

# When God Refuses to Listen

*Jeremiah*

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**Bible Text:** Jeremiah 15:1  
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Well, we can turn again, please, to Jeremiah 15. Jeremiah 15. Let's read again verse 1.

1 Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth.

Dear people, the Lord our God is merciful and he is gracious, he is longsuffering, he is slow to anger, and he is plenteous in mercy as the Psalm tells us, and yet it's clear from the word of God that his longsuffering does have a limit. You remember in the days of Noah when Noah's building the ark, Noah was a preacher of righteousness and even the building of the ark was a sermon to the people, it was a sermon that had a message both of the judgment that was coming and the need to repent and to turn to the Lord and to come into this place of safety, and so the very ark was both a message of the judgment to come but also of a provision of God, a place of safety for the people, and you remember that the Lord tells Moses there that his Spirit will not always strive with man. And what we see here in Jeremiah's day is the very solemn, the very sobering truth that for the nation of Judah, for the church in the land, they have come to this point of no return and we want to concentrate our attention this evening on these words from verse 1, but just before we do so, let me just give you a very brief explanation of the verses from 1 through 9.

So verse 1 you have really the fact that this time of opportunity is over. The Lord is saying, "I refuse to hear anymore intercessions for them." And then he anticipates in verse 2 a complaint of the people, that they're going to say to you, Jeremiah, "Whither shall we go forth? Or where will we go?" And Jeremiah's given four options for them and they're all death, really. There's death by death, which is probably a reference to the pestilence. Or there's death by sword, by battle or violence. Or there's death by famine. Or there's something that's effectively as good as death and that's captivity. And verse 3 gives us this awful picture of total, of complete, of merciless destruction. Again, these four things. There's the army, God uses all these things, there's the army that comes with the sword that are unclean dogs that come to pull away the bodies, suggesting that there's no burial, and there's birds of the air, there's beasts of the earth, God uses all these things to speak of a total destruction.

Verse 4 gives us, again, the reason for it, the sin of Manasseh. Manasseh, you remember, had been very militant in his promotion of idolatry and really Jeremiah's message all along has been a message of repentance from the course of action that Manasseh has set in motion. Manasseh had set this off and, of course, Manasseh, he had repented, he had been converted, he had sought to reform, but yet there was still this evil in the land and Josiah and then Jeremiah, really their message is to turn away from Manasseh's evil that he has done. And it's clear here, then, that even though there had been this great reformation under Josiah, yet the heart of the people was not changed and I think it is important there to say that God is not punishing these people for sins they did not commit. He's punishing them for continuing in the same sin of their ungodly forefather Manasseh. "I am the Lord thy God, a jealous God visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, of them who go on in the same wicked way." So there's the seriousness of sin and the consequences of sin can be generational.

But verse 5 then the Lord asks these questions. Really he's saying, "Well, who's going to pity you now? If the Lord won't pity you, if the Lord won't come for your help, who's going to pity you now? Who will bemoan you?" Who will care for you, in other words. "Who's going to ask how you're doing?" It's a picture of someone completely without help or care.

Verse 6, the Lord really pins it on the people. Again, they can't blame Manasseh. He's saying, "No, it's you," in the singular, "thou, thou hast forsaken me. You, you in particular. Thou hast forsaken me, saith the LORD, thou art gone backward." And the idea there of going backward in Hebrew has the idea of you persist in it, you keep going on in this, you refuse to stop. And the Lord says in these striking words, "I am weary with repenting." I am weary with repenting. Very strong words, words that would normally suggest a very emotional response. Of course, the Lord doesn't have emotional response like we do but that's the picture. So Calvin, for example, says, he puts these words, as it were, into the Lord's mouth here, "I have so often repented that I cannot possibly be induced now to forgive, for I see that I have been so often deceived that I cannot bear to be deceived any longer." That's the kind of idea of the strength, the feeling, if you will, of these words, "I am weary with repenting."

