

The Judgment of Sword, Famine and Pestilence

Jeremiah 14

Jeremiah 14:1-6 – *“The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah concerning the droughts. ²“Judah mourns, and her gates languish. They mourn for the land, and the cry of Jerusalem has gone up. ³ Their nobles have sent their lads for water; they went to the cisterns and found no water. They returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded and covered their heads. ⁴ Because the ground is parched, for there was no rain in the land, the plowmen were ashamed. They covered their heads.*

⁵ Yes, the deer also gave birth in the field, but left because there was no grass. ⁶ And the wild donkeys stood in the desolate heights; they sniffed at the wind like jackals; their eyes failed because there was no grass.”

Background Notes

In this chapter we learn that God sent a major drought on the nation of Judah. The drought was a sign and warning of the coming Babylonian invasion and captivity – God’s judgment for Judah’s sin and rebellion. In fact, this drought may have been associated with the Babylonian invasion in 597 BC. The final invasion came in 586 BC, when the Temple was destroyed, and the people were taken away into captivity.

In any event, verses 1-6 provided a vivid description of the horrible conditions that existed during the drought. Even the servants of the wealthy nobility could not find water: *“Their nobles have sent their lads for water; they went to the cisterns and found no water. They returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded and covered their heads.”*

The farmers also covered their heads in shame because they couldn’t produce any crops out of the dry, parched and cracked ground. Wildlife was totally disrupted, with much starvation and death. There was no grass or vegetation, and no water. All of this was caused by Judah’s sin. The sin of any nation results in bad fallout that even affects the environment.

Doctrinal Points

1. Droughts in Israel were a sign of a broken covenant.

The second half of Jeremiah 12 recorded the conclusion of Jeremiah’s sermon about the broken covenant between God and His people. God didn’t break **His** side of the covenant. No. The people had continuously broken **their** side of the

covenant by their rebellion and idolatry. In chapter 13, Jeremiah gave the object lesson of the ruined linen sash, the parable of the smashed wine bottles, and the message of the scattered flock of sheep. All three of these communications - the object lesson, the parable, and the message - warned the people of the coming Babylonian invasion, and declared that they were about to reap what they had sown.

In chapter 14 the Lord Himself gave a sign that the covenant had been broken. Lack of rain on the land was one of the sanctions of the Mosaic Covenant; so extended drought was a sure sign that the covenant had been broken.

Deuteronomy 28 described the blessings of the covenant if the people followed the Lord. Deuteronomy 28:12: *“The Lord will open to you His good treasure or storehouse, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.”*

But the covenant also included the “curses,” or judgments, that would come upon the people if they broke the covenant. Deuteronomy 28:23-24: *“And your heavens which are over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you shall be iron. The Lord will change the rain of your land to powder and dust; from the heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed.”* The people of Israel knew these Scriptures. They knew that droughts in Israel were a sign of a broken covenant.

2. Droughts in Israel were a warning to a bankrupt nation.

Jeremiah 14:7-12 – *“O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do it for Your name’s sake; for our backslidings are many. We have sinned against You. ⁸ O the Hope of Israel, his Savior in time of trouble, why should You be like a stranger in the land, and like a traveler who turns aside to tarry for a night? ⁹ Why should You be like a man astonished, like a mighty one who cannot save? Yet You, O Lord, are in our midst, and we are called by Your name. Do not leave us! ¹⁰ Thus says the Lord to this people: “Thus they have loved to wander; they have not restrained their feet. Therefore the Lord does not accept them. He will remember their iniquity now, and punish their sins.” ¹¹ Then the Lord said to me, “Do not pray for this people, for their good. ¹² When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. I will consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence.”*

In verses 7-9 Jeremiah interceded on behalf of the people. He acknowledged that the people had sinned and broken the covenant, and that as a nation they were spiritually and morally bankrupt. There was no denying these facts. So Jeremiah prayed on the basis of God’s own reputation, and for the sake of His Name (v7). He asked God how could He just stand by like a stranger or passer-by, and not use His power to deliver the nation that was called by His name (v8-9).

