



BETHEL
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Apostasy on Trial

Jeremiah 2:1-19 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD, "I remember concerning you the devotion of your youth, The love of your betrothals, Your following after Me in the wilderness, Through a land not sown. "Israel was holy to the LORD, The first of His harvest. All who ate of it became guilty; Evil came upon them," declares the LORD.' " Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. Thus says the LORD, "What injustice did your fathers find in Me, That they went far from Me And walked after emptiness and became empty? "They did not say, 'Where is the LORD Who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, Who led us through the wilderness, Through a land of deserts and of pits, Through a land of drought and of deep darkness, Through a land that no one

crossed And where no man dwelt?' "I brought you into the fruitful land To eat its fruit and its good things. But you came and defiled My land, And My inheritance you made an abomination. "The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' And those who handle the law did not know Me; The rulers also transgressed against Me, And the prophets prophesied by Baal And walked after things that did not profit.

"Therefore I will yet contend with you," declares the LORD, "And with your sons' sons I will contend. "For cross to the coastlands of Kittim and see, And send to Kedar and observe closely And see if there has been such a *thing* as this! "Has a nation changed gods When they were not gods? But My people have changed their glory For that which does not profit. "Be appalled, O heavens, at this, And shudder, be very desolate," declares the LORD. "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns That can hold no water. "Is Israel a slave? Or is he a homeborn servant? Why has he become a prey? "The young lions have roared at him, They have roared loudly. And they have made his land a waste; His cities have been destroyed, without inhabitant. "Also the men of Memphis and Tahpanhes Have shaved the crown of your head. "Have you not done this to yourself By your forsaking the LORD your God When He led you in the way? "But now what are you doing on the road to Egypt, To drink the waters of the Nile? Or what are you doing on the road to Assyria, To drink the waters of the Euphrates? "Your own wickedness will correct you, And your apostasies will reprove you; Know therefore and see that it is evil and bitter For you to forsake the LORD your God, And the dread of Me is not in you," declares the Lord GOD of hosts.

As we examine Jeremiah and the prophets we must have a good understanding of the covenant relationship that existed and was enjoyed between God and His people throughout this time.

When God created this world, He entered into a relationship with Adam which required perfect obedience to a set law (Genesis 2:15-17). We call this a covenant (Hosea 6:7)! Furthermore, Adam was no mere man; he was created to be the representative of the human race in this relationship. As such, if he failed (and he did), his failure would be counted against all of humanity- which is why we read in this in Romans 5.

Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned."

Because Adam, as our Federal Head, failed, all mankind now stands guilty of violating the Covenant of Works which God established with Adam at the dawn of time. This is why a person goes to hell today! It is NOT because they break the Ten Commandments; it is because they are guilty of violating Genesis 2:15-17!

Now rather than destroying the human race in Adam, the Lord deigned to send a "Second Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45); Jesus Christ who

- (1) Would NOT be part of the race which Adam represented (which in part is why the doctrine of the virgin birth is so important; Adam was NOT Christ's head),
- (2) BUT would be born under the stipulations of the original covenant as outlined in Genesis 2.

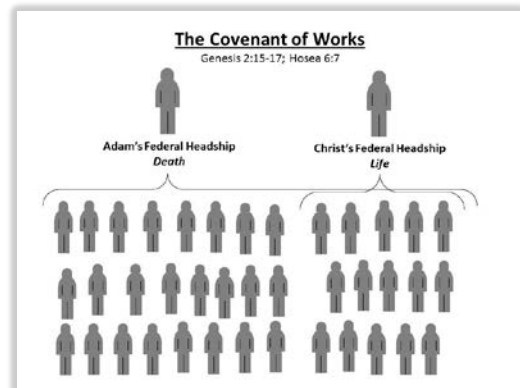
Galatians 4:4-5a, "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law..."

Christ came to uphold the original covenant which Adam violated, and so He was born "under the [same] law [as Adam]" and so became a "Second Adam."

Romans 5:19, "For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners [because of Adam, the world was plunged into sin and misery], even so through the obedience of the One [Jesus Christ] the many will be made righteous."

In theology, we call this the Covenant of Grace which in essence was a covenant overlay whereby all represented by Christ regained their original right-standing which Adam forfeited on account of his rebellion. Accordingly at this point, there are two covenants which we need to understand.