So verse 7, he uses this picture of fanning them with a fan in the gates of the land. That's a picture of a farmer who takes the grain and the husk and throws it into the air with force to separate the one from the other. It's a picture of separation. The grain and the husk will be removed from one another, there's going to be a separation, and it's in the gates of the land. The gates of the land is the place of judgment or the courts, we might say, the courts of the land, but the thing here is in the courts of the land. It's not you who is sitting there anymore, you've been fanned there, you've been thrown there, but who's going to be sitting there, who's going to be sitting there in judgment? Well, it's the enemy, it's the invading army as chapter 1, verse 15 had made clear. It's the enemy that's going to sit in the gates of your land. It's the enemy that's going to be in your Supreme Courts, in other words, and they're the ones who are going to decide, as it were, your fate. They're going

to decide which of you are going to be slain. They're going to decide which of you will stay here, and they're going to decide which of you will come to Babylon. So this picture, "I will bereave them of children, I will destroy my people, since they return not from their ways."

Verse 8 gives a sound of the covenant with Abraham. Remember the covenant with Abraham speaks of multiplying the people like the sand of the sea. Well, you have the same kinds of words here but now it's in the context of judgment. "Their widows are increased to me above the sand of the seas."

And then there's the pictures or images of distress and terror. Verse 9, "She that hath borne seven languisheth," seven being the idea of perfection, she who has her quiver full of children, she who has a full complement of children and, of course, in these days children being, as it were, like your insurance policy or the idea of security. But now she too, she's growing faint. In other words, she's lost her children even though she had seven. She gives up the ghost. Her sun goes down while it's yet day; before the time when she should die, she dies while it's yet day when the sun should still be up. Instead of blessing she is ashamed and confounded and even the survivors, it says, the residue of them, the people who survive all this, I will deliver to the sword says the Lord.

So the picture is very very bleak, to say the least that wickedness has come to such a height that the Lord says in verse 1 that, "Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand here and pray for them, I would not change my mind. Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth." This is a very solemn and indeed a remarkable verse. Matthew Henry notes that Moses and Samuel are two of the greatest favorites of heaven. They're known in Scripture for their intercession for the way in which they came between the sinful people and the Lord and pleaded for them, and the Lord answered their prayers. And so this verse, this message to Jeremiah, especially after the prayers that we heard in chapter 14, these powerful prayers we would have said, this is devastating now. "Though Moses and Samuel and you too, Jeremiah, though you all pray, my mind could not be toward this people."

Now with these words, we want to first just notice the place of the intercession of God's people, or the place the intercessions that God's people have. God, of course, is the great Sovereign. His purpose stands. He will do all his pleasure. You remember the great, the words of Nebuchadnezzar, "All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing and he doeth according to his will and the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand or say unto him, What doest thou?" The Lord does whatever he pleases and nobody can change his mind, as it were, or say to him, "What doest thou?" And that really is a bedrock truth, a most comforting truth for God's people, that God is on the throne, that even when storms rage around us or inside us in our world, the message is, "Be still and know that I am God. I am fulfilling my purposes." And yet it's also true that while God doesn't need anybody, that nobody challenges his authority, nobody says what are you doing, yet God is pleased to use the prayers of his people for the working out of his purpose. God is pleased to use the prayers of his people for the

working out of his purpose, and so he calls us to pray and he gives us promises in his word.

He tells us men ought always to pray and not to faint, and so we have a responsibility for everything we do, for all our actions, and God requires us to do things, not even though he is sovereign but because he is sovereign. Because he is sovereign and he has told us to preach the gospel, we preach the gospel. Because he is sovereign and he has told us to say and do things, we, by grace, seek to do these things. "You are my witnesses," the sovereign God says, "that I am Jehovah. So witness. Go into all the world and preach the gospel." God doesn't need us but he is pleased to use us and because he has told us to do these things, we are responsible to do them.

