

So far in Jeremiah, we have heard Jeremiah’s sermons against Jerusalem and Judah.
Tonight we come to Jeremiah’s first sermon against the nations.

Our text tonight is all about Babylon and Jerusalem.

And it is passages like this one in Jeremiah 25

that set up the NT use of the image of Babylon as the “city of man.”

So as we hear about Babylon and Jerusalem in our text tonight,

we need to see how judgment begins with the household of God –

but if it begins with us,

what will become of those who do not obey the gospel? (1 Peter 4)

1. Seventy Years of Desolation: the Result of Persistent Disobedience (25:1-14)

a. You Have Not Listened to My Servants the Prophets (v1-7)

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon),² which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem:

The fourth year of Jehoiakim – which is also the first year of Nebuchadnezzar –
is known in our history books as the year 605 B.C.

605 BC was a very important year in the ancient world!

605 BC was the year of the battle of Carchemish –

where Nebuchadnezzar, the crown prince of Babylon,

defeated the combined armies of Assyria and Egypt

in order to establish Babylon as the greatest power in the Middle East.

Nebuchadnezzar’s father, Nabopolassar,

had led a Babylonian uprising against the Assyrian Empire.

In 612 B.C., Nabopolassar had defeated Nineveh –

so the Assyrians moved their capital to Harran.

In 610, Nabopolassar conquered Harran –

so the Assyrians moved their capital to Carchemish, on the Euphrates.

In 609 B.C., Pharaoh Neco of Egypt had brought his army to defend Assyria –

King Josiah of Judah had sought to ambush the Egyptians,

hoping to win Babylonian favor –

but Pharaoh Neco soundly defeated Judah, killing Josiah in battle.

Then Neco removed the pro-Babylonian Shallum (or Jehoahaz),

and replaced him with the pro-Egyptian Jehoiakim.

Now, four years later, in 605 B.C., word comes to Jerusalem

that Pharaoh Neco has been defeated – the joint Egyptian/Assyrian army destroyed –

and the crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar, the hero of the Battle of Carchemish,

has replaced his father as King of Babylon.

Let's see –

four years ago, your father sought to help the Babylonians;
four years ago, the Egyptians killed your father, deposed your pro-Babylonian brother,
and put *you* on the throne in order to have a pro-Egyptian ruler in Judah.

Let's just say that the year 605 B.C. was not a good year for pro-Egyptian rulers.

Assyria has fallen.

Egypt is weak and helpless.

And Nebuchadnezzar has dreams of restoring the great Babylonian Empire of old!

Quite frankly, you don't need to be a prophet

to know that Nebuchadnezzar will be coming your way in order to deal with Egypt –

and if you are still pro-Egyptian,

he will deal with *you* along the way!

You only need to be a prophet to know *what to do about it!*

Jeremiah hears the news about the battle of Carchemish

and he says to all the people of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem:

³ *“For twenty-three years, from the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, to this day, the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened.*

Twenty-three years.

I have spent fourteen years preaching to a congregation that *does listen* –

at least, most of the time! –

and I have found that preaching to a generally faithful congregation
is emotionally challenging.

I cannot imagine what it would be like

to preach for 23 years to a congregation that would not listen.

Well, it's only fair to the truth to point out that many of Jeremiah's hearers *did* listen.

There was a faithful remnant:

Baruch, his brother Seraiah, and some of the elders.

But Jeremiah's call required that he not just preach to the faithful remnant.

Jeremiah's call required that he go to the temple and proclaim his message there.

Jeremiah's call required that he go to the sons of David,

and tell them that they were doomed.

If my call was to go to the county/city building in South Bend

and proclaim a message of coming destruction on South Bend,

I can only imagine the response I would receive!

Then again, South Bend is not the city where God placed his name!
If you want a better parallel,
consider the church situation in South Bend.
There are many prophets in South Bend –
some of whom are faithful – and some of whom are not.