- (1) The original covenant- the Covenant of Works- by which all those represented by Adam fell into condemnation on account of Adam's rebellion.
- (2) The Covenant of Grace by which only those who have Christ as their federal head/representative regain their original right-standing before God!



1 Corinthians 15:22, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive."

Again it is important to note that in order for you to regain your original right-standing before God, you have to be represented by Christ! You have to be a Christian!

Now this second covenant, the Covenant of Grace, is what the rest of the Bible is all about. From Genesis 3:15 onward, everything given to us in Scripture is an elaboration of Christ and so His work as our Federal Representative.

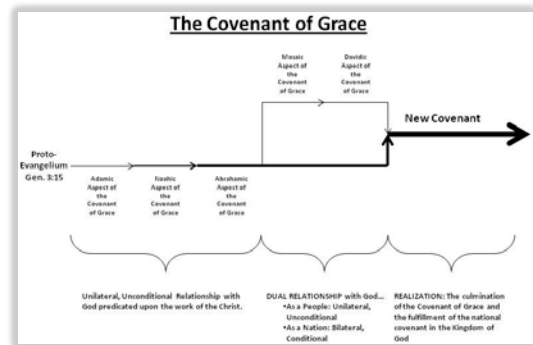
John 5:39, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me."

Speaking of Christ on the Road to Emmaus we read:

Luke 24:27, "And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."

Thus when you look at the Bible as a whole, you notice grand movements by which God revealed another facet/aspect of His redeeming work in Christ.

- From Genesis 3:15-5:32 we read of the Adamic Aspect of the Covenant of Grace which introduced Adam and Eve to the person and work of the Redeemer.
- From Genesis 6-9, we read of the Noahic Aspect of the Covenant of Grace which not only preserved the remnant of God's people, but the entire world for God's purpose and glory.
- From Genesis 11-50, we read of the Abrahamic Aspect of the Covenant of Grace by which God confined His redemptive work by and large to a family/clan. Here we see the formal establishment of an identifiable people of God- which today we call the church!
- But then starting in Exodus, we come to the Mosaic Aspect of the Covenant of Grace by which God organized His people into a nation- and this is huge! At this point in time, the people of God now enjoyed a dual status before God. (1) Individually they enjoyed an unconditional relationship with God by which there never again would be condemnation. (2) Corporately, as a nation, they enjoyed a conditional relationship with God by which God promised to bless the nation if as a nation they proved faithful. But if as a nation they rebelled, then God would reject the nation!



It is so important for you to see that at this time in Redemptive History, God's people were a Theocracy; the individual and the national merged//the people of God and the state. As the chart illustrates, they remained a clan/children of Abraham by which they enjoyed an unconditional relationship with God. However they also had become a nation by which they enjoyed a conditional relationship with God; if they proved faithful as a nation, they would endure. But if they rebelled, God's covenant protection on the nation would be removed. Moses gave this warning to the people of God in Leviticus:

Leviticus 26:14-17, "But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments, if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, *and* so break My covenant, I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that shall waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you shall sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies shall eat it up. And I will set My face against you so that you shall be struck

down before your enemies; and those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when no one is pursuing you.”

Deuteronomy 28:15-16, “But it shall come about, if you will not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Cursed *shall you be* in the city, and cursed *shall you be* in the country.”

W. J. Dumbrell wrote this:

Since, however, Sinai tied political forms, which would produce a national state, to the theological concept of Israel [the clan, the organized people of God], a new factor had emerged. While the future of the Israel of God could be unequivocally guaranteed it would be a different question whether the notion of the territorial state which Sinai would call into being would survive. [Now speaking of this political state...] The stability of the political arrangements resulting from Sinai would depend entirely, as the book of Deuteronomy makes plain, upon the national response to the blessings of nationhood and land conferred. These blessings would be retained if their source was gratefully remembered and if the national life gave expression to this. They would be lost if the political or national goals became an end in themselves and Israel were to forget the ultimate authority to whom she owed allegiance. As we know, this in fact happened in the Old Testament era. That is why the Old Testament becomes a history of Israel’s national failure. (Dumbrell, 2001, p. 99)

