

Jeremiah's Warning of Invasion

Jeremiah 4

Jeremiah 4:1-4 - *"If you will return, O Israel," says the Lord, "return to Me; and if you will put away your abominations out of My sight, then you shall not be moved. ² And you shall swear, 'The Lord lives,' in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness. The nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in Him they shall glory."*

³ *For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: "Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns.*

⁴ *Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn so that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings."*

Background Notes

In the second half of Jeremiah 3 we discussed the good news about Israel's future. Jeremiah predicted a time when the northern kingdom of Israel would be reunited with the southern kingdom of Judah, living together in the Land that God gave as an inheritance to the Jewish patriarchs. Look back at Jeremiah 3:18: *"In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given as an inheritance to your fathers."*

Notice: this is not a prediction of the present-day Church, as is sometimes taught. It is a prediction of a future restored people of Israel who will be restored to the Land of Israel. The fact that Israel is once again a nation, on the very land that God gave to Abraham, is only the beginning of this prophecy's fulfillment. The best is yet to come! At that future time, Israel will be ashamed of her former sins, and will turn back to the Lord (3:22-25).

Jeremiah 4 revealed that ***the key to Israel's blessing in the future is her return to the Lord*** (v1). The problem is not that God refuses to receive Israel back; the problem is that Israel has not yet turned back to the Lord! Only when Israel turns to the Lord as her true Messiah will she be the light to the Gentiles that God always meant her to be (v2).

The revival that took place during King Josiah's reign (around the time that Jeremiah gave this prophetic message) was short lived, and the people soon turned back to their sinful ways. They did not "break up the hard ground" of their hearts - they continued to sow among thorns (v3). They did not "spiritually circumcise" themselves - they did not cut off from their fleshly desires and separate from their evil deeds (v4). For these reasons, God would allow the Babylonians to invade and conquer Judah and Jerusalem.

Doctrinal Points

Jeremiah 4:5-13 - ⁵ *Declare in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem, and say: "Blow the trumpet in the land; cry, 'Gather together,' and say, 'Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the fortified cities.'* ⁶ *Set up the standard toward Zion. Take refuge! Do not delay! For I will bring disaster from the north, and great destruction."* ⁷ *The lion has come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of nations is on his way. He has gone forth from his place to make your land desolate. Your cities will be laid waste, without inhabitant.* ⁸ *For this, clothe yourself with sackcloth. Lament and wail, for the fierce anger of the Lord has not turned back from us.*

¹⁰ *Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Surely You have greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, 'You shall have peace' - whereas the sword reaches to the heart."* ¹¹ *At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem, "A dry wind of the desolate heights blows in the wilderness toward the daughter of My people— not to fan or to cleanse— ¹² a wind too strong for these will come for Me. Now I will also speak judgment against them. ¹³ "Behold, he shall come up like clouds, and his chariots like a whirlwind. His horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us, for we are plundered!"*

Judah was told to prepare for the coming invasion by sounding the alarm and fleeing to the fortified cities (v4-6). Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian armies were coming upon them as a lion (v7). Israel would be destroyed as a nation, and the land would become waste. This was God's judgment because of Judah's continuing sin (v8).

Everyone would be appalled and astounded and taken by surprise because the false prophets had been (falsely) prophesying peace (v9). This false message of the false prophets explains Jeremiah's statement about God's apparent "deception" in verse 10: *"Ah, Lord God! Surely You have greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, 'You shall have peace' - whereas the sword reaches to the heart."*

God allowed the false prophets to convince the people that they would have peace when the axe was about to fall, because they would not believe God's Word spoken by His true prophets. The Babylonian forces were about to sweep in - not as a gentle winnowing wind, but as a hot, scorching, violent and devastating sirocco wind (v11-12). A whirlwind of chariots with horses swifter than eagles was on its way (v13).

Jeremiah 4:14-22 – *"O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you? ¹⁵ For a voice declares from Dan and proclaims affliction from Mount Ephraim: ¹⁶ "Make mention to the nations, yes, proclaim against Jerusalem, that watchers come from a far country and raise their voice against the cities of Judah. ¹⁷ Like keepers of a field they are against her all around, because she has been rebellious against Me," says the Lord.*

¹⁸ *"Your ways and your doings have procured these things for you. This is your wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reaches to your heart."*

¹⁹ *O my soul, my soul! I am pained in my very heart! My heart makes a noise in me;*

I cannot hold my peace, because you have heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. ²⁰ Destruction upon destruction is cried, for the whole land is plundered. Suddenly my tents are plundered and my curtains in a moment. ²¹ How long will I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet? ²² “For My people are foolish. They have not known Me. They are silly children, and they have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.”

