

## JUDGMENT ON JUDAH

The writings of Jeremiah regarding Judah before and during the Babylonian captivity are applicable to the times in which we are living. There are too many similarities. The stage is set in the Seventh Chapter as to the cause of the problem: 7:28 *Therefore say to them, 'This is the nation that has not obeyed the LORD its God or responded to correction. Truth has perished; it has vanished from their lips. 7:34 I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, for the land will become desolate.*

In Chapter 8, the rest of the story is spelled out.

Jer 8:1 "At that time, declares the LORD, the bones of the kings and officials of Judah, the bones of the priests and prophets, and the bones of the people of Jerusalem will be removed from their graves.

The horrors of what happens when a people no longer have the protection of God is pictured by Jeremiah. We see the horrors of war and the tyranny of Godless people in power on the news and in documentaries and we are appalled. The desecration of graves and the bodies of ancestors was unthinkable to the Jews.

Jer 8:2 They will be exposed to the sun and the moon and all the stars of the heavens, which they have loved and served and which they have followed and consulted and worshiped. They will not be gathered up or buried, but will be like refuse lying on the ground.

Lives of people who seek their own way are devastated by the very things they pursued when they had a choice. We can see the effects of wrong choices in the smoker who gets lung cancer, the person who abuses alcohol with broken lives and ruined health, the so-called alternate lifestyle person who contracts AIDS – you get the idea. The Jews turned their backs on God and worshiped the sun, moon and stars and now their dead bodies -- their bones were laid bare before the very things they worshiped.

Jer 8:3 Wherever I banish them, all the survivors of this evil nation will prefer death to life, declares the LORD Almighty.'

The undisciplined life leads to a life that is so miserable that people wish to die rather than live. Jesus warned us that the devil came to steal, kill and destroy but He came that we might have life and have it abundantly. When you have a chance to make a choice, it is important that you choose correctly – to choose righteousness over iniquity, to choose mercy over judgement, to choose forgiveness over holding grudges – The choices you make when you still have a choice will determine what will happen when it is too late and there are no more choices to be had.

Jer 8:4-5 "Say to them, 'This is what the LORD says: "When men fall down, do they not get up? When a man turns away, does he not return? Why then have these people turned away? Why does Jerusalem always turn away? They cling to deceit; they refuse to return.

None of us is able to live a perfect, error-free life. However, we should not continue on in error once we see the right way. If we actually look for ways to be more sinful, then we have no hope. Isn't this where we are as a nation, today? Do we not see people looking for ways to be more wicked rather than looking for ways to avoid sin? People clamored for package stores, and then they wanted liquor by the drink, now some are wanting to legalize marijuana. We started out allowing abortion when it was early in a pregnancy or when there was something that threatened the life of the mother. Now they are doing abortions on partially born infants. The amazing thing is that we in the church are not jumping up and down and voting the scoundrels out of office. We could mention the kind of language that is becoming acceptable in our society, the proliferation of pornography that is available on cable TV or the internet – and the list goes on and on.

Jer 8:6-7 I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. No one repents of his wickedness, saying, "What have I done?" Each pursues his own course like a horse charging into battle. Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their migration. But my people do not know the requirements of the LORD.

Not only do people not "walk the walk" they don't even "talk the talk" anymore. Years ago, people would at least pretend to do what was right. Many have heard the truth but their interests lie in other things and they do not really know the message -- they hear but they do not really comprehend it. Even in the church, the confession of many Christians is not one of victory and faith in the omnipotent God of the Universe, but of fear and defeat. We have failed to be about the business of being transformed into the character of the new nature. The truth of the assertion of many who profess to be Christians is contradicted by their continued walk in the ways of the old nature -- the way of the world. The only time they have behavior that is like the new nature is when they deliberately set their minds to do so. This proves that they are still operating under their own strength and living under law and not grace. If they have truly been converted then they would do the work of Jesus "naturally" and would not even realize they were doing it.

Jer 8:8-9 "How can you say, "We are wise, for we have the law of the LORD," when actually the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely? The wise will be put to shame; they will be dismayed and trapped. Since they have rejected the word of the LORD, what kind of wisdom do they have?"

Those in our churches today have Bibles but they do not know what the word of God says. They have read and listened to watered-down commentaries or they have embraced fantasies for so long, that the power of the word of God lies dormant and impotent in them. Too many preachers interpret the word of God based on their own limited experience rather than just taking God at His word. I have heard preachers say that we are delivered from the **penalty** of sin but NOT from the **power** of sin. If people believe such a lie then they will be defeated Christians. Many will preach and teach that God has changed, that we should not expect miracles today. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. If we do not have faith in what God can do, then we are not likely to experience it. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Alter the truth of the word by mishandling it and you alter the outcome of the impact it can have on our lives.

There are many who write volumes regarding the Christian life and they do not believe what the Bible says. They have academic titles and claim to be experts and they are respected by others. They think themselves to be wise, but it is the wisdom of man and not the wisdom of God. As Paul said in Roman, "Professing themselves to be wise, they become fools." (Rom 1:21)

Jer 8:10-11 Therefore I will give their wives to other men and their fields to new owners. From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. "Peace, peace," they say, when there is no peace.

When those who are in the ministry are there simply because it is a "job," then they may tend to interpret the word based on the best benefit to themselves in their job or career. The seriousness of sin is not addressed because it may offend someone and they will stop attending (and giving). The net result of such practice is that the stewardship for God's plan of salvation will be given to others.

