

Studies From The Book Of Jeremiah (Part I.)

Lesson 2: The Rejection Of Israel And The Way of Salvation

First Group Of Readings: Jer 3:6-10; 5:1-9; 6:1-30

Introductory Remarks

1. These first three readings are taken from chapters 3 through 6 and have to do with God's rejection of Israel.
2. Hopefully the breakdown below will facilitate a better grasp of the unit as a whole.

Outline:

- I. The rejection of impenitent Israel (3:6-6:30).
 - A. The required Change of Heart necessary for the nation's Salvation and the Fulfilment of its Destiny (3:6-4:4).
 - B. God's Burning Wrath Which Will Consume Judah in the Absence of Repentance (4:5-31).
 - C. The Outcome of the Period of Testing--the Rejection of a Worthless People (6:1-30).

Reading 1: Israel's rejection ignored by Judah (3:6-10).

1. Israel here (6) refers to the ten northern tribes of the north. Because of her faithlessness, she had been taken into captivity by Assyria, Samaria falling in 722 B.C. and so about 100 years earlier. In contrast Judah has reference to the two remaining tribes of the south, Jerusalem being her capital.
2. Judah failed to take note of this warning and continued in religious harlotry (6-7). On reaching a degree of independence (aged about nineteen), Josiah sought to purge the land of idolatry.
3. The speech exposed Judah's delusory sense of security. She took Israel's whoredoms lightly and her return was in pretence only, idolatry remained in her heart (9-10).

R. 2: Judah's obstinacy and corruption made pardon impossible (5:1-9).

Corruption and rebellion existed in all classes (1-5)

1. "Run to and fro
"If there is [anyone] who executes judgment... And I will pardon her" (1; Gen 18:22-33).
2. "Though they take the most binding form of oath, they do so only as a means of deceiving others" (Barnes on v. 2).
3. Faithfulness was the chief attribute that God sought but despite chastening none was to be found in Judah (3).
4. The disregard of truth and law existed in both the poor and the leaders (4-5).

The necessary punishment (6-9)

Judah had forsaken Jehovah for false gods. Despite being well provided for, they had committed adultery, both spiritual and physical. Why should I, asked God, not punish them?

R. 3: The outcome of the testing - the rejection of a worthless people (6:1-30).

Graphic portrayal of approaching attack on Jerusalem as warning to the people (1-8)

Such warnings going unheeded, God's wrath must be poured out (9-15)

1. "Their houses ... fields ... everyone is given to covetousness..." (12-13). Compare the order of listing (Dt 5:21). The people had been greedy so they must suffer the loss of all things.

2. They had treated the wound of the people “slightly” (14; Cf. Eze 13:10). Like a doctor who prescribes paracetamol for gangrene.

The fruit of such stubbornness and hardness of heart—a judgment which cannot be averted By unrepentant Sacrifice (16-21)

1. Jehovah had not left the people without guidance (16). He had sent various messengers to direct the people back to the old paths. Then when that had been rejected, He sent prophets to sound a warning. But they were deaf to all efforts to help (17).
- They had forsaken the old/ancient paths and the side-lanes they had chosen were leading to calamity (18:15-17).
- “Ask... where is the good way?” (16) Note the appeals of Moses to the Israelites to walk in the ways marked out by Jehovah so that they might live and prosper in Canaan (Dt 5:33; 8:6; 10:12-13; 11:22-25; 19:9; 26:17; 28:9).
2. The people being resistant, God explains to the nations what he will do (18-19).
3. In the face of such rebellion sacrifices will be to no purpose (20). Rather God will lay stumbling blocks before them, explained in the next verses.

The nature of Judah’s Enemy Calls for Bitter Lamentation (6:22-26).

1. The sound of their approach - like a roaring sea (23).
2. The terror that would spread through the land by their approach (24-25).
3. *Call for mourning at what lay ahead (26).*

The outcome of Judah’s time of trial - a rejected people (27-30)

1. These verses provide a basis for understanding Jeremiah’s work among the nation and explain why the destroyer must come. He was to be a tester set out in the figure of an assayer who would test ore for the presence of gold or silver. However the prophet was to “know and test their way.” In this role he would be exposed to the venom of the people but God would make him an impregnable “fortress” (27).
2. Jeremiah found them to be stubborn rebels, walking as slanderers and corrupters (28). Continuing the metaphor, they were the relatively inferior metals of brass and iron compared to silver (27, 30; cf. Eze 22:18).
3. The metallurgic comparison is continued with reference to smelting (29). As an intense effort to separate the baser metals using lead proves vain, so the preaching of Jeremiah failed to draw off the wicked.
4. Those observing will call them “rejected” silver because the Lord had “rejected” them (30). So the period of trial finding them wanting, Judah must be destroyed.