The Lord replied in verses 10-12. In essence, He said: It’s too late, Jeremiah. Judah has had plenty of chances, but they are spiritually and morally bankrupt, so don’t even pray for their welfare (v10-11). Their religious sacrifices, offerings and

ritual fasts mean nothing to Me because their hearts are not right (v12). They will die by sword, by famine, and by pestilence. All this bad fallout was associated with the Babylonian invasion of the spiritually and morally bankrupt nation of Judah.

Jeremiah 14:13-22 - *“Then I said, ‘Ah, Lord God! Behold, the prophets say to them, ‘You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.’” “And the Lord said to me, “The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart. ¹⁵ Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who prophesy in My name, whom I did not send, and who say, ‘Sword and famine shall not be in this land’ - ‘By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed! ¹⁶ And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; they will have no one to bury them—they nor their wives, their sons nor their daughters—for I will pour their wickedness on them.”*

¹⁷ “Therefore you shall say this word to them: ‘Let my eyes flow with tears night and day, and let them not cease; for the virgin daughter of my people has been broken with a mighty stroke, with a very severe blow. ¹⁸ If I go out to the field, then behold, those slain with the sword! And if I enter the city, then behold, those sick from famine! Yes, both prophet and priest go about in a land they do not know.” ¹⁹ Have You utterly rejected Judah? Has Your soul loathed Zion? Why have You stricken us so that there is no healing for us? We looked for peace, but there was no good; and for the time of healing, and there was trouble.

²⁰ We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness and the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against You. ²¹ Do not abhor us, for Your name’s sake. Do not disgrace the throne of Your glory. Remember, do not break Your covenant with us.

²² Are there any among the idols of the nations that can cause rain? Or can the heavens give showers? Are You not He, O Lord our God? Therefore, we will wait for You, since You have made all these.”

In verse 13 Jeremiah suggested to the Lord that somehow the prophets were to blame for the bankrupt condition of the nation. The Lord responded, in no uncertain terms, that these prophets were false prophets, and they were giving a false message (v14). They would be held accountable - and so would the people who believed their false message. Verses 14-16 indicated that the spiritually and morally bankrupt people would reap what they had sown.

In verses 17-22 Jeremiah continued his prayer with a lament for the bankrupt and defeated nation. The sad conditions of verses 17-18 may have already taken place during the second Babylonian invasion in 597 BC. On the other hand, Jeremiah may have been looking forward prophetically to the final invasion in 586 BC. In verses 19-20 Jeremiah asked the Lord why such tragedy had to fall on Israel - but he answered his own question in verse 20.

In verse 21 Jeremiah again requested that the Lord consider how Judah’s defeat would reflect negatively upon the Lord’s own name and glory. There would be great negative effect when Judah was conquered. However, Jeremiah and the

people of Judah knew that God controlled the rains, and only God could stop the drought. And they knew that God must be true to His principles. Droughts in Israel were a warning to a bankrupt nation.

Practical Application

Beware of today's false prophets!

Notice what the Lord told Jeremiah about the false prophets: *"And the Lord said to me, 'The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart' (v14).*

This is still true today – in fact, there are many false prophets on the religious scene today who claim to speak for God. Just as in Jeremiah's day, the false prophets of today try to sell a package of falsehood and false security. Verse 13: *"Behold, the prophets say to them, 'You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.'"* But these are lies.

Today's false prophets claim that God is giving them the message - and many of these modern false prophets actually believe that God is speaking to them and through them!

In Matthew 7:22 the Lord Jesus said that some of these prophets will even be able to do signs or miracles. But, as verse 14 says, the sources of their prophecies are either demonic or figments of their own imagination.

So don't get taken in, as did many of the people in Jeremiah's day. Compare all messages and prophecies against the true and perfect standard of the Word of God. By studying Scripture we can discern whether or not "prophets" are speaking for God - or for their own personal fame, popularity, and profit.

Beware of today's false prophets!