

September 3

Scriptures: Read Jeremiah 11, 12 & 13

Key Verse: “Obey My voice so shall you be My people, and I will be your God.”
(Jeremiah 11:4)

Overview

The discovery of the lost book of the Law (likely the book of Deuteronomy) in the days of Josiah (2 Kings 22:8, 11) brought new light on the people’s obligations to the covenant. It also taught them about the curses for disobedience and the blessing for obedience to the words of the covenant, as fully described in Deuteronomy 28. Many times the children of Israel had said “amen” to the covenant (Ex. 24:7; Deut. 27:26; 2 Kings 23:3), but then they would always break it and suffer the curses. The covenant, however, was a blessing and a privilege to be enjoyed, for in keeping it the Lord would be their God, and this is the greatest blessing (cf. Deut. 29:12-15). Jeremiah makes many direct references to Deuteronomy, for as a priest, he would have studied the book thoroughly and would have seen how far the people had fallen into sin and how deserving they now were of the curses (cf. Deut. 27:26; 29:24-28).

The Lord told Jeremiah to go throughout Judah to remind the people of the words of the covenant and tell them to obey God’s words (“do them”, 11:6; cf. Rom. 2:13). Yet the people did not listen or obey; rather they continued to do as they pleased, just as Moses warned would happen (compare 11:8 and Deut. 29:19). Their idolatry was the sin that most angered the Lord, for they worshipped as many gods as they had cities. God told them that because of their “lewd deeds” with so many gods, they had no right to even enter the Temple of the Lord (11:15). God knew that because of the people’s stubborn rebelliousness, it was of no use for Jeremiah to even pray for them. He declared that when the calamity would come upon them, He would not hear their cries, and their many gods, to whom they would also cry, could do nothing to help them (11:11-14). The Lord’s good olive tree and choice vine would be burned and mercilessly trampled (12:10), and its branches would be broken, meaning they would be removed from their land and taken captive, as well as meaning that they would be removed from the spiritual tree (11:16b; cf. Rom. 10:17-20).

No one likes to hear messages of doom, but when they are true they should be believed and heeded, but even Jeremiah’s own family and those from his priestly home town of Anathoth did not believe him. They tried to exercise their authority over him by telling him to stop preaching, yet he would not, for a higher authority had commissioned him to preach those messages. In keeping His word to protect Jeremiah (1:8,19), the Lord revealed to him the conspiracy of those from Anathoth to murder him, and so it failed. Rather than taking matters into his own hands, Jeremiah left the vengeance to the Lord, who proclaimed that they would die by the sword and no remnant would be left in the land; this possibly meant that some would be taken captive to Babylon, for later we read that some people of Anathoth did return to the land from the captivity (cf. Ezra 2:23).

The first six verses of chapter 12 seem to also refer to the men of Anathoth of whom Jeremiah complains that although they are wicked they still appear to be “planted” by God and prosperous.

In prayer, Jeremiah reminds the Lord that they had not believed his message (12:4b). In response, the Lord tells Jeremiah that his troubles will increase (12:5) and affirms that indeed a prophet is without honour in his own home and his own country (cf. Matt. 13:57; John 4:44). No one took Jeremiah's God-given message to heart (12:11b). Therefore, God would forsake His heritage, His beloved, His vineyard, and leave it to be ravished by wild beasts. The chapter ends, however, on a note of hope for both Judah and her captors. The Lord would have compassion on Judah, pluck her out of the foreign land, and bring her back, and any Gentile who obeys the Lord will likewise be welcomed to dwell among them. But if they do not obey Him, He will one day destroy those wicked nations (12:17; cf. Isa. 60:12).

People often learn best if they have a visual illustration. Therefore, Jeremiah was instructed by the Lord to purchase a new priestly sash (probably an elaborately decorated one); it was to represent the proud people of Israel and Judah, but after leaving it in a hole by the Euphrates for many days (in the territory of Babylon, possibly symbolizing that God would cast them away in that direction), it was marred, ruined, and worthless, just as the people had become, and when they would return from captivity they would be stripped of their pride and humbled.

The second illustration of the filled wine flagons was to show that when God's wrath would be poured out upon them, it would cause confusion, disillusionment, and a fall, like that of a drunkard (cf. Ps. 60:3; Isa. 51:17). They would not give glory to God, for they loved the darkness, and therefore God would give them actual darkness in death (cf. Eph. 4:18; John 3:19-20). They were accustomed to doing evil, and just as it is impossible for the Ethiopian to change his skin (13:23), so too they could not save themselves or become pure. This shows the sinfulness and depravity of man, for without a miracle from God —the incarnation of Jesus — mankind cannot live in the Light and become pure and righteous (cf. Rom. 3:12, 23; Ps. 14:3; 51:5; Eph. 2:1-3).

Prayer

As the leopard cannot change the condition of its spots, we cannot change the condition of our hearts, but You can, Oh Lord. Help us to realize our need of Christ's daily cleansing and His desire for daily obedience.