

## Journey through Jeremiah Part 5 – Declaration of Desolation

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney, Th.D. – Wednesday, January 18, 2017

### † Jeremiah 4:1-31

We pick up tonight in Jeremiah chapter 4 looking at an invitation for Israel to repent and return and a declaration of desolation given to Judah.

- (1) If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the LORD, return unto me: and if thou wilt put away thine abominations out of my sight, then shalt thou not remove.  
(2) And thou shalt swear, The LORD liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; and the nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory.

The invitation for Israel to return is given under the condition that they put away their abominations (false idols) and serve only the LORD (Yahweh). If they do that then He will bless them and will glory in Him.

Remember in the last chapter the LORD had declared that the little sister Judah, had done worse than Israel and even their heathen neighbors.

- (3) For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.

Now he specifically addresses the men of Judah and Jerusalem. They are to “break up their fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.”

On this I can speak with great experience. Growing up my dad and my papaw Chesney always put out gardens. In fact, our backyard was a large garden. My papaw also had a huge garden on top of the hill which my dad also shared. Every year we would plow, plant, and pick from those gardens. One thing you have to know about gardening is that you have to have properly prepared soil (or dirt as we say it). You can't just go to an open field that has not been plowed and cultivated and expect to grow crops. You have to do a lot of work to prepare it. You have to rid the ground of weeds, briars, saplings, and anything else that may be growing there. Then you have to plow that ground. Some people use a tractor but we always used a mule or a horse.

It begins in the late fall. You plow the ground to prepare it for the next season. The cold winter months with rain and snow help the soil. Then in early Spring you plow again to break up the ground and then you disk it to refine the soil and make it useable to plant in. This is “fallow ground.” After you have fallow ground, then you can plow your rows. Drop your plow down about ankle deep and run your rows down the garden. It is then ready to drop the seed in and cover it up.

Listen, you can't just go out into an unplowed, unprepared field and expect to plant and produce anything. The ground is hard, everything gets choked out by weeds and thorns, and anything good you planted will die.

The men of Judah must have fallow hearts. They can't say they are going to repent while their hearts are still hard. They've got to clean up their hearts and their lives. This starts by throwing out their abominations (false idols), tearing down their high places of worship, and getting rid of all of the heathen god worship. They have to do that before they will have true repentance.

- (4) Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

The word circumcise means “to cut short, to cut out, to destroy.” We know the covenant that God made with Abraham and the requirement for the Hebrews was that they were to undergo physical circumcision. But the men of Judah have already underwent physical circumcision, that is not what this is talking about. They are to circumcise their hearts. This is a familiar phrase to them because the LORD has mentioned it several times before, such as in:

**Deuteronomy 10:16:** Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.

**Deuteronomy 30:5-6:** And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. 6 And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

They have to circumcise, cut out, destroy the evilness that is in their hearts. He says if they do not then: “lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.”

Just as God's fury poured out upon the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Judah too will experience this fury if they do not repent.

- (5) Declare ye in Judah, and publish in Jerusalem; and say, Blow ye the trumpet in the land: cry, gather together, and say, Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the defenced cities.

Here through their Prophet, Jeremiah, the people of Judah are given a pre-warning of what is to come if they do not repent. Enemies are going to invade their land from the north. They are to sound the warning trumpet and warn everyone that the enemy is coming, take shelter in the defenced cities.

- (6) Set up the standard toward Zion: retire, stay not: for I will bring evil from the north, and a great destruction.

“Set up the standard toward Zion” The standard was a long pole with a flag on top. They would point it toward the direction of Zion to point people to the place of safety.

“I will bring evil from the north, and a great destruction” We know this to be referring to the Chaldeans, the Babylonian army led by King Nebuchadnezzar. They were becoming the new World Empire conquering all nations. They had their sites on Judah now. This was the tipping of the “**seething pot**” that Jeremiah saw in Chapter 1.

- (7) The lion is come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way; he is gone forth from his place to make thy land desolate; and thy cities shall be laid waste, without an inhabitant.

“The lion is com up from his thicket” The lion being described here would be King Nebuchadnezzar. He was also known as “the destroyer of the Gentiles.” Again, they are forewarned of the pending destruction. The Chaldeans would invade their land and show no mercy. Damage and destruction is all they care about.

(8) For this gird you with sackcloth, lament and howl: for the fierce anger of the LORD is not turned back from us.

This is a plea for the people to mourn over their sins. Whenever the Jews were in mourning they would put on the sackcloth and cover themselves in ashes to show their distress. They need to do this over their sins.

(9) And it shall come to pass at that day, saith the LORD, *that* the heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes; and the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder.

When Nebuchadnezzar invades Judah, it will utterly dismay the King, Princes, Priests, and Prophets. Yes, there were other Prophets but they had become false prophets. Jeremiah is the only true Prophet in Judah at this time. He will not be dismayed or caught off guard because the LORD has already told him and he is prophesying of what is to come.

(10) Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! surely thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul.

I will have to admit that this verse is a little confusing to me. It reads as if Jeremiah is accusing the LORD of deceiving His people. We know that the Prophets most of the time did not understand the prophecy that they were given. Jeremiah could be so perplexed by what is going to happen that he is having a hard time believing it.