This brings us to the Prophetic Corpus of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, and the like. Almost all of these prophets were sent to the NATION (Israel or Judah) and their leaders and kings to sound the alarm that if as a nation God’s people persisted in their rebellion, then bad things would come and eventually God would disown them as a nation! We see it in Jeremiah. Notice the basis on which he addresses the people of God:

Jeremiah 11:1-5, “The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, ‘Hear the words of this covenant [which covenant? The national covenant or the unconditional covenant of grace which is bound up in Christ?] and speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and say to them, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Cursed is the man who does not heed the words of this covenant which I commanded your forefathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt [Got it! Jeremiah is talking here about the national, conditional covenant God made with Israel at Sinai], from the iron furnace, saying, “Listen to My voice, and do according to all which I command you; so you shall be My people, and I will be your God,” in order to confirm the oath which I swore to your forefathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as *it is* this day.’”” Then I answered and said, ‘Amen, O Lord.’”-

It was the Mosaic Aspect of the Covenant of Grace which Jeremiah brought before the nation- for it was this national covenant which God’s people were violating at the time.

Jeremiah 11:6-8, “And the Lord said to me, ‘Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying, “Hear the words of this covenant and do them. For I solemnly warned your fathers in the day that I brought them up from the land of Egypt, even to this day, warning persistently, saying, ‘Listen to My voice.’ Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked, each one, in the stubbornness of his evil heart; therefore I brought on them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded *them* to do, but they did not.””-

We know the rest of the story! God’s people did not heed the voice of the prophets and so the nation was disowned by God, given over to other nations, and so destroyed in 722 BC for the Northern Kingdom of Israel and 586 BC for the Southern Kingdom of Israel! Jeremiah lays the blame for the destruction of the nation(s) at the feet of the nation(s) because they lived in sin, their nation was destroyed!

Now it is tempting to shut down our brains with the telling of all of this history thinking that it is quite irrelevant to our lives today. After all, the theocracy is gone! And while that is true, let me remind you of some very important points.

- The Theocracies of Israel and Judah were each made up of two entities: the state and the church.

When bad things happen today in the United States, God’s people generally respond by blaming it on the moral decline of the nation itself; as if somehow the promises/threats which God made to Israel as a nation in the Old Testament now belong to the USA. For example when a severe drought came upon the land in Jeremiah’s day we read this:

Jeremiah 14:1-4, “That which came as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah in regard to the drought: ‘Judah mourns, and her gates languish; they sit on the ground in mourning, and the cry of Jerusalem has ascended. And their nobles have sent their servants for water; they have come to the cisterns and found no water. They have returned with their vessels empty; they have been put to shame and humiliated, and they cover their heads. Because the ground is cracked, for there has been no rain on the land; the farmers have been put to shame, they have covered their heads.’”

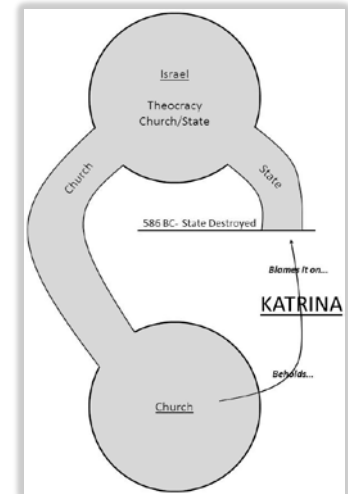
Why was there a drought? Jeremiah laid the blame at the feet of the nation, on account of their national sin.

Jeremiah 14:10-12, “Thus says the Lord to this people, ‘Even so they have loved to wander; they have not kept their feet in check. Therefore the Lord does not accept them; now He will remember their iniquity and call their sins to account.’ So the Lord said to me, ‘Do not pray for the welfare of this people. When they fast, I am not going to listen to their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I am not going to accept them. Rather I am going to make an end of them by the sword, famine and pestilence.’”

Why did God send the sword, famine and pestilence? Jeremiah says it was because as a nation the people of God rebelled.

Now with chapters like this in mind, when a severe drought (or some other national disaster) comes upon the United States USA what do we hear from the pulpits? We hear that the disaster came because of the “*wickedness of the nation!*” Now to be sure, there is something that can be said about this. All nations are bound by the “general equity of the law” (Romans. 2:14-16). Thus every nation is held accountable before God for what it does or does not do. This no doubt is why God raised up Jeremiah as a “prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5) and why this prophecy ends with six chapters detailing God’s judgments against foreign nations (Jeremiah 46-51).