"Ye are the salt of the world. Ye are the light of the world." And God in his great sovereignty and wisdom brings these things together, so Paul plants and Apollos waters, but God gives the increase. And so you see God is the one who gives the blessing and yet he uses Paul and he uses Apollos and he uses his people and that's true in a special way here of the prayers of God's people. God has given promises to pray individually, together corporately. He says, "Call upon me," in Psalm 50, "in the day of trouble. I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify my name." Ezekiel around this time, maybe a few years after this, Ezekiel is saying in chapter 36:37, "Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet be enquired for this, to do this for the house of Israel. I will yet be enquired of by the house of Israel to do this for them."

And here then you have these examples of Moses and Samuel, two of the greatest Old Testament intercessors, and they too are the greatest intercessors for God's people in the Bible, and as you look through the history of Moses and Samuel, you see how the two of them on several occasions prayed for the people and the Lord heard the prayer and the Lord came for the salvation of his people. You remember in the wilderness, boys and girls, when the people murmur against the Lord and the Lord sends fiery serpents, you can read of this in Numbers 21. The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people and much of the people died. So they murmur, God sends fiery serpents, the people die, the people come to Moses and they say, "Moses, pray unto the Lord that he take away the serpents from us," and Moses prayed for the people and the Lord said unto Moses, "Make a fiery serpent," and then you have the serpent that gives life to those who are bitten. And Samuel too, there's the time in 1 Samuel 7 when the Philistines are all coming in and they're overrunning the land and Samuel says in 1 Samuel 7:5, "Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD." And when the children of Israel heard of the Philistines, they were afraid and the children of Israel said to Samuel, "Cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines." And Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel and the Lord heard him. These are just two examples but there's many examples of Moses especially but also Samuel praying for the people, interceding for the people. These are, as it were, heroes in the Old Testament for praying for the people and for the Lord hearing them. They're known as great intercessors.

So we see God is pleased to hear and answer the prayers of his people on the behalf of others, and whenever the Lord purposes to bless, whenever he has a mind, as it were, to bless people, he usually stirs his people up to pray and we ought to be thankful if we have a burden for prayer. We ought to be thankful if we have, as we say, a mind to pray, and that we have this burden, the Lord has put it there, let us use that burden and let us pray and pray on. But you see, it's this truth, the fact that the Lord uses the prayers of his people, it's this truth that lies behind this verse and makes this verse so solemn, and that brings us here to see the second thing, the solemn warning; that the time may come when God will no longer listen to his people's intercessions for others. The time may come when God will no longer listen to his people's intercessions for others.

"Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth." This is Judah. These are the professing people of God. This is a nation that the Psalm tells us that God favored above every other people in the world. They had the law, they had the covenants, they had the adoption, Paul says in Romans. God sent them many prophets, rising up early, pleading with them, and yet they refused them, they rejected them, they killed them. God sent them a reformation just before this time through godly King Josiah. They destroyed the idols, they restored the worship, but their hearts are still far off. Later in this book of Jeremiah, this prophecy, you can read of this in chapter 36, verse 23. In chapter 36, 23, Baruch the scribe, he brings the scroll which is the prophecy which is the word of God, "And it came to pass," we read there, "that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves," when he had read a little of the word of God, this is what he did, "he cut it with the penknife," he took the Bible and he ripped it up and "cast [the Bible] into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth." That's their attitude, you see. That's their attitude to the word of God. It's showing that for all the gospel that had been brought through Isaiah and Amos and now through Jeremiah, for all the warning, for all the reformation, their hearts were as hard and as desperately wicked as ever. And that gives us something of what the Lord then is saying in verse 6, "I am weary with repenting." The Lord is merciful, he's gracious, he's slow to anger, he's been holding back like, as it were, a great water with a dam for all this time, but the time for holding back the judgment has come. There's a limit to the longsuffering.

