

The Certainty of God's Judgment Jeremiah 6

Jeremiah 6:1-8 - *"O you children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee from the midst of Jerusalem! Blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and set up a signal-fire in Beth Haccerem, for disaster appears out of the north, and great destruction. ² I have likened the daughter of Zion to a lovely and delicate woman. ³ The shepherds with their flocks shall come to her. They shall pitch their tents against her all around. Each one shall pasture in his own place." ⁴ "Prepare war against her. Arise, and let us go up at noon. Woe to us, for the day goes away, for the shadows of the evening are lengthening. ⁵ Arise, and let us go by night, and let us destroy her palaces." ⁶ For thus has the Lord of hosts said: "Cut down trees and build a mound against Jerusalem. This is the city to be punished. She is full of oppression in her midst. ⁷ As a fountain wells up with water, so she wells up with her wickedness. Violence and plundering are heard in her. Before Me continually are grief and wounds. ⁸ Be instructed, O Jerusalem, lest My soul depart from you; lest I make you desolate, a land not inhabited."*

Background Notes

Jeremiah 6 concluded Jeremiah's second prophetic message to the kingdom of Judah, that began in Jeremiah 3:6. This message was given during the days of King Josiah, who reigned over Judah from 627 BC down to 609 BC. Josiah was a good king. During his reign, a copy of God's Law was discovered in the Temple area, and as a result King Josiah initiated reforms in Judah. Idols and altars on the high places were torn down and removed, and in 621 BC a great revival swept through the land.

Jeremiah's prophetic sermon in chapters 3-6 may have paved the way for Josiah's reforms and for the great revival. Unfortunately, the revival was short lived, and the people soon went back to their sinful ways. Morally and spiritually, the nation went rapidly downhill. So this prophetic sermon may have been preached to the people of Judah after the revival of 621 BC, because King Josiah's reign continued until 609 BC.

In any case, this concluding chapter of the second sermon emphasized the reasons for - and the certainty of - God's coming judgment of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians.

Doctrinal Points

1. There is certainty of God's judgment.

When Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian armies invaded Jerusalem, the attack came from the north. *"For disaster appears out of the north, and great destruction."* Attacks on Jerusalem always came from the north, because that side of the city was the most vulnerable.

Jerusalem, Judah's capital, was located in the tribal territory of Benjamin, so the alarm was sounded from towns south of Jerusalem. The sons of Benjamin and the people of Jerusalem were to flee south, because a great and certain destruction was coming from the north. Beautiful Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah would soon be cut off (v2).

The "shepherds and their flocks setting up their tents around Jerusalem" may be a figurative reference to the Babylonian officers and troops camped around the city during the siege - or it may be a description of literal shepherds and sheep that would inhabit that area for grazing, because the city would be so completely destroyed. The attack by the Babylonian forces would not wait until noon, the conventional time for warfare. The armies would come at night, raise a siege wall around Jerusalem, and the city would suddenly be cut off from any help (v4-6). The disastrous siege that ensued lasted for more than a year before Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, just as predicted, in 586 BC.

The certainty of God's judgment on Jerusalem in those days definitely has an application for the certainty of God's judgment today.

a. **Certainty of God's judgment rests on the unbeliever.**

Hebrews 9:27 says, *"It is appointed for man to die once, but after this, the judgment."*

b. **Certainty of God's judgment rests on the wayward believer.**

1 Peter 4:17 says that *"judgment begins with the household of God."* Even though a believer's sins are eternally forgiven, God must discipline and punish a believer who is involved in sin. There is the certainty of God's judgment.

2. There are reasons for God's judgment.

Jeremiah 6:9-26 - *"Thus says the Lord of hosts: "They shall thoroughly glean as a vine the remnant of Israel. As a grape-gatherer, put your hand back into the branches. ¹⁰ To whom shall I speak and give warning, so they may hear? Indeed, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot give heed. Behold, the word of the Lord is a reproach to them. They have no delight in it. ¹¹ Therefore I am full of the fury of the Lord. I am weary of holding it in. "I will pour it out on the children outside, and on the assembly of young men together. For even the husband shall be taken with the wife; the aged with him who is full of days. ¹² And their houses shall be turned over to others, fields and wives together, for I will stretch out My hand against the inhabitants of the land," says the Lord. ¹³ "Because from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely. ¹⁴ They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, 'Peace! peace!' - when there is no peace. ¹⁵ Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, nor did they know how to blush. Therefore, they shall fall among those who fall. At the time I punish them, they shall be cast down," says the Lord. ¹⁶ Thus says the Lord: "Stand in the ways and see. Ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it. Then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it. ¹⁷ Also, I set watchmen over you, saying, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But they said, 'We will not listen.'*

¹⁸ Therefore hear, you nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them.¹⁹ Hear, O earth! Behold, I will certainly bring calamity on this people - the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not heeded My word or My law, but rejected it. ²⁰ For what purpose to Me comes frankincense from Sheba, and sweet cane from a far country? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor are your sacrifices sweet to Me.” ²¹ Therefore thus says the Lord: “Behold, I will lay stumbling blocks before this people, and the fathers and the sons together shall fall on them. The neighbor and his friend shall perish.”