However, there is also a reason God’s word says, “...judgment begins with the household of God” (1 Peter 4:17). When God assembled His people into a Theocracy (which involved a merging of the church and state) and gave them promises conditioned by their conduct, we must see that these promises were given to two entities: the State as well as the Church, the organized people of God. Now of the two entities, which has continued throughout Redemptive and Church History? Not the theocratic nation/the state, but the church/the organized people of God! The only “group” today that can legitimately claim for themselves the “Old Testament warnings concerning covenant rebellion” is the church, the organized people of God. This is why we read passages such as Jeremiah address to the people of God who had been brought into exile, thus they were without a state. They stood before God only as a people



Jeremiah 29:17-20, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Behold, I am sending upon them the sword, famine, and pestilence, and I will make them like split-open figs that cannot be eaten due to rottenness. And I will pursue them with the sword, with famine and with pestilence; and I will make them a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse, and a horror, and a hissing, and a reproach among all the nations where I have driven them, because they have not listened to My words,’ declares the Lord, ‘which I sent to them again and again by My servants the prophets; but you did not listen,’ declares the Lord. You, therefore, hear the word of the Lord, all you exiles, whom I have sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon.”

The same warnings which God gave to the Theocracy, He gave to the organized people of God which we call the church! From this we conclude that when the church is sick, the land in which they live will be sick!

The book of Haggai was written around 520 BC, long after the Theocracy. Listen to the exhortation on account of the people’s sin:

Haggai 1:10-11, "Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands."

Malachi was written around 444 BC. There it is God's word to the organized people of God/the church.

Malachi 2:8-9a, "'But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi,' says the Lord of hosts. 'So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people...'"

This led to harsh times as the land in which God's people lived became cursed. But notice, if God's people repented, the land would be restored.

Malachi 3:11-12, "'Then I will rebuke the devourer for you [this most likely referred to a locust plague], so that it may not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast *its grapes*,' says the Lord of hosts. 'And all the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land,' says the Lord of hosts."

In light of all of this, we conclude that God referenced both the state and the organized people of God when he gave this exhortation at the dedication of the temple:

2 Chronicles 7:13-14, "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

When bad things happen in a land that which ought to be first in the cross hairs of blame is NOT the nation in which we live, BUT the church which we comprise! Accordingly, let me ask you these questions:

- Could it be that the blame for the moral decay of the nation in which we live could be placed at the feet of the church? Not because we aren't being salt and light in the culture, but because we've compromised the callings and the command of God!
- Could it be that this disaster or that drought came upon the USA because the people of God in the USA have compromised their faithfulness to the Lord?

The church today is in as worse shape as it has ever been, and we have the gall as a people to blame this or that bad thing on the nation in which we live? This is hypocrisy! Paul asked the people of God in His day this:

Romans 2:22, "You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?..."-

The question is a good one for the church which has as high if not a higher divorce rate than the world!

Romans 2:22b, "...You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?"

Are we as a church going to benefit from the things we claim we deplore? We hate adultery and the devastating effects this can have in a marriage... but we love our pornography, don't we?

Romans 2:23, "You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?"

The evangelical church claims to love God's word. Yet they have despised His worship and so have adopted a Baalistic approach! Is not God blasphemed among the gentiles because of what we, the church, have done? In my humble opinion, the church as it exists in these United States today is in apostasy! There can be no doubt, the broad, evangelical church in America today is in apostasy!

Because this is true, when we come across a passage like the one before us in which God places Apostasy on Trial, how we must all sit up, wake up, and consider that the first message we ought to hear as we consider this text is this: "Thou art the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7). And bear in mind that it is not enough that we prove faithful as a church or that our denomination is faithful. The compromise of the true church down the street is going to impact us.

So indeed we must hear this message, humble ourselves before the Lord, set our houses in order, and then labor on our knees for the fidelity of the people of God! Toward that end, let's examine the passage before us beginning with...

Jeremiah 2:9, "'Therefore I will yet contend with you,' declares the Lord, 'And with your sons' sons I will contend.'"