Indeed, Jeremiah recognizes that he is not the only faithful prophet:

⁴ You have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear, although the LORD persistently sent to you all his servants the prophets, ⁵ saying, ‘Turn now, every one of you, from his evil way and evil deeds, and dwell upon the land that the LORD has given to you and your fathers from of old and forever. ⁶ Do not go after other gods to serve and worship them, or provoke me to anger with the work of your hands. Then I will do you no harm.’ ⁷ Yet you have not listened to me, declares the LORD, that you might provoke me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm.

Notice the basic message of the prophets:

“Do not go after other gods to serve and worship them.”

We have spent a lot of time in recent weeks focusing on Jeremiah’s message regarding doing righteousness and justice.

There is a big debate between those who say that *idolatry* is the chief sin, and those who say that failure to do justice is the chief sin.

Jesus put an end to this debate in Matthew 22,
when he said,

“You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the great and first commandment.

And a second is like it:

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.” (Matt 22:37-40)

Your biggest problem is that you don’t love God.

But one of the most obvious manifestations of your failure to love God
is seen in the way that you treat those who are made in the image of God.

You see, if you love God, then you will love that which reminds you of the one you love!

And when you don’t love God with all your heart,
invariably you will love something else in place of God.

We were created to love and serve him.

So if we don’t love and serve him, we will love and serve something else.

And my observation is that very few people idolize themselves.

Yes, we are pursuing glory, honor, and peace –
but those are all things that we *should* seek from God
(as Paul says in Romans 2:10).

Our problem is that we seek glory, honor, and peace from that which is not God.
Professors, managers, spouses, parents, children...

Jerusalem had sought glory, honor, and peace from the surrounding nations.
And so they accepted and worshiped the gods of the nation
in order to obtain the blessings of fellowship with the nations.

Likewise, when I love praise from men more than I love praise from God,
then I accept and worship the gods of others in order to win their praise.
So, for instance, if I want the approval and help of my boss (or professor)
I will acquiesce in their injustice in order to further my own career.

Now, this does not mean that you always need to speak up in *every* situation.
Not every faithful Israelite in Jeremiah's day was called to be Jeremiah!
But it *does* mean that there *are* times when you will be called to stand up to injustice –
when love for neighbor requires that you use your position to protect the innocent.

But Jerusalem did not listen to Jeremiah – or to the rest of the faithful prophets.
And so the LORD says that if you will not listen to my servants the prophets,
I will bring *another servant* to deal with you:
“my servant Nebuchadnezzar!”

b. So I Will Bring My Servant Nebuchadnezzar to Destroy All These Nations (v8-11)

⁸ “Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, ⁹ behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the LORD, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these surrounding nations.

There are very few people whom God identifies by name as “my servant.”
Moses, Job, David – and a handful of others – culminating with our Lord Jesus.
But among that elite company is Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, my servant.

And the reason why should be clear enough:
if you will not listen to my servants the prophets,
then you *will* listen to my servant, the King of Babylon!

And God says that *he* will turn the world upside down.
All the curses of the covenant he will bring upon his own city:

I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. ¹⁰ Moreover, I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the

voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp.

Judgment begins with the household of God.

¹¹ *This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.*

The 70 years should not be taken *as a precise count*.

Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem in 587 B.C.

The decree allowing the return to Jerusalem came in 538 B.C. (49 years later) – and the temple was rebuilt in 515 B.C. (72 years).

But as with all of these sorts of numbers in the Bible, the point is “approximately” 70 years.

And the point of the “70 years” is that it will be a *long time* – long enough for your children to grow old and your grandchildren to grow up – long enough for two generations to die in Exile.

Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness – 40 years was long enough for one generation to die.

Jeremiah has said that the deliverance that is coming is *greater* than the Exodus.

Even so the penalty for Israel’s sin is greater as well!

You will die in Exile – but so will most of your children.

Only a handful of greybeards in 515 B.C. would still remember Solomon’s temple.

But 70 years is also a *limited* punishment.

There is an end.