Second Group of Readings: Jeremiah 7:1-15; 10:17-25

Introductory Comments

1. The next Major section of the book deals with the way of salvation (chapters 7-10).
2. Judah was deluded about this as shown in the first reading. Jeremiah insisted that the only way of salvation is through the knowledge of the true God. But Judah refused to know Jehovah (cf. 9:3, 6). Therefore the nation faced a devastating Judgment. In the second reading we see the lesson which would be taught by the calamity to come upon Judah. The lesson which they refused to learn in any other way, would be forced upon them through that disaster.

An outline of the unit:

I. The way of salvation

A. Warning against a false trust in the temple and the sacrificial service (7:1-8:3).

- B. The stubborn and foolish commitment to apostasy which brought Judah to ruin (8:4-9:1).
- C. Judah: a people destroyed for lack of knowledge (9:2-11).
- D. The wisdom attained through judgment (9:12-10:25).

R. 4: The false security felt by Judah (Jer 7:1-15).

Repentance and reform - Judah's only hope to remain (1-7).

1. The message was delivered at the gate of the Temple (1).
2. He warned "Amend your ways and your doings (says God), and I will cause you to dwell in this place" (3).
3. They violated God's law and served other gods but believed that the Temple was the surety for their safety. It was the sanctuary of God and the place of His presence and so no matter what evil they did, as long as it stood they would be able to remain in the land (4). Hence in Micah's time the false prophets argued "is not the LORD among us? No harm can come upon us" (Mic 3:11). They had a superstitious regard toward the Temple as did their forefathers towards the Ark believing that it would ward off harm (1 Sam 4:4-5).
4. This was delusionary; the only safeguard was godly living (5-7).

The delusion of false trust amplified (8-11)

Behaving in this way was to place trust in deceptive words (8).

2. Jeremiah asked two questions (9-11):

- Do you believe that you can commit these sins –stealing, murder, adultery, swear falsely, serve Baal etc. – "And [then] come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations?'" (9-10).
- "Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den (m'arah) of thieves in your eyes?" With the warning "Behold, I, even I, have seen [it], says the LORD" (11). "M'arah" is defined by Vine as "a cave or cavern, used especially as a hiding place or dwelling for wild animals." The Jews saw it as a place of refuge from the consequences of their sins. They would steal, murder, commit adultery and worship other gods thinking that they could then offer their sacrifices and be forgiven.

The delusion exposed by a reference to Shiloh (12-15)

1. Shiloh was the site in Israel where the Tabernacle was first erected upon entrance into Canaan (Josh 18:1; Judges 18:31; 21:12, 19; 1 Sam 1:3, 9; 2:14; 3:21; 4:3-4). The historical books do not recount its destruction but there are allusions to it (Jer 26:6; Psa 78:60). Probably Shiloh was overrun after the Philistines' victory and the Ark's capture (1 Sam 4). The Tabernacle was at Nob during Saul's reign (1 Sam 21).
2. God would do to the Temple what He had done to Shiloh and as Ephraim had been removed, so would they (14-15). The sacredness of a place would not save it from destruction if sin was practised there.

R 5: The great lesson of judgment and captivity (10:17-25).

Call to prepare for exile (17-18)

1. "Gather up your wares from the land, O inhabitant of the fortress!"

- It is essential in this passage to be aware of the different renderings since the NASV and ESV for example give the impression that those addressed are living under siege at the time of the speech. More likely Jeremiah anticipates what will be (cf. 22).

- ASV marginal note says the Hebrew is "inhabitant of the fortress."

2. The reason - "Behold, I will throw out at this time The inhabitants of the land, And will distress them, That they may find [it so]" (18).

The response of the people to Their fate (19-25)

1. A humbled people anticipated (19-22).

- The speaker here is the inhabitress of Jerusalem (cf. 18). The inhabitants of Jerusalem are represented as a woman who bemoans her fate (19-20).

- main cause of the disaster are the “shepherds” who failed to enquire of the Lord and relied on human wisdom to plot their course (21).

- Confirmation that this passage anticipates what is to come (22).

The great lesson (23-25)

1. Jeremiah continuing to speak on behalf of the people expresses the great truth that they had learned. Control of human affairs is not in man. They had followed their leaders, ignored God’s counsel and the result was the city’s destruction and exile. They had also learned “[It is] not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (23).

2. Entreaty for mitigation in correction and for God’s wrath to be poured out upon her enemies (24-25).

Questions

1. What were the weaknesses in Josiah’s reforms?
2. Why did judgement have to come upon Judah?
3. What was Judah’s delusion?