God's People had offended God such that He resorted to a trial. The word "contend" can be used of a physical fight (cf. Exodus 21:18), it also was a legal/forensic term used of a plaintiff presenting his case in court (cf. Job 33:13; Proverbs 25:8). And this is how the term is used here. That God is said to "contend" with Israel indicates that the text before us was intended to be a lawsuit in which God deigned to sue His people for their worship, love, and devotion.

If you think about it, you don't sue someone in a court of law unless you had a legal claim on that which the other person is possessing. Otherwise, the lawsuit would be thrown out.

That God deigned to sue His people tells us that in redemption God places a claim on His people on which He fully intends to collect. Think about this for a moment. You are not your own; God bought you out of slavery and therefore has a right to do with you as He wills! Do you live like this? Or do you think that because of salvation God now is at your disposal? Will you make a claim against God when things don't go your way? Or will you submit to the claim He has placed

on your life?! I hope you see that the latter is the path of health and peace in life!

The purpose of this trial was NOT to bring His people back, BUT to give the grounds for their impending doom.

Jeremiah 15:1-4, "Then the Lord said to me, 'Even though Moses and Samuel were to stand before Me, My heart would not be with this people; send them away from My presence and let them go! And it shall be that when they say to you, "Where should we go?" then you are to tell them, "Thus says the Lord: 'Those *destined* for death, to death; and those *destined* for the sword, to the sword; and those *destined* for famine, to famine; and those *destined* for captivity, to captivity.'" And I shall appoint over them four kinds of *doom*,' declares the Lord: 'the sword to slay, the dogs to drag off, and the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy. And I shall make them an object of horror among all the kingdoms of the earth because of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, the king of Judah, for what he did in Jerusalem.'" -

What a sober passage and promise! Years before this passage, a Judean prophet announced God's intent to sue the Northern Kingdom/Israel for their worship (recall Micah 6). As this was Judah's big sister, at the time the Southern Kingdom was given a warning which they needed to heed. Yet fast forward the clock 100 years and what do we see? Not only did Judah NOT heed the warning, BUT they dove headlong into her sister's sin...

Jeremiah 3:6-8, "Then the Lord said to me in the days of Josiah the king, 'Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there. And I thought, "After she has done all these things, she will return to Me"; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also.'" -

In fact, though Judah had more warnings given to her on account of her sin, she ignored them all and sinned in ways Israel never did.

Jeremiah 3:11, "And the Lord said to me, 'Faithless Israel has proved herself more righteous than treacherous Judah.'" -

And so there was a time when Judah could have responded to the Lord's rebuke and it would have changed her future, but at the time of Jeremiah that had long since passed. The obvious purpose of the trial of Jeremiah 2 was to vindicate the name of the Lord on account of Judah's impending exile. Now realize today we as a church by virtue of this passage, are witnesses to the trial of Judah and so her condemnation as a nation (as Judah was to her big sister, Israel). Will our generation heed the message? Or will we turn a deaf ear because "*God would never allow this to happen to us!*"?

O church of God, awake! It was God's commitment here ever and always to contend with the

sons and daughters of the covenant if ever they should fall away.

Jeremiah 2:9b, “‘Therefore I will yet contend with you,’ declares the Lord, ‘And with your sons’ sons I will contend.’”

If you think about it, this is an amazing promise! The nation was soon to be destroyed, yet God indicates here His intent concerning the people in Jeremiah’s day and every Christian who would be born of them up until today: Apostasy, regardless of the degree, will always be dealt with by God! If the church

- Flirts with the world.
- Goes after the Baals.
- Is content with compromise and rebellion.
- Endures wickedness.
- Plays loose with God’s word.
- Tramples underfoot the covenant responsibilities it has in caring for the weak and hurting in the body.
- Abandons love, compassion, and mercy toward one another.

Then we can be sure of one thing: once again the land will mourn as God deals with His wayward child! And listen: again it is not enough that our house is in order. The book of Ephesians was originally written to and so intended for every Christian in Ephesus (as well as Asia Minor). How important therefore in examining this Trial that we approach it not simply as Bethel Presbyterian Church, but ever mindful of the body of Christ in America!

Works Cited

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About the Preacher

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