And there is also a promise:

c. After Seventy Years I Will Punish Babylon (v12-14)

¹² *Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste.*

Earlier, we sang Psalm 137 – a song that speaks of the blessing upon the one who dashes the Babylonian children’s heads against the rocks.

The author of Psalm 137 probably knew the prophecy of Jeremiah.

The Psalmist knew that God had promised that what Babylon had done to Jerusalem would be done in turn to Babylon.

Judgment begins with the household of God,
but if it begins with us, what will become of those who do not obey the gospel?

And so God says:

¹³ *I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations.* ¹⁴ *For many nations and great kings shall make slaves even of them, and I will recompense them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.*”

Now, you might wonder,

“Wait a minute, when has Jeremiah prophesied against the nations?”
We’ve heard Jeremiah’s preaching against *Jerusalem* –
but we’ve heard *nothing* against Babylon or the nations!

So, what is this “book” that verse 13 refers to?

Verse 14 says that God will recompense the nations according to their deeds.
In the LXX, this is followed by a series of oracles against the nations.
In our Bibles, those oracles are found in Jeremiah 46-51.

To put it simply the LXX has the same beginning, through 25:13,
then gives us the *oracles* of Jeremiah 46-51 (though in a different order),
then returns to 25:15 – and runs through chapter 45 –
which means that the LXX ends with chapter 45 –
the word of the LORD to Baruch, regarding Egypt.
This is fitting, because the beginning of the LXX translation came from Egypt.

Certainly chapters 46-51 work well here – but so do verses 15-38!

In the LXX, verses 15-38 become the conclusion of the oracles against the nations.
In our version, verses 15-38 become the summary of the oracles against the nations.

I’ll mention this again when we get to chapter 46

because verse 13 makes it clear that we should think about those oracles
in *this* context.

And God has given us *two* manuscript traditions of Jeremiah that follow these two orders.
Both of which are so early that the best explanation
is that Jeremiah sent one to Babylon with Seraiah (end of chapter 51),
and the other with Baruch to Egypt (chapter 45)

Seraiah’s manuscript has more detail that is particular for a Babylonian context.
Baruch’s manuscript leaves out much of the Babylon-specific material,
and seems to be well-edited for a Egyptian context.

But when you think about how the kings of Judah were torn back and forth
by pro-Egyptian and pro-Babylonian factions,

the last half of Jeremiah 25 reinforces the theme that yes,
judgment begins with the household of God,

but if it begins with us, what will become of those who do not obey the gospel?

2. The Cup of Wrath: To the Jew First and also to the Greek (25:15-29)

a. The LORD’s Rule Over the Nations (v15-16)

¹⁵ Thus the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: “Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. ¹⁶ They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them.”

In Jeremiah 1, God had told the prophet that God was setting Jeremiah over *nations* – not just Judah –

“to pluck up and to break down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant.”

And so now God tells Jeremiah to take the cup of the wine of wrath,
and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.

Here you see the principle that Paul will articulate in Romans:

“to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

Yes, God deals in a special way with his chosen people –
but remember what God had said to Abraham!

Why did God choose Abraham and his seed?

So that the blessing the Abraham might come to the nations –
so that in *you* all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

The calling of Israel – indeed, the calling of the church –
is not to be a ghetto, isolated from the world –
but to be the colony of heaven –
the place in this age where the kingdom of heaven is revealed.

You see this in the table of the nations in verses 17-26.

b. Jeremiah’s Table of the Nations That Shall Drink (v17-26)

¹⁷ So I took the cup from the LORD's hand, and made all the nations to whom the LORD sent me drink it: ¹⁸ Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a desolation and a waste, a hissing and a curse, as at this day;

Notice verse 18.

“As at this day.”

This probably comes from a later time in Jeremiah’s ministry.

In 605 BC, it is not obvious yet that Jerusalem is a “desolation and a waste.”

But as we have seen repeatedly,

the book of Jeremiah is not organized in chronological order,
but as a collection of sermons and stories
that remind the people of God in every age
of the dangers of forgetting the LORD!

But as judgment begins with the household of God,
judgment continues to fall on the nations.

