

Jeremiah 25 • God's Cup of Wrath

Introduction

There is a biblical difference between the working of God's discipline and the working of His wrath. Neither is pleasant or desired, but as long as discipline is the work of the hour we can at least fall back on the knowledge that God continues to work to reconcile people to Him. But God's wrath explicitly brings with it the knowledge that time is running out, that at a very, very near time in our immediate future there will no longer be any opportunity for reconciliation and the only thing remaining will be the consequences of judgment. We have seen this repeatedly in the examples of Noah, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Canaanite nations, the northern kingdom of Israel, Assyria, and now with both Babylon and the nations in and around Judah. Throughout Scripture when God begins to speak about the cup of His wrath He is teaching about final judgment.

¹The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), ²which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, ³"From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, these twenty-three years the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened.

[Read v.1-3]

Q: What is the historical context? Why is it significant that this message is coming "in the fourth year of Jehoiakim" and "the first year of Nebuchadnezzar"?

A: Jehoiakim is the third to last king of Judah, a completely corrupt and wicked king. It is during his reign that the first of three deportations to Babylon will be conducted by Nebuchadnezzar, each becoming more severe than the last. This is the beginning of the end for Judah. Everything spoken by God through the prophets is finally and literally coming true.

Q: What is the spiritual context?

A: "I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened". (v.3)

Point: The time comes when the opportunity to repent and return to God runs out. It comes about when response to God's Word ultimately approaches zero.

⁴And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets again and again, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear, ⁵saying, 'Turn now everyone from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds, and dwell on the land which the LORD has given to you and your forefathers forever and ever; ⁶and do not go after other gods to serve them and to worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands, and I will do you no harm.' ⁷Yet you have not listened to Me," declares the LORD, "in order that you might provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm.

[Read v.4-7]

Q: Was the problem that they simply refused to listen only to Jeremiah?

A: Jeremiah was only the latest in a long list of prophets ignored by God's people. Twelve Old Testament books come from eleven prophets sent by God leading up to the Babylonian exile. There were many other prophets in addition to the these.

Q: What is the proof that they "have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear"?

1. They did not turn from their "evil way" or "from the evil of your deeds". (v.5) They broke all the commandments of the 2nd Tablet to love others.
2. They went "after other gods to serve them and to worship them". (v.6) They broke all the commandments of the 1st Tablet to love God.
3. They created their own idols designating them "gods" "with the work of your hands". (v.7) They didn't merely subvert God's Word and ways but attempted to completely replace Him and both tablets.

Q: What is the end result of these behaviors?

1. They will not be allowed to "dwell in the land with the LORD has given to you". (v.5) In other words, they endanger their spiritual legacy from God.
2. Their willful disobedience provokes God's anger "to your own harm". (v.7) In other words they endanger their personal relationship with God.

Point: This is not a picture of people temporarily backslidden or struggling with their faith, but those who consistently resist God's discipline and decidedly choose to live according to their own way even though they know better.

⁸Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Because you have not obeyed My words, ⁹behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' declares the LORD, 'and I will send to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. ¹⁰Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. ¹¹This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

[Read v.8-11]

Q: To the people of the day to which Jeremiah prophesied, what might have been ironic about God calling Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon "My servant"?

A: It was most likely a reproof to the Jews who were supposed to be the servants of God, and probably even boasted they were the servants of God, that as an agent of God's judgment a heathen and foreign king was more of a servant to God than they were.

Q: Was Judah the only target of judgment by God at the hand of Babylon?

A: No, it was "against this land...and against all these nations round about". (v.9) All the nations who had consistently disobeyed God and refused to repent would together experience the single force of God's judgment. (Note: This serves as a "type" or foreshadowing of how Final Judgment in the Last Days will take place against the whole world.)

Q: What is the meaning of v.10?

A: This is a very dramatic way of describing the full weight of God's judgment which will be so complete that not even a sound or the flickering of a single candle will remain. All the activities of their personal lives in which they gave the highest priority at the expense of God will cease and become a mute testimony against them.

Q: Why might v.10 sound familiar to us?

A: It is very similar to the apostle John's description of God's judgment on the final Babylon in Revelation.

Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer. And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery.

– Revelation 18:21-23

Q: What does it mean in v.11 that the land will not just be desolated but "a horror"?

A: It's a way of stating that it will serve as a visible testimony of what it means to undergo God's judgment.

¹²“Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,” declares the LORD, “for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation. ¹³I will bring upon that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, all that is written in this book which Jeremiah has prophesied against all the nations. ¹⁴(For many nations and great kings will make slaves of them, even them; and I will recompense them according to their deeds and according to the work of their hands.)”

