

September 1

Scriptures: Read Jeremiah 7 & 8

Key Verse: “Is there no balm in Gilead, is there no physician there?...” (Jeremiah 8:22)

Overview

In Jeremiah’s divinely inspired sermon, recorded in chapter seven, he made many strong statements against the people of Judah, which was likely one of the major reasons for his unpopularity. He stood at the entrance way to the inner court, into which he as a priest was permitted to enter. The common people, who had come to “worship the Lord”, or perhaps to attend one of the great feasts, were congregating in the outer court. The beautiful Temple which had once been restored and purged by the godly King Josiah (2 Kings 23:4-6, 10) had again become defiled under his son Jehoiakim, who permitted syncretic worship by mixing idolatrous abominations with the worship of God. He also reinstated worship to the god Molech in the valley of Tophet; this practice included human sacrifice, just as his grandfather Mannaseh had done (7:9-10, 30-31; 2 Kings 21:3-6; cf. Lev. 20:2-5).

Along with committing such wicked idolatry and abominations, they would come hypocritically to worship God in the Temple (cf. John 4:24). It was obedience to Him that God demanded first and foremost, not their sacrifices. Therefore, He told them that they might as well eat their burnt offerings for their offerings were in vain, being unacceptable to Him because of their unclean hearts (7:21-23; Isa. 1:11-13; Hos. 6:6; Ps. 51:16-17). God desired them to obey Him so that He would truly be their God and that they might be His people whom He would bless (7:23; Ex. 19:5-6).

The lying prophets and corrupt priests had turned the people’s hearts away from God by putting their focus on the building and the outward acts of worship rather than on the Lord, whose presence the Temple merely symbolized. It was likely these lying prophets who taught the people the “lying words” of the repetitious and superstitious chant: “The Temple of the Lord” (7:4, 8), thus making the Temple a fetish. They thought the Temple was indestructible, since God would protect it as He did when the Assyrians attacked Jerusalem many years before (cf. 2 Kings 19:32-35).

To prove them wrong, the Lord pointed to the destruction of Shiloh, where His original Tabernacle was erected after the conquest of Canaan and where it remained during the period of the judges (Josh. 18:1; 1 Samuel 2:22); but because of Israel’s wickedness and the Tabernacle’s defilement. His presence was no longer there, just as His presence was no longer with the Ark when they took it into battle as a fetish (1 Sam. 4:3, 10). Likewise, the Lord’s presence had left the Temple in Jerusalem, for it too had been defiled by sin, including their injustice and unmerciful oppression of the needy (stranger, fatherless, widow, 7:5-6, cf. Deut. 14:29; 24:19-21). Like Jesus, Jeremiah saw that the Temple had become “a den of thieves” (7:11; Matt. 21:13). Therefore, God would no longer be tolerant. He even stopped Jeremiah from interceding on their behalf, for they had become so calloused, insensitive, and hardened in sin that they had reached the point where God saw they would not repent. Thus His burning wrath would indeed come upon them (7:16, 20, 32-34).

Chapter eight begins by describing the coming judgment. The enemy would desecrate the graves and kill so many that they will be “like refuse” on the ground (8:1-3). This will come upon them because they have not heeded the warnings of the true prophets, and because they have abused their free will and rebelled against God’s will—something that even the migratory birds do not do (8:5-7; cf. Isa. 1:3). They were all so foolish, especially the “false” scribes who thought they were wise in giving their own interpretations of the law (Rom. 2:17-19), but in so doing they unashamedly led the people into sin (cf. 8:8-7:10). They, along with the priests and prophets who spoke falsely and sinned with idolatry, would suffer grave punishments, for they, of all people, should have known better (8:10-12).

As Jeremiah vividly describes the coming invasion wherein the Babylonians would devour the land and its people, he laments for his stricken people who have rejected God’s words, and he mourns because of their incurable spiritual disease. Even the balm of Gilead, implying God’s gracious and merciful healing touch, could not heal their festering wounds caused by their rebelliousness against the Great Physician, who longed that they would come to Him for healing.

Prayer

Dear Father, thank You that through trusting in Jesus we are made temples of Your Holy Spirit. We determine to remain true to You, that Your holy presence would not depart from us, Your temples, as happened to the temple in Jeremiah’s day.