¹⁹ Pharaoh king of Egypt, his servants, his officials, all his people, ²⁰ and all the mixed tribes among them; all the kings of the land of Uz and all the kings of the land of the Philistines (Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod); ²¹ Edom, Moab, and the sons of Ammon; ²² all the kings of Tyre, all the kings of Sidon, and the kings of the coastland across the sea; ²³ Dedan, Tema, Buz, and all who cut the corners of their hair; ²⁴ all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the mixed tribes who dwell in the desert; ²⁵ all the kings of Zimri, all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of Media; ²⁶ all the kings of the north, far and near, one after another, and all the kingdoms of the world that are on the face of the earth. And after them the king of Babylon^[a] shall drink.

The order of the nations is roughly chronological.

Egypt was the nation who oppressed Israel in the days of Moses.

The following kings formed a “who’s who” of the ancient enemies of Israel, gradually expanding out to the distant kingdoms “far and near” –

“all the kingdoms of the world that are on the face of the earth.”

And last of all, “the king of Babylon shall drink.”

Now, you could see this as a prophecy of what would happen in the next generation.

Babylon, under Nebuchadnezzar *did* make the nations drink the cup of God’s wrath.

And then, finally, Babylon fell to the Medes and the Persians.

But the imagery of Jeremiah 25 will be taken up in the book of Revelation,

as “Babylon the Great” – the prostitute – becomes the queen of all the earth.

In other words, the New Testament calls us to read the story of Babylon as the story of the city of man.

In every generation Babylon continues to flourish under a new name and with a new leader.

And Jeremiah gives us the principle – that judgment begins with the household of God, but if Jerusalem must drink, then what will become of the nations of the earth?

c. If Jerusalem Must Drink, What of the Nations of the Earth? (v27-29)

²⁷ “Then you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Drink, be drunk and vomit, fall and rise no more, because of the sword that I am sending among you.’

Verse 27 gives a vivid picture of the effects of drunkenness.

²⁸ “And if they refuse to accept the cup from your hand to drink, then you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts: You must drink!’ ²⁹ For behold, I begin to work disaster at the city that is called by my name, and shall you go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished, for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth, declares the LORD of hosts.’

You cannot escape the cup of God’s wrath!

Everyone must drink!

Why do we call the cup at the Lord's Table "the cup of blessing"?

It is because Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath.

In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus trembled because he *knew* that he must drink that cup.

He even asked that the cup be taken from him! (Matt 26:39)

And he told his disciples that they would drink the same cup that he did (Matt 20:23).

When we come to the Lord's Table, we drink of his cup.

That's *why* Paul says that the one who eats and drinks unworthily
eats and drinks judgment to himself!

Because the cup *is* the cup of judgment – the cup of wrath!

That may sound shocking to you.

But think about what Jesus says:

“This cup is the new covenant *in my blood.*”

Or think about how Paul says it:

“The cup of blessing that we bless
is it not a participation in the *blood of Christ?*”

Why do the NT authors put such an emphasis on the symbolic drinking of Christ's blood?

Because *only* the blood of Christ can save you from the wrath of God.

Everyone must drink the cup of God's wrath.

There is *no* escape.

But just as the waters of judgment in the Flood became the waters of salvation for Noah,
so also the cup of wrath becomes the cup of salvation for those who trust in Jesus.

3. The Prophecy Against the Nations (25:30-38)

Our passage tonight ends with Jeremiah's prophecy against the nations (verses 30-38).

This message is given to Jerusalem in order to encourage the faithful to endure.