[Read v.12-14]

Q: Why is it significant that God states Babylon will be punished “for their iniquity”?

A: “*Iniquity*” denotes sin that can only be committed by a believer, someone who chooses to consciously break God’s commandment even though they know better. As God’s instrument of judgment Babylon did not learn any of the lessons of that judgment and experience even greater judgment themselves. They knew better.

Q: What is ironic in the comparison of Babylon’s iniquity in v.14 compared to Judah’s iniquity previously outlined in v.4-7?

A: Both are repaid by God “*according to their deeds*” – a way of describing the breaking of all the commandments of the 2nd Tablet to love others, and “*according to the work of their hands*” – a way of describing the worst kind of idolatry embodying the breaking of all the commandments of the 1st Tablet to love God.

Q: What is the chief difference between God’s punishment of Judah and His punishment of Babylon?

A: Judah’s punishment lasts for 70 years, but Babylon’s punishment is permanent. (v.12)

Point: Verses 8-14 describe what we might call “the **historical** cup of God’s judgment”. They detail what literally occurred to those nations at that time of history. What comes next is most likely a greater application of these things for the whole world. We might call the following “the **prophetic** cup of God’s judgment” because what began literally and historically serves as a pattern and lesson for a greater, final fulfillment yet to come.

¹⁵For thus the LORD, the God of Israel, says to me, “Take this cup of the wine of wrath from My hand and cause all the nations to whom I send you to drink it. ¹⁶They will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them.”

[Read v.15-26]

Q: How do we know that this cup is prophetic and applicable to future times beyond just Jeremiah’s day?

A: It is a teaching repeated in Scripture not only by Jeremiah (Jer. 13:12-13; 49:12; 51:7) but by Isaiah (Is. 51:17-22), Ezekiel (Ez. 23:31-33), Habakkuk (Hab. 2:16), Zechariah (Zech. 12:2) and John (Rev. 14:10; 16:19; 18:6).

Q: What is the symbolic meaning of wine as used throughout Scripture?

A: When properly consumed wine is a symbol of being filled with the Holy Spirit. But when wine causes drunkenness and loss of control, wine is the symbol of being deceived and under a false spirit. Drunkenness represents something that is a counterfeit of the sobering work of the Holy Spirit.

Q: Who is at the top of the Jeremiah’s list to whom the cup is given?

A: “*Jerusalem and the cities of Judah and its kings and its princes*”. (v.18) Judgment always begins with the house of God first.

Q: Why might it be significant that Egypt is then immediately mentioned next?

A: It is with Egypt that Judah was attempting to make a treaty and to rely upon for protection instead of God in the literal sense, and to Egypt representing the old life to which all backslidden believers return to in vain in the greater spiritual sense.

¹⁷Then I took the cup from the LORD’S hand and made all the nations to whom the LORD sent me drink it: ¹⁸Jerusalem and the cities of Judah and its kings and its princes, to make them a ruin, a horror, a hissing and a curse, as it is this day; ¹⁹Pharaoh king of Egypt, his servants, his princes and all his people; ²⁰and all the foreign people, all the kings of the land of Uz, all the kings of the land of the Philistines (even Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and the remnant of Ashdod); ²¹Edom, Moab and the sons of Ammon; ²²and all the kings of Tyre, all the kings of Sidon and the kings of the coastlands which are beyond the sea; ²³and Dedan, Tema, Buz and all who cut the corners of their hair; ²⁴and all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the foreign people who dwell in

the desert;²⁵ and all the kings of Zimri, all the kings of Elam and all the kings of Media;²⁶ and all the kings of the north, near and far, one with another; and all the kingdoms of the earth which are upon the face of the ground, and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them.

²⁷“You shall say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, “Drink, be drunk, vomit, fall and rise no more because of the sword which I will send among you.”’²⁸ And it will be, if they refuse to take the cup from your hand to drink, then you will say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts: “You shall surely drink! ²⁹For behold, I am beginning to work calamity in this city which is called by My name, and shall you be completely free from punishment? You will not be free from punishment; for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth,” declares the LORD of hosts.’

³⁰“Therefore you shall prophesy against them all these words, and you shall say to them,

‘The Lord will roar from on high
And utter His voice from His holy
habitation;
He will roar mightily against His fold.
He will shout like those who tread the
grapes,

Against all the inhabitants of the earth.

³¹A clamor has come to the end of the

Q: Is there a pattern to the rest of the nations specifically mentioned?

