

Disaster from the North (Jeremiah 4:1–31)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (1/19/2020)

Introduction

1. The section of Jeremiah before us details the certain judgment looming from the north (Babylon).
 - a. Chapters 2 and 3 detailed the indictment against Judah and Jerusalem for her forsaking the Lord and refusal to repent and reform her covenant betrayal.
 - b. The prophet also documented the ultimate purpose of God for His covenant people by reserving for Himself a chosen remnant to fulfill His will (3:14–18).
2. Before the prophet warned of the impending judgment on Judah, God graciously held out to the erring people a plea to return.
 - a. The section from 3:19–4:2 addresses the *people* of Israel (the northern kingdom) who had already fallen to the Assyrians, deported never to return.
 - b. The gracious call of 4:1 and 2 must be understood as addressed to *individuals*, laying out hope that, even in judgment, sinners can return to the Lord.
3. It is also logical to take 4:3 and 4 as an appeal for individuals within Judah to get right with the Lord before the Babylonian invasion.
 - a. The text is addressed to *men* (humankind), not the nation.
 - b. As such, modern believers should consider these verses carefully in the face of the awful conditions within the nation and the world bringing us to judgment (1 Peter 4:17, 18).
4. Concerning this passage, Matthew Henry wrote, “God always warns before He wounds.”
 - a. Judah was not just another nation but the kingdom of God on earth, defined and governed by covenant.
 - b. Judah’s covenant failure serves as a warning for the new-covenant church as well.
 - c. A local church is not a club or civic organization. It is the kingdom of God whose citizen-members must take covenant commitment very seriously.

I. The Warning

1. It was a mercy from God that the rebellious nation not be caught by surprise when the awful and devastating invasion came.
 - a. This warning described the terrible nature of the judgment but also instructed those who had ears to hear as to what they should do in the storm.
 - b. The Lord acknowledged that it was He who sovereignly brought disaster and great destruction from Babylon because of Judah’s rebellion (vv. 4, 6, 12, 18).
2. The severity of the judgment was illustrated by a fierce and savage lion rushing to terrify, waste, and ruin the cities of Judah (vv. 7–10).
 - a. In response to the unrelenting fierce anger of the Lord, the people should mourn and lament (v. 8).
 - b. Courage would fail when seeing the bewilderment of the leadership of the nation as the message of the prophets was found to be utterly false (vv. 9, 10).
3. The Lord’s wrath was like a hot wind from the desert (vv. 11–14).

- a. This would not be a refreshing breeze to cool maidens, gently separate the chaff in winnowing, or cleanse the ground (v. 11).
 - b. This destructive wind came from the Lord, reflecting the unstoppable power of His Word (v. 12).
 - c. Babylon was compared to a tornadic devastation, leaving total desolation and provoking “*Woe to us, for we are ruined [or plundered]*” (v. 13).
4. The prophet informed the watchmen to be on full alert (v. 15).
- a. They were to sound the alarm (v. 15).
 - b. They were to warn the people (v. 16).
 - c. They were to beware of their own tendency to rebellion because of wicked thoughts lodging in them (v. 14).

II. The Judgment

1. The prophet’s lament is recorded (vv. 19–21).
2. The folly of the people is described (v. 22).
 - a. Though He was angry, He graciously owned them as His own (“*my people*”) as purposed in Deuteronomy 32:9.
 - b. Their foolishness was in not owning Him due to their ignorance—their deliberate disregard for the means of knowing and understanding Him or doing what pleased Him.
 - c. However, they were skilled in doing evil, which put them under His judgment.
3. The might and power of God in His fierce anger was put on full display (vv. 23–26).
 - a. The consequence of the judgment is compared to returning the earth to its primal condition at creation—no light and without form and void.
 - b. The effect of this awful power is described as a shaking of the mountains and a moving of the hills (Hebrews 12:25, 26).
 - c. The section is also a prophetic glimpse of the coming *Day of the Lord* (2 Peter 3:12; Revelation 6:12–17; Isaiah 65:17).
 - d. Nevertheless, a word of *hope* ends the terrifying section: “*The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end*” (v. 27).
4. The text closes with a note of certainty: “*For I have spoken; I have purposed; I have not relented, nor will I turn back*” (v. 28).
 - a. There will be no escape from the invader.
 - b. There will be no compromise with the invader.

What to Take Away

1. We confess, as Israel, to be a covenant people; however, are our ways and deeds pleasing to our Lord and in keeping with His will for us?
2. Do wicked thoughts lodge within us, leading to ways and deeds that attract Divine displeasure? Are our thoughts deceitful, leading away from truth? Are they unprofitable, not glorifying God or advancing the kingdom? Are they wasteful and destructive? Do they attract condemnation? (1 Peter 4:17, 18; Psalm 50:3–6).