²² Thus says the Lord: “Behold, a people comes from the north country, and a great nation will be raised from the farthest parts of the earth. ²³ They will lay hold on bow and spear; they are cruel and have no mercy; their voice roars like the sea. They ride on horses, as men of war set in array against you, O daughter of Zion.” ²⁴ We have heard the report of it. Our hands grow feeble. Anguish has taken hold of us, pain as of a woman in labor. ²⁵ Do not go out into the field, nor walk by the way. Because of the sword of the enemy, fear is on every side. ²⁶ O daughter of my people, dress in sackcloth and roll about in ashes! Make mourning as for an only son, most bitter lamentation, for the plunderer will suddenly come upon us.” One of the reasons for God’s judgment of Judah was that the people refused to turn from their wickedness. Just as a fountain wells up with water, so Judah welled up with wickedness (v7). Judah was like a fountain, always producing fresh wickedness.

From verse 10-26, God gave other reasons why He would allow the Babylonian forces as His judgment. Judah, like a vineyard, would be stripped bare by the Babylonians, because the people of Judah had closed their ears to God’s Word (v9-10). The people of Judah no longer delighted in the Word of God. The state of our own nation is certainly described in verse 10: “...*Indeed their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot give heed. Behold, the word of the Lord is a reproach to them; they have no delight in it.*” As a nation, we can expect judgment when we close our ears to God, and despise the truth and moral standards of the Bible.

Another reason for God’s judgment of Judah was that all the people, young and old alike, were greedy for gain. They were dealing falsely with one another (v11-13). In addition, the leaders of Judah, including the false prophets, were promising peace when they knew that there was no peace - and they were not even ashamed of their lies and sinful actions. Again the parallel with our own nation is striking. “*Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, nor did they know how to blush*” (v15).

Verses 16-19 provided two other reasons for God’s judgment: Judah would not return to the good and godly traditions, and she had not heeded the warnings of the good prophets. “*Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it. Then you will find rest for your souls*” (v16). Instead they rejected God’s Law: “*But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’*” And they refused to listen to God’s warnings.

Another reason for God’s judgment was that the people of Judah were still going through the traditional motions of burning incense and conducting sacrifices - but their “worship” was not sincere. “*Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet to Me*” (v20). Their “worship” was not from the heart; it was only form and show.

Again, what does verse 20 say about God's attitude toward the "religiosity" in our nation today? Many of our "worship services" are just religious tradition - or religious entertainment. All too often we don't bring true worship from the heart to the Lord.

For all these reasons, God was about to allow the Babylonian forces to sweep in upon Judah as judgment. *"Therefore thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will lay stumbling blocks before this people, and the fathers and the sons together shall fall on them. The neighbor and his friend shall perish" (v21). And, "Do not go out into the field, nor walk by the way, because of the sword of the enemy. Fear is on every side" (v25).*

All of this came true, of course, when the Babylonians invaded Judah. In 586 BC Jerusalem fell after a lengthy siege, and the beautiful Temple of the Lord was destroyed. The people of Judah reaped what they had sown. There are reasons for God's judgment.

Practical Application

How much dross still remains?

Jeremiah 6:27-30 - *"I have set you as an assayer and a fortress among My people, that you may know and test their way. ²⁸ They are all stubborn rebels, walking as slanderers. They are bronze and iron; they are all corrupters. ²⁹ The bellows blow fiercely; the lead is consumed by the fire. The smelter refines in vain, for the wicked are not drawn off. ³⁰ People will call them rejected silver, because the Lord has rejected them."*

In verses 27-30, the Lord told Jeremiah that he was an assayer and tester of God's people. An assayer tests metal by putting it into a crucible and turning up the heat. The result is that the impurities and worthless matter are either burned off, or they form on the surface of the molten metal as a scum or dross. The dross is removed and discarded, and the precious metals, like silver or gold, remain after the refining process. In Judah's case, all was dross! No precious metal remained. Thus the nation was called "rejected silver."

Suppose the Lord were to put your life into the crucible and turn up the heat. Would He find any precious metal? How much dross would be found in your life – or in mine?

That's what the apostle Peter had in mind when he wrote, *"...you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6-7).* So this question is important for all believers.

How much dross still remains?