And this idea of repenting as one man said, it's not God changing his will but rather it is that God has willed a change. It's not God changing his will but it's God who has willed a change. He's been warning them, he's been pleading through the prophets to repent, he's been giving them promises, he's been giving them gospel as well as warning, and Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, the one who's been weeping in secret, the one who's been pleading with them, Jeremiah has been coming pleading and preaching the covenant of grace. That's what he's been doing. The sure mercies of David, that if you turn to the Lord even though you have so sinned, he will turn to you. He is rich in mercy. He is ready to forgive even now. Look at Manasseh. There is mercy for you with God. When Jeremiah has come so like Christ himself, the greater weeping prophet standing over Jerusalem and saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not. Your house is left unto you desolate. All day long I've stretched out my hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people." And now,

you see, the time has come when the Lord is saying, "Now though Samuel and Moses and Jeremiah and Job would stand with you, Jeremiah, I will not hear. The time for speaking is over. The time for warning and for pleading is over. The time for judgment has come."

Judah is a privileged people, a people who had the gospel. My dear friends, the same is true for any nation, for any people that have had the gospel and gospel privileges and gospel preaching, and gospel ministers, and godly elders, and godly men in church and state, and godly mothers, and godly examples, and people who prayed for you. But the sins of the nation, as we've said already, bring the judgment of God. And a time may come when even though Moses and Samuel and Jeremiah and Elijah and all the godly and all the tears of the godly that are in God's bottle, former elders, deacons, mothers, grandmothers, fathers, grandfathers, great grandparents, the time can come when God will still say, "Cast them out of my sight." That is a very very very sobering thing.

Now we can't say that that time has come but we can say it could come, and so let me just conclude here by giving a solemn exhortation to us. Now of course, we know when we say all this that we know that God does hear the prayers of his people. The prayer of the destitute he does regard. We know that the Lord will not, will never cast off his people, those who call upon him in truth. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." And even Jeremiah here, when you read these prayers in chapter 14, the feeling, the wrestling with God, the acknowledgment of sin, the confession of sin, the pleading the name of Jehovah, "Do it for thy name's sake. Don't disgrace the throne of thy glory." We would say, "How is it possible but that the Lord would not hear this?" But the Lord did hear it. He did hear it but the Lord doesn't always answer us in the way that we think or the way that we request. And it wasn't in vain for Jeremiah. Jeremiah, we believe, came to see and came to line up more with the purpose that God had and the glory that God has.

And God will then preserve his faithful church even in a day of great wickedness. And though their prayers for others may not be heard, yet he will preserve his people. He will preserve the church, the invisible church. But we want to just simply note here in conclusion what effect should this have on us. Well, it should have this effect, that we should fear God's judgments, should we not? Do we fear God's judgments? Does a text like this alarm us? Or do we say, "Well, that's for a different people, a different time. That could never apply to us." That's what they said then. This ought to make us fear God's judgments. It ought to make us plead more earnestly, more strongly as Jeremiah did in chapter 14. It ought to put us to our knees and make us weep for those who won't weep for themselves. You know, we pray, we acknowledge these things, we speak about the wickedness in the land, we speak about our own wickedness, but really do we have this burden that we see with Jeremiah, this real feeling, this fountain of tears because of our sin and the sins of others?

Well, it should make us fear God's judgments. It should make us realize that this is what we deserve. Do we think we're better than Judah? Do we think that we would never have the spirit that they had? This should make us realize that we deserve this. We deserve to hear that the Lord would say of us, "I'm weary with repenting. Cast them out." This

should make us cast ourselves on the mercy of God in Christ and to plead and hold onto Christ and the gospel as our only hope. It should drive us to our knees. It should stir us up. It should break our stony and cold hearts and we should plead with the Lord that he would give us a spirit of prayer, a spirit of grace and supplications, that he would take away our spiritual laziness and tiredness and lethargy.

We should pray that the Lord would wake us up, shake us out of our complacency. It is high time, the apostle writes, to awake out of sleep. Out of sleep and we need this at a personal level too, of course. We're in the land of the living and as long as we are, we believe it's true that there is mercy for sinners in Christ. The promises of the word are yes and amen in Christ and Christ, my dear friend, Christ is the one that we need pleading for us. We need to get a view of that, oh, of Moses and Samuel and Jