

Class 5: Jeremiah 14-20

God Determines the Penalty

May 3, 2017

The Drought: The blessings of the law of Moses included things such as a protection from enemies (Deut. 28:7) and water on the land (Deut. 28:12). Yet at the same time, the promise of the curse is that for a lack of obedience the rain will turn to powdered (Deut. 28:24) and Israel would fall before their enemies (Deut. 28:25). Jeremiah 14 begins with the drought brought to them as proof that they would fall to their enemies.

False Prophets: Jeremiah seems to make defense (or at least offer a reason) for the conduct of Israel – false prophets. Yet God makes it clear that He did not send the prophets, and we know that He gave a methodology for determining whether a prophet was true or false (Deut. 13). Thus God indicates that Judah is guilty of false prophets (consider the fate of the man of God in 1 Kings 13).

Jeremiah's Burdens: in chapter 15 we see Jeremiah introspective. He is a man who owes nothing, yet he is hated by many. He never enjoys the company of other men (vs 17), because he will be commanded neither to celebrate with the people nor to mourn with them (chapter 16). All of this burden has become too much for him; in a fashion, now Jeremiah is being tested. Indeed, in 15:18 he seems to accuse God: is his pain unending, and will God actually support him? It seems that Jeremiah has become so weak that he is not doing what he should as God's spokesman (15:19).

But God is with Jeremiah. He promises that He will strengthen him (15:11) and He will bring down his enemies (15:11). God will save him in the end from these men. However, Jeremiah needs to repent from the unworthy words – that God is not with him.

The Wickedness of the Heart of Judah: Jeremiah now speaks to the heart of a nation. They have sinned so long it has become their nature. It is part of even the lives of their children. Ultimately this brings to Jeremiah this pronouncement: that their heart is wicked above all things. God alone can determine this.

Jeremiah makes a personal plea to God not to let such hard words go unfulfilled, although he does not desire it to come to pass. He desires that God do what He has purposed, but that Jeremiah might in some way be spared.

Breaking the Sabbath: God commands Jeremiah to teach the Sabbath law again. The rules of rest are commonly violated. God tells the people that if they kept this law, they would remain His. It is not because this law alone is holy, but in it is a reflection of the holiness of God. In other words, as long as men remembered the Sabbath, they were remembering their creator.

The Potter's House: God has several lessons for Jeremiah to observe. This one reflects on God's sovereign nature. It is not the Calvinistic sovereignty in question, as the point is that Israel has a choice; God makes it clear that if they choose to do evil, they are the spoiled vessel. Perhaps Paul is thinking of this event when he speaks of Israel and the potter in Romans 9:20-21. God says that He is fashioning (as a potter) a calamity against Judah. God is making the Babylonian empire for their destruction.

The Second Conspiracy: in 18:18 another conspiracy against Jeremiah is formed. This conspiracy intends to verbally assault him and to ignore his message. Jeremiah calls on God to repay them. It is not a matter of personal vengeance, but a desire to stop the evil speech.

The Valley of Hinnom Demonstration: In chapter 19 Jeremiah is again called to act out God's wrath. He is instructed to purchase a clay jar and go to the gate at the valley of Hinnom (our second occasion to visit this vile place) and to bring with him the priests and the elders. Then he is told to pronounce disaster on Judah and Jerusalem, and to break the clay jar.

Again the valley of Hinnom is key to Judah's destruction. As mentioned in chapter seven, this valley becomes the model of Hell in the New Testament (Gehenna). God promises to fill this place with those whom He has judged unrighteous, as does Jesus. Jeremiah then returns to the temple and ends this proclamation, in a form bringing to a close the temple sermons begun (years before?) in chapter 7.

Jeremiah's Imprisonment: chapter 20 begins recounting some of the history around the life of Jeremiah. In a sense, this is the third conspiracy, but this time there is considerable action. One of the ungodly priests (consider them in concert with the false prophets), Pashhur, has Jeremiah beaten and imprisoned at the gate (to be seen by all). When he is released, Jeremiah pronounces judgment on this faithless priest – he will bear witness with his own eyes the death of those he cares about, and be taken away into captivity.

Jeremiah's Accusation: perhaps because of this imprisonment, Jeremiah calls out to God. He cries that God has not protected him as promised, and that he is insulted and abused. He then tells us that if he instead chose to keep quiet, the message of God would burn through him. He knows no one wants to hear what he has to say, and that they want to see him fail so that they can be justified in rejection.

Then Jeremiah reminds himself that he is God's man, and that God will bring justice. "Sing to the Lord" he proclaims to himself, reminding us that often in difficult situations it is such that restores our heart (Acts 16:25). He laments his birth, either as a result of his great frustration and sorrow or because of the message he brings.

Let us never forget how hard it was to be a prophet of God.

Making Applications:

1. We are constantly warned about false teachers and false prophets in the New Testament. Is there a methodology for us to discern who is a false teacher as there was for Israel?
2. Jeremiah stands as an important lesson of letting our work overwhelm us. It is important that we not lose hope of God's ultimate victory nor lose faith in His desire for our success. Even the best of prophets can have doubts (Matthew 11:1-8).
3. Jeremiah asks God to strike those who oppose him. It seems odd that he also asks God to spare his nation on occasion. Consider how Paul speaks in 2 Timothy 4:16 asks God to forgive those who abandoned him, but in 4:14 seeks that God repay Alexander the coppersmith's harm. It is not a matter of personal vendetta, but a matter of silence and bringing to an end the work of the unrighteous (Revelation 6:10).
4. When people do not like what we have to say, they (like Jeremiah's enemies) seek to point out our inconsistencies or failings, as though it validates their rejection of our cause. For this reason we are often reminded of how important it is to behave in all things; *"in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us"* (Titus 2:7-8).