Already, from Dan and Mount Ephraim in the north, the watchmen were sounding the alarm, because those who would besiege Jerusalem were on their way as judgment for Judah’s evil ways (v15-17). Jeremiah was not unattached or aloof from his message of coming judgment, as are some preachers today. He was emotionally appalled and distraught at the thought of the coming destruction (v19-21).

The Lord spoke in verse 22, and again He gave the reason why the nation had to be judged: *“For My people are foolish. They have not known Me. They are silly children, and they have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.”* That sounds a lot like the present situation in our own nation.

Jeremiah predicted the conditions of the coming Babylonian invasion.

2. Jeremiah described the results of the coming Babylonian invasion.

Jeremiah 4:23-29 - “I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form, and void; and the heavens, they had no light. ²⁴ I beheld the mountains, and indeed they trembled, and all the hills moved back and forth. ²⁵ I beheld, and indeed there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled. ²⁶ I beheld, and indeed the fruitful land was a wilderness, and all its cities were broken down at the presence of the Lord, by His fierce anger. ²⁷ For thus says the Lord: “The whole land shall be desolate; yet I will not make a full end.” ²⁸ For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black, because I have spoken. I have purposed and will not relent, nor will I turn back from it. ²⁹ The whole city shall flee from the noise of the horsemen and bowmen. They shall go into thickets and climb up on the rocks. Every city shall be forsaken, and not a man shall dwell in it.”

In verses 23-26 Jeremiah saw the coming invasion as so devastating, and ending in such desolation, that it would be like the heavens and earth before God formed them and filled them with life. But in verse 27 there was good news: in His grace, God would not execute a complete destruction. The fact that the Jewish people and the nation of Israel still exist today is proof of this fulfilled prophecy: *“For thus says the Lord: “The whole land shall be desolate; yet I will not make a full end.”*

However, this good news did not change or take away from the fact of God's determined purpose to bring such judgment on Judah for her wickedness that the heavens and the earth would mourn. The people would try to flee from every city, and try to hide from the Babylonians archers (v28-29).

³⁰ "And when you are plundered, what will you do? Though you clothe yourself with crimson, though you adorn yourself with ornaments of gold, though you enlarge your eyes with paint, in vain you will make yourself fair. Your lovers will despise you. They will seek your life. ³¹ "For I have heard a voice as of a woman in labor, the anguish as of her who brings forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion bewailing herself. She spreads her hands, saying, 'Woe is me now, for my soul is weary because of murderers!'"

In verses 30-31 Judah was again pictured as a prostitute, making herself as attractive as possible so as to hopefully elude the invaders and turn them away from the attack. Instead, however, she would find herself like in a woman in labor, crying out for help. But there would be no help, and she would die at the hands of her murderers (v30-31).

Jeremiah described the results of the coming Babylonian invasion.

Practical Application

Don't get taken in by the false prophets of today!

In verses 9-10 we saw that the false prophets of Jeremiah's day were very persuasive. They had convinced the people of Judah that Babylon would not invade, and that somehow there would be peace. And the people were completely convinced – they were sure there would be no invasion. They were so sure, in fact, that even the king, the princes, the priests and the false prophets themselves would be appalled and astounded on the day of the invasion! All of them had actually believed the lie that peace was on the horizon. It appears that even Jeremiah was surprised that God would allow such appalling conditions to befall the people of Judah (v10).

The same situation exists today. There are many "prophets" today who falsely persuade people that they don't have to worry about God's judgment in the future. It amazes true believers that God allows these false prophets to continue deceiving people.

However, God allows people to be deceived because they have already turned their backs on Him and refuse to believe the truth. Do you remember what the Lord said in Matthew 13:14? Unbelievers hear, but they do not understand; and they see, but they do not perceive. Why? Because they have "hearts of unbelief." Where is your heart?

In His Olivet Discourse, the Lord made it clear that false prophets will increase in the last days. Trust in the Word of God alone. Don't get taken in by the false prophets of today!