

Hear the Words (Jeremiah 11:1–22)
By Pastor Jeff Alexander (3/1/2020)

Introduction

1. We considered the greatness of Israel’s covenant Lord in Chapter 10:6, 7, 10, 12. When He utters His voice, great and powerful things happen in the heavens and on earth (v. 13).
2. We also observed that His covenant people were “*both stupid and foolish*” because they preferred “*the instruction of idols [which are] but wood*” (v. 8). They refused the word and warning of the true God (“*Learn not the way of the nations . . . for the customs of the peoples are vanity,*” vv. 2, 3) to follow the way of the nations, adopting those which are no gods. Why did they behave so foolishly? The answer for this question is found in 9:25. A true believer, like Jeremiah, recognizes the problem and submits to the Lord (vv. 23, 24).
3. Chapter 11 follows on Jeremiah’s effort to understand the condition of his beloved Judah under the threat of invasion from Babylon. The prophet was broken and grief-stricken for the people and bewildered by Yahweh’s anger against them. He also struggled to understand the personal opposition he encountered as he faithfully proclaimed the Word of Yahweh. In this chapter Yahweh further develops the heart condition of the covenant people in their persistent tendencies to refuse His wise instruction. This refusal resulted in their being cursed and subject to suffering the just judgment of God.
4. The warnings given here must also be seriously considered by those who profess to be in the new covenant of Jesus Christ. Like Israel of old, many who profess a covenant relationship with Christ are also uncircumcised in heart—unregenerate (Colossians 2:11, 12).

I. Broken Promises

1. Jeremiah pleaded with the Lord to pour His wrath on the nations that did not know Him and thus consumed Jacob, laying waste his habitation (10:25). The prophet could not understand Yahweh’s anger directed toward His covenant people Israel.
 - a. The Lord responded to Jeremiah, commanding him to “*hear the words of the covenant*” (v. 2) in which Yahweh explicitly stated, “*Cursed be the man who does not hear the words of this covenant*” (11:3–5).
 - b. The condition of Israel’s privileged position depended on evidence of their circumcised hearts—obedience to all that the Lord commanded them. They did not listen or obey; therefore, they were liable to the curse—punishment.
2. Paul laid out the argument of circumcision in Romans 2.
 - a. The external sign of circumcision is of no value when the covenant it signifies is broken (Romans 2:25).
 - b. Circumcision does not in itself distinguish anyone as having covenant privilege (Romans 2:26; 3:28–30).
 - c. Everything relating to the old covenant pointed to Jesus and to the new covenant of grace by which all the promises to Abraham would be fulfilled based on justification by faith (Romans 4:11,12).

II. Ears to Hear

1. Jeremiah learned that hearing distinguished true covenant people with circumcised hearts from those merely circumcised in the flesh (Jeremiah 11:4, 5).
 - a. Israel was called to *hear* the Lord, translating the Hebrew word, *shema*, which appears 184 times in Jeremiah (9 times in chapter 11; vv. 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14). It is variously translated *hear*, *listen*, and *obey* and means taking the message to heart and acting on it (Deuteronomy 6:4–6; 8:19, 20; Luke 17:10; Matthew 13:10–17; Deuteronomy 8:19, 20).
 - b. Isaiah revealed that the Jews did not have hearing ears (Isaiah 6:9, 10), the text cited by Jesus in Matthew 13 on why He spoke to the Jews in parables.
2. Only regenerate people have hearing ears (John 8:31, 32, 37, 43, 47).

III. A Conspiracy

1. At verse 9, the Lord explained to Jeremiah why the Jews opposed the prophet and his message from God (vv. 9, 10).
 - a. The term *iniquities of the forefathers* is defined as “*You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes*” (Deuteronomy 12:8).
 - b. As a result, they “*have broken my covenant that I made with their fathers*” (v. 10). This was ever Israel’s problem, and it is not unique to them. This is the condition of the heart of everyone without the Spirit of God to direct him in the fear of God by the Word of God.
 - c. The tendency of the heart is to judge the things of God by human standards, putting God in a box of self-definition, deceptively comforting the heart when all is not well. It is a fact that “*the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.*”
 - d. Thus, they attacked Jeremiah when he told them the truth they did not want to hear.
2. The Lord had been very clear from the beginning, and now, “*Behold, I am bringing disaster upon them that they cannot escape. Though they cry to me, I will not listen to them*” (v. 11).
 - a. Judgment is a subject forbidden in modern Christianity; yet Scripture warns, “*The Lord will judge his people*” (Hebrews 10:30, 31).
 - b. Many who, like the people of Judah, think they are safe in their professed faith are in for a rude awakening at Judgment Day (Hebrews 10:26–31).

Take Away

What can we conclude?

1. Do you understand all that the Lord expects of you in the way of covenant obligations?
2. Are you guilty of not listening and responding to the Word of God as He expects of His own?
3. Have you acted treasonously against your Lord by turning back to your former iniquities—doing what is in your own heart?
4. Do you believe that God will judge those who refuse to hear and obey?