The gaping wounds that are crippling us are treated with band-aids. In the 1980's we tried to declare detente with the Communist forces. We'll all just live together and everything will be OK. In the church it also seems that we have declared detente with the devil. We pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done." But are we doing anything to occupy the land so that God's will can be done "on earth as it is in Heaven?". When the Children of Israel went into the Promised Land they did not have possession of the land until they took control of it. They booted out the heathen and

the pagan influence and to the extent they did NOT eliminate such influence, to that extent they left a snare for themselves and the coming generations. We cannot afford to declare peace until the enemies of God have been brought into submission to His will. Folks, that applies to our world, our nation, our state, our city, our community, our church, our family and to ourselves as individuals. The order in which it must be implemented is to start with ourselves.

Jer 8:12 Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when they are punished, says the LORD.

Almost as a refrain, the lack of shame is sounded out again as an indication of how far we have fallen from a right relationship with God in our culture. The problem of misplaced priority affects the clergy and the lay persons. Everyone becomes so desensitized to evil that nothing causes us to blush anymore. And we are told “it’s OK.” We are just being freed of our inhibitions. That is hogwash! It is sad when we put more confidence in psychologists than we do in the word of God the God of the Word. As a society we have adopted an “anything goes” attitude and we have open the gates and torn down the walls to our fortified cities of “who we are culturally” and we have let in every kind of evil beast to roam around the world in which we live. We even let it into our family rooms via the television set. When we let such things happen and do not see any immediate consequences, then we think, it must be OK. When you plant a seed, you do not see the consequences immediately – the fruit of what we do comes along later.

Jer 8:13 "I will take away their harvest, declares the LORD. There will be no grapes on the vine. There will be no figs on the tree, and their leaves will wither. What I have given them will be taken from them."

When we fail to acknowledge that all things to which we have access belong to God and He is the Source of everything good, then He will eventually take them away. If the harvest fails, do we look to the Lord of the Harvest Who is the Source of every good and perfect gift or do we look at the weather report? When there is not fruitfulness, then we excuse ourselves by saying that “Results don’t matter, just as long as we are faithful, that’s all that matters. Jesus taught us that we are expected to be fruitful and if we are not then we should be examining our faith and our faithfulness. However, when we recognize Him as Lord of all and allow Him to live His life through us, then we share in His abundance for all time and eternity.

Jer 8:14 "Why are we sitting here? Gather together! Let us flee to the fortified cities and perish there! For the LORD our God has doomed us to perish and given us poisoned water to drink, because we have sinned against him.

The people of Judah who lived in the countryside saw how defenseless they were against the enemy. Their solution to the problem was to flee to the fortified cities for protection. This proved to only prolong the time but was not a source of salvation. We also look for man-made solutions to problems rather than seeking God’s way and all we are doing is prolonging the judgement against us. They knew that judgement was sure even if they fled to the city. I’m not sure we understand that humanistic solutions will **not** save us.

Jer 8:15-16 We hoped for peace but no good has come, for a time of healing but there was only terror. The snorting of the enemy's horses is heard from Dan; at the neighing of their stallions the whole land trembles. They have come to devour the land and everything in it, the city and all who live there."

When false prophets tell us that all is well, then we have expectations that will never come to pass. It is only when we “realize our condition and repent” that judgement is stayed. Unfortunately, those who initially believe the lie of the false prophet and the “infernal optimists” will hang onto that belief until disasters comes upon them. Then it will be too late to believe the truth.

Jer 8:17 "See, I will send venomous snakes among you, vipers that cannot be charmed, and they will bite

you," declares the LORD.

The coming enemy will not be appeased; that is, he cannot be charmed. The old snake becomes deaf and cannot hear the music of the charmers. The old sins that become ingrained in our culture cannot be extricated since they have become "part of who we are." We have become a society in which human life is not highly valued at its beginning or its ending. We have turned loose a snake that is already showing signs of being out of control. We have entertained pornography and now the truth of that snake is showing itself in child abuse, perversion and other sex crimes. There are many snakes that are loose among us in our culture. We thought we could control them but they wind up controlling us.

Jer 8:18 O my Comforter in sorrow, my heart is faint within me.

Perhaps Jeremiah felt overwhelmed when he considered the state of his nation and how far the people had gone away from the right path. His cry goes up for some glimmer of hope.

When we stray far from God, then those things that were meant for our comfort will, instead, bring sorrow. David wrote in Psalms 23, "Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me." When we are close to God, His correction and discipline brings us confidence and assurance. When we stray and are going away from God, even His word brings guilt and sorrow.

Jer 8:19 Listen to the cry of my people from a land far away: "Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King no longer there?" "Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their worthless foreign idols?"

The people would some day lament and question why God did not protect them from the onslaught of the enemy. God's answer is another question for them to answer for themselves: "Why did they provoke God with their misplaced priorities?" One of these days, people may be asking, "Why did God abandon the USA? Did not our forefather found our nation on principles that are right and holy? Surely, God will protect us!" The answer is going to be another question that asks "Why did you replace the reading and teaching of my word in your schools with teachings about alternate life styles? Why did you refuse to let people pray at your public events? Why did you ignore My word on being truthful? Why did you neglect to teach your children about Me and My ways?"

Jer 8:20 "The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved."

Time flies by and we keep putting off doing that which we know to be the right things to do. We will repent tomorrow, we'll turn over a new leaf next week, we will walk closer to God next year, we will spend more time on the things of the kingdom of God when we retire. If we can put off doing what is right for one minute, then we can put it off for an hour, a day, a week, a year and a lifetime.

Jer 8:21-22 Since my people are crushed, I am crushed; I mourn, and horror grips me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?

21-22 Those who proclaim the truth empathize with those who will not listen and instead rush to their own judgement. The tragedy is compounded by the fact that solutions for the situation are available. Healing ointment or balm of the Holy Spirit is available and the Great Physician (the Lord Jesus) Who can apply it for healing the wounds of the world is eager to help.