Or, there is another explanation which some Bible commentators provide and that is that he is referring to the false prophets that were in that day proclaiming peace among the people and deceiving them. Much like what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians concerning the end of times: **1 Thessalonians 5:1-3: But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. 2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. 3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.**

(11) At that time shall it be said to this people and to Jerusalem, A dry wind of the high places in the wilderness toward the daughter of my people, not to fan, nor to cleanse, (12) *Even* a full wind from those *places* shall come unto me: now also will I give sentence against them. (13) Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots *shall be* as a whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe unto us! for we are spoiled.

This is a description of the swiftness that Nebuchadnezzar's army will invade them. It will be like a dry wind coming off of the Arabian desert. His horses will come riding in like a whirlwind and overtake them before they know what hit them.

(14) O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?

Jeremiah continues to plead for them to repent of their sins and return to the LORD or be destroyed.

(15) For a voice declareth from Dan, and publisheth affliction from mount Ephraim.

Dan was the northern most city where the Chaldeans would enter from and Ephraim is a mountain between Dan and Jerusalem. This is again speaking of the swiftness of the invading army and the path they would take.

(16) Make ye mention to the nations; behold, publish against Jerusalem, *that* watchers come from a far country, and give out their voice against the cities of Judah.

This is a cry to warn every one of the coming invaders, here called "watchers." They will come out against Judah.

(17) As keepers of a field, are they against her round about; because she hath been rebellious against me, saith the LORD.

The Hebrews constructed tents around their fields and keepers would stay in them to guard the field and to be there in case anything went wrong. Jeremiah is comparing the invaders from the north to these keepers. They will surround Jerusalem like the keepers surround the fields.

(18) Thy way and thy doings have procured these *things* unto thee; *this is thy* wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart.

He tells them the reason all of this is going to happen, it is because of their own doings, their wickedness, it has turned their hearts bitter.

(19) My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. (20) Destruction upon destruction is cried; for the whole land is spoiled: suddenly are my tents spoiled, *and* my curtains in a moment.

Jeremiah is so distressed by this news that he yells out in distress; "My bowels, my bowels." Generally, in the Bible the word "**bowel**" is used to indicate **the seat of deep emotion**. Jeremiah is very emotionally distressed and pained in his heart over what is going to happen to his land of Judah.

(21) How long shall I see the standard, *and* hear the sound of the trumpet?

The standard would stay out as a guide for the inhabitants of Judah for where to seek for safety. The trumpets would blare indicating the enemy was coming. Jeremiah exclaims, "how long shall I see and hear" all of this?

Then we hear the LORD's answer to Jeremiah:

(22) For my people *is* foolish, they have not known me; they *are* sottish children, and they have none understanding: they *are* wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.

Even though the people of Judah are "God's people," He states that "**they have not known me,**" and "**they have none understanding.**" Listen, you can be saved and not have an understanding of Who God is. The way that you get to know him and understand Him is by following Him, reading His Word, and being in communication with Him (prayer).

Just as in the days of Jeremiah, today people that claim to be Christians are living lives like they don't know Him at all. Living in sin, glorifying the sin of the world, not living a separated life. Americanized Christianity has become much like the Children of Israel, only God's people in name but not in action.

(23) I beheld the earth, and, lo, *it was* without form, and void; and the heavens, and they *had* no light. (24) I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. (25) I beheld, and, lo, *there was* no man, and all the birds of the

heavens were fled. (26) I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place *was* a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the LORD, *and* by his fierce anger.

The narrative then switches back to Jeremiah as he sees in the vision that God has given him the Land of Judah after the Babylonian invasion. Just as the LORD said, the land would be desolate. Jeremiah sees it as it will be, much as it was before God began His creation; without form and void. Everything had been wiped away by the Babylonians because of God's wrath on Judah.

(27) For thus hath the LORD said, The whole land shall be desolate; yet will I not make a full end.

The word "**desolate**" means "**devastated, wasted.**" Even though the LORD will devastate the Land of Judah, He will not completely destroy it off the face of the earth. He says "I will not make a full end."

(28) For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black: because I have spoken *it*, I have purposed *it*, and will not repent, neither will I turn back from it.

The description is one of misery and mourning. He says that he has "*spoken it,*" and "*purposed it.*" It is his final say so because of their unwillingness to repent and turn to Him, He will carry out exactly what He said He would do.

(29) The whole city shall flee for the noise of the horsemen and bowmen; they shall go into thickets, and climb up upon the rocks: every city *shall be* forsaken, and not a man dwell therein.

It will be a time of horror in the Land of Judah when the Chaldeans invade. The inhabitants of Judah will run in fear but the army will pursue them no matter where they may go or try to hide. There will be no escape from their wrath.

(30) And *when* thou *art* spoiled, what wilt thou do? Though thou clothest thyself with crimson, though thou deckest thee with ornaments of gold, though thou rentest thy face with painting, in vain shalt thou make thyself fair; *thy* lovers will despise thee, they will seek thy life.

He describes the attempt that the people of Judah will make to preserve their lives. They will adorn themselves as some rich person in hopes of making a bargain or as if their life was too important to take. They will be like the prostitutes painting themselves up to try and attract their lover but just like an old used up harlot they will be rejected and despised.

(31) For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, *and* the anguish as of her that bringeth forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion, *that* bewaileth herself, *that* spreadeth her hands, *saying*, Woe is me now! for my soul is wearied because of murderers.

He compares them to a woman in labor pains with her very first child. In pain and deep distress. They will be overwhelmed by the destruction and misery that they will go through.