Yes, Babylon is going to win – for now –

but in the end *God wins.*

a. The LORD Will Enter into Judgment with All Flesh (v30-33)

³⁰ “*You, therefore, shall prophesy against them all these words, and say to them:*

“*The LORD will roar from on high,
and from his holy habitation utter his voice;
he will roar mightily against his fold,
and shout, like those who tread grapes,
against all the inhabitants of the earth.*

³¹ *The clamor will resound to the ends of the earth,
for the LORD has an indictment against the nations;
he is entering into judgment with all flesh,
and the wicked he will put to the sword,
declares the LORD.*”

³² *“Thus says the LORD of hosts:
Behold, disaster is going forth
from nation to nation,
and a great tempest is stirring
from the farthest parts of the earth!*

³³ *“And those pierced by the LORD on that day shall extend from one end of the earth to the other. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall be dung on the surface of the ground.*

Verses 30-33 takes themes that Jeremiah has already used in his prophecy against Jerusalem and applies them to the nations.
Don't worry, God may use the nations to punish you,
but he will bring disaster upon them as well!

Indeed, in verses 34-38, he even uses the language of the shepherds and the flock:

b. The Shepherds and the Flock Will Find No Refuge (v34-38)

³⁴ *“Wail, you shepherds, and cry out,
and roll in ashes, you lords of the flock,
for the days of your slaughter and dispersion have come,
and you shall fall like a choice vessel.*

³⁵ *No refuge will remain for the shepherds,
nor escape for the lords of the flock.*

³⁶ *A voice—the cry of the shepherds,
and the wail of the lords of the flock!
For the LORD is laying waste their pasture,
³⁷ and the peaceful folds are devastated
because of the fierce anger of the LORD.*

³⁸ *Like a lion he has left his lair,
for their land has become a waste
because of the sword of the oppressor,
and because of his fierce anger.”*

There's not a whole lot of explanation of *why*.
It should be obvious “why”!
If Jerusalem is guilty, *obviously* the nations are guilty!

You know how this works:
you don't need *me* to convince you that American culture is corrupt!
In the same way, the remnant (to whom Jeremiah is writing)
needed no explanation of why Babylon and the nations were corrupt!

In conclusion, I want to come back to that opening Psalm – Psalm 137.
“O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed,
blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us!

Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!”

The violent death of little children is one of the great signs of God’s wrath against humanity.

We struggle with this – because we intuitively recognize
that they have done *nothing* to deserve this!

But the Psalmist recognizes that *because* of sin
there must be a day when God makes things right –
when God makes the nations drink the cup of his wrath.

And we can’t be squeamish about what that means!

It means that God will bring back upon their own heads what they have done to others!

There is a way in which abortion in this country is not only a sin –
but it is also God’s judgment *against sin* –
which continues to *compound the sin*.

The prophets often speak of Israel’s guilt in offering their children in the fire to Molech.

And people often *rightly* compare this to the modern practice of abortion.

But I do not think that people understand the significance of the comparison.

If child sacrifice was a necessary part of the idolatry of the nations,
then so long as that idolatry remained,
child sacrifice would continue.

This is why the prophets do not mount a campaign to end child sacrifice!

They mount a campaign to end idolatry.

I would love to see the practice of abortion end in our country.

But so long as we continue our national idolatry of convenience and personal comfort
we will never end abortion.

The prophets understood that “righteousness”
is not something that can be established piecemeal.

Yes, it is good and right to do justice in particular cases –
so it is good to seek justice for the unborn!

I am glad to see many of our members involved in this!

But don’t get your hopes up!

If you have a fundamentally unrighteous state,
you can only expect partial justice.

If the root of idolatry remains,
the fruit of wickedness cannot be removed!

We need to focus our energy on being a righteous community
that protects the weak and gives a home to the helpless (of all ages!).

We’ve done a *great* job of doing this for one another.

(And quite frankly, you *can’t* do it for outsiders *unless* you do it for one another!)

Now we need to build on that and do better at drawing others in.

We've seen recent examples as

Joel and Jamie have done this by fostering,

Hugh and Rachael have done this by adopting.

Not everyone can do these things!

Foster parents and adoptive parents need to have support networks –

so if *everyone* is fostering and adopting, we'd probably fall apart!

Don't feel like you need to do everything yourself!

But Babylon is under the judgment of God.

And if the wrath of God is revealed against Babylon for its unrighteousness,

then we need to seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness,

so that we can show to the watching world a different way –

the way of King Jesus.