A: They detail all the nations immediately adjoining Israel beginning in the south and basically working counter-clockwise around the map. There does appear to be four classes: (1) Jerusalem and Judah (v.18), (2) Egypt (v.19), (3) the closer foreign nations (v.20-22), and (4) the further foreign nations (v.23-25). Jeremiah’s prophecies specific to them comes in the following chapters.

Q: Who is “the king of Sheshach” mentioned in v.26?

A: Because of its reappearance in Jeremiah 51:41 there is no dispute that this is another name for Babylon. Some scholars attribute it to being associated with the goddess Shach, others to being a codeword derived from an ancient Hebrew system known as “Atbash”, a letter substitution system. (The first letter of the Hebrew alphabet stand for the last, the second stands for the next to last, and so forth.)

Q: What is probably the greater meaning for us in the use of the mystical name “Sheshach” in reference to Babylon?

A: We know from Scripture that the literal Babylon serves as a model of spiritual Babylons throughout various periods of earth history culminating in the final one to come in Revelation. The use of a symbolic name is most likely the Holy Spirit’s way of informing us that what literally took place in Jeremiah’s day represents something greater to come in the future iterations of Babylon.

Point: A time comes when everyone must experience God’s judgment for the final time. What happened historically to the literal nations of Jeremiah’s day during the first Babylon will occur on behalf of the whole world in the Last Days in the final fulfillment of the last Babylon.

[Read v.27-38]

Q: What is the basic message of v.27-29?

A: Once the cup of God’s judgment is provided there is no turning back. “You will not be free from punishment”. (v.29)

Q: How might what is described in v.30-31 be ironic considering what was discussed earlier?

A: In v.10 God’s judgment resulted in making everyone and everything completely silent. Here the only voice is that of God Himself.

Q: What might be particularly symbolic of God’s final judgment in v.30?

A: “He will shout like those who tread the grapes”. A repeated picture of final judgment throughout Scripture is the winepress of God’s wrath, the treading of grapes.

Q: What is the greater spiritual problem where the nations are concerned?

A: According to v.32 the coming storm of God’s judgment is the product of evil “going forth from nation to nation”. It’s a picture of rebellion, of the people of the earth deceiving and themselves being deceived.

Q: What does v.33 seem to portray?

A: The final battle of judgment we commonly refer to as “Armageddon”.

[Continued on the next page.]

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earth,
Because the Lord has a controversy
with the nations.
He is entering into judgment with all
flesh;
As for the wicked, He has given them
to the sword,' declares the LORD."

³²Thus says the LORD of hosts,
"Behold, evil is going forth
From nation to nation,
And a great storm is being stirred up
From the remotest parts of the earth.

³³"Those slain by the LORD on that day
will be from one end of the earth to the
other. They will not be lamented,
gathered or buried; they will be like dung
on the face of the ground.

³⁴"Wail, you shepherds, and cry;
And wallow in ashes, you masters of
the flock;
For the days of your slaughter and your
dispersions have come,
And you will fall like a choice vessel.

³⁵Flight will perish from the shepherds,
And escape from the masters of the
flock.

³⁶Hear the sound of the cry of the
shepherds,
And the wailing of the masters of the
flock!

For the LORD is destroying their
pasture,

³⁷And the peaceful folds are made
silent

Because of the fierce anger of the
LORD.

³⁸He has left His hiding place like the
lion;

For their land has become a horror

Because of the fierceness of the
oppressing sword

And because of His fierce anger."

Q: Why do you suppose that in the closing verses from v.34 on that God references the plight of the shepherds and the "masters of the flock"?

A: First, as a literal application to the historical nation of Israel and its calling to be a kind of "shepherd" to the nations, a light to the Gentiles, its own judgment is causing an end to both its status as a nation and its role as a witness to the other nations. It is a statement regarding its utter failure to fully deliver according to its calling and spiritual legacy.

Secondly as a spiritual application, there is a very personal despair felt by all spiritual shepherds when time runs out and there is no longer any opportunity to save the flock, to encourage repentance. Jeremiah himself throughout the whole of his ministry struggled with the worst feelings of despair and grief over the rejection of God's Word through Him by His people, knowing what would eventually come to them.

Point: *What was fulfilled in this historical event foreshadows a much greater and weightier final fulfillment yet to come.*

Overall Application

Just as there was an "explosion" of God's Word in the period leading up to God's judgment in Judah, so there has been an explosion of God's Word in our time leading into these Last Days. During the first rise of Babylon God sent the majority of prophets recorded in the Bible. In our time, technology, the media, and a lifestyle of wealth and prosperity has allowed God's Word to be repeated and retransmitted innumerable times. But just as in Jeremiah's day, who is listening? Why should believers today expect that anything less than what resulted in Jeremiah's day will come to final fulfillment in our time?