gods of self, materialism, sex, and human freedom result in broken marriage covenants, and failure to live up to other responsible commitments. Idolatry results in broken covenants.

2. Idolatry results in brazen conspiracies.

Jeremiah 11:18-23 - *“Now the Lord gave me knowledge of it, and I know it; for You showed me their doings. ¹⁹ But I was like a docile lamb brought to the slaughter; and I did not know that they had devised schemes against me, saying, “Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be remembered no more.” ²⁰ But, O Lord of hosts, You who judge righteously, testing the mind and the heart - let me see Your vengeance on them, for to You I have revealed my cause.”*

²¹ “Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the men of Anathoth who seek your life, saying, ‘Do not prophesy in the name of the Lord, lest you die by our hand.’ ²² Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Behold, I will punish them. The young men shall die by the sword, their sons and their daughters shall die by famine, ²³ and there shall be no remnant of them, for I will bring catastrophe on the men of Anathoth, even the year of their punishment.’”

The people of Judah did not like what they were hearing from Jeremiah, so in a vain effort to get rid of the message, they plotted to get rid of the messenger! Even the men of Anathoth, Jeremiah’s hometown, sought for ways to kill him. In the same way, the unbelievers of Nazareth, the Lord’s hometown, openly tried to kill the Lord by throwing Him over a cliff - because they didn’t like His message (Luke 4).

When unbelievers hate the message, they hate the messenger even more - and their conspiracies to remove the messenger may become quite bold and brazen. In fact, if not for the criminal penalties of the law, those who hate the message would openly kill many more preachers of the gospel. We would be like lambs led to the slaughter (v19). Did you notice the reaction to the recent death of a well-known preacher who denounced the social sins of this nation? Many of those who hated the message greeted his death with cheers - and some were even quite open and brazen about their celebration.

God revealed the threats on his life to Jeremiah – and He promised that He would deliver Jeremiah from the plots to kill him.

In verse 20, keep in mind that in his prayer Jeremiah was not looking for **personal revenge**. When he asked for God's vengeance on the would-be killers, he was upholding God's righteous standards and praying that these standards would be maintained.

And so should we. We should pray for God's righteous judgment on those around the world who brazenly kill God's people in the name of their false gods or their atheistic authoritarian governments. Such idolatry is openly blasphemous to the true and living God. Idolatry results in brazen conspiracies.

Practical Application

Don't miss the significance of "My beloved" in Jeremiah 11:15!

Jeremiah 11:14-17 - *"So do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them; for I will not hear them in the time that they cry out to Me because of their trouble. ¹⁵ "What has My beloved to do in My house, having done lewd deeds with many? The holy flesh has passed from you. When you do evil, then you rejoice. ¹⁶ The Lord called your name, "Green Olive Tree," lovely, and of good fruit. With the noise of a great tumult He has kindled fire on it, and its branches are broken.*

¹⁷ "For the Lord of hosts, who planted you, has pronounced doom against you for the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have done against themselves to provoke Me to anger in offering incense to Baal."

In verses 14-17, notice **the context** of this term, "My beloved."

The context reveals that in spite of the fact that Jeremiah was told, once again, not to pray for his people (v14), and in spite of the fact that their sacrifices were meaningless (v15), and in spite of the fact that as a nation, they were now a fruitless olive tree that would have to be burned (v16), and in spite of the fact that they would be severely disciplined because of their idolatry (v17) - **yet God still referred to them as "My beloved"!**

What an encouragement that should be to backslidden believers today! No matter how far you've wandered away from the Lord, and no matter how much discipline the Lord has had to bring into your life - **if you're in God's family, you are still God's beloved child!**

As the cut-off olive branches of Israel will once again bear fruit (according to Romans 11), so you too can be restored to a close position of fellowship with the Lord - because you are still one of God's beloved children.

Don't miss the significance of **"My beloved"** in Jeremiah 11:15!