

The Lord's Anger and Assurance

Jeremiah 15

Jeremiah 15:1-4 – *“Then the Lord said to me, ‘Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people. Cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth.’² And it shall be, if they say to you, ‘Where should we go?’ then you shall tell them, ‘Thus says the Lord: “Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity.”*”

³*“And I will appoint over them four forms of destruction,” says the Lord: “the sword to slay, the dogs to drag, the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy. ⁴ I will hand them over to trouble, to all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for what he did in Jerusalem.*

Background Notes

In Jeremiah 14, Jeremiah interceded for Israel after the Lord sent a major drought on the Land. Drought was one of the sanctions for breaking the Mosaic Covenant. The Covenant said that if Israel followed the Lord, the people would be blessed, and the Land would be blessed with rain. But if Israel broke the Covenant and turned away from the Lord, the Lord could not bless the people, and the rains would be withheld from the Land. So there was no doubt why there was a drought, and in his prayer Jeremiah did not deny that Israel had sinned and broken the Covenant.

But Jeremiah prayed for God's mercy on the basis of God's own reputation, and His Name's sake, and His glory (14:20-21). Furthermore, prayed Jeremiah, if God brought the rains back, it would prove that the God of Israel, the one true God, controlled the rains and not Baal and the foreign gods: *“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”* (Jeremiah 24:22).

In verses 1-4 God answered Jeremiah's prayer on the behalf of the people. His reply was essentially the same answer He gave to Jeremiah in chapter 14:10-12. The Lord expanded on His previous answer to Jeremiah's intercession. In essence, He replied: *“Jeremiah, it's too late for these rebellious people. Even if Moses and Samuel were to intercede for these people, it would not help (v1).”*

Why did God mention Moses and Samuel? Were they better “pray-ers” than Jeremiah? No. God mentioned them because they had successfully made intercession for Israel (Exodus 32; 1 Samuel 7). In Exodus 32 Moses prayed on behalf of the people after the golden calf incident. And in 1 Samuel 7 Samuel interceded for the people after the Ark of the Covenant had been returned from the land of the Philistines.

God spared Israel at those times - but not now. The end was near. The Babylonians would invade Judah. Some of the people would die by plague. Some would die by the sword. Some would die from starvation. Some would go into captivity. Those who died would not have proper burials - their bodies would be left for the dogs, the birds, and wild beasts (v3). They would be an object lesson of horror before all the nations of the earth (v4).

King Manasseh was singled out because he was the worst of Judah's kings (v4). Manasseh introduced and participated in gross idolatry in the kingdom of Judah. 1 Kings 21:11 says that King Manasseh was more wicked than the Amorites and Canaanites who formerly lived in the Land.

Doctrinal Points

1. To the defiant and rebellious the Lord says, "I am against you."

Jeremiah 15:5-9 - *"For who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem? Or who will bemoan you? Or who will turn aside to ask how you are doing? ⁶ You have forsaken Me," says the Lord. "You have gone backward. Therefore, I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you. I am weary of relenting!*

⁷ And I will winnow them with a winnowing fan in the gates of the land. I will bereave them of children; I will destroy My people, since they do not return from their ways. ⁸ Their widows will be increased to Me more than the sand of the seas. I will bring against them, against the mother of the young men, a plunderer at noonday. I will cause anguish and terror to fall on them suddenly. ⁹ "She languishes who has borne seven. She has breathed her last. Her sun has gone down while it was yet day. She has been ashamed and confounded. And the remnant of them I will deliver to the sword before their enemies," says the Lord."

Can you think of any worse words from God than these? God said that He was against the kingdom of Judah, and that no one would have pity on them because they had forsaken the Lord (v7-8). Now the Babylonians would remove them, just as chaff is blown away in the winnowing process (v7). Wives would lose their husbands and mothers would lose their children in the catastrophe. A mother who was considered to have security for life, with her perfect family of seven sons, would suddenly lose everything - and maybe even her own life as well (v9).

To the defiant and the rebellious the Lord said, *"I am against you."* And this was not only true of the ancient nation of Israel - it is true today as well. It is true of nations and of individuals. There will be a future judgment of nations (Matthew 25), and the wrath of God abides (present tense) on every rebellious and defiant individual who will not come to Christ (John 3:36).

To the defiant and rebellious the Lord says, "I am against you."

2. To the discouraged and rejected the Lord says, “I am with you.”

Jeremiah 15:10-21 - *“Woe is me, my mother, that you have borne me, a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have neither lent for interest, nor have men lent to me for interest. Every one of them curses me.*

11 The Lord said: “Surely it will be well with your remnant. Surely I will cause the enemy to intercede with you in the time of adversity and in the time of affliction. 12 Can anyone break iron, the northern iron and the bronze? 13 Your wealth and your treasures I will give as plunder without price, because of all your sins, throughout your territories. 14 And I will make you cross over with your enemies into a land which you do not know; for a fire is kindled in My anger, which shall burn upon you.”

15 O Lord, You know; remember me and visit me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In Your enduring patience, do not take me away. Know that for Your sake I have suffered rebuke. 16 Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart, for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.

17 I did not sit in the assembly of the mockers, nor did I rejoice. I sat alone because of Your hand, for You have filled me with indignation. 18 Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable, which refuses to be healed? Will You surely be to me like an unreliable stream, as waters that fail?

19 Therefore thus says the Lord: “If you return, then I will bring you back. You shall stand before Me. If you take out the precious from the vile, you shall be as My mouth. Let them return to you, but you must not return to them. 20 And I will make you to this people a fortified bronze wall; and they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you; for I am with you to save you and deliver you,” says the Lord. 21 “I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem you from the grip of the terrible.”

These verses reveal that Jeremiah was probably at his lowest emotional point in his ministry. Today we would say that he was facing burnout. He wished he had never been born (v10). He was in debt to no one - and yet everyone cursed him. He felt that God was not vindicating him, even though his servant was enduring reproach for the Lord (v15). Jeremiah even dared to tell God that He was like a deceptive stream, an unreliable source of refreshment, because Jeremiah was finding no relief from his pain (v18).

So how did the Lord respond to Jeremiah’s extreme discouragement and feeling of rejection? First of all, in verse 11 the Lord told Jeremiah that he would not be taken into captivity - and in fact, the Babylonians would listen to him! We’ll see the fulfillment of those words in later chapters of Jeremiah. Then the Lord encouraged him by confirming that all the events that Jeremiah had prophesied would come true - in spite of what the false prophets were saying, and in spite of what the people were believing (v12-14).

In verse 16 Jeremiah acknowledged that he had found joy and encouragement in reading God’s Word. Remember - a complete copy of the Scriptures had been found in the Temple during King Josiah’s reign, in the early years of Jeremiah’s ministry. Then the Lord assured Jeremiah that if he would hang in there and stand true, in spite of the opposition and his discouragement, there would be some fruit from his ministry.

The Lord assured Jeremiah that He would be with him, that He would give him the needed strength, and that He would deliver him from the opposition (v19-21). And the Lord gives us the same promise of His personal presence today. *“I will never leave you nor forsake you”* (Hebrews 13:5).

To the discouraged and rejected, the Lord says, “I am with you.”

Practical Application

Don't stop reading the Word!

“Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart” (v16).

Even though Jeremiah was extremely discouraged, and even though he felt disappointed with God, he did not stop reading God's Word! And neither should we. We should keep on reading! Even when we don't feel like it, just keep on reading!

Even if you have to force yourself - read Scripture! The Word will be effective in your life, even when you're extremely discouraged. And it will be effective, even when you're disappointed with God Himself, for whatever reason. So don't stop reading the Word.

Here's an illustration. If I told you to bring me some water in a dirty sieve, you'd think I was crazy - but you might do it just to show me that the sieve would hold no water. Now suppose I told you to do it a second time, and then a third time. You'd think I had really lost it! But then I would point out to you that the dirty sieve was now clean.

In the same way, you may think that your mind is like a sieve when you're discouraged. You don't even want to read the Bible. And you think just can't retain any of the Word of God when you are extremely discouraged and when don't want to read Scripture. But do it anyway! The Word will have a cleansing effect on your life, and eventually it will bring the joy of the Lord back into your heart.

So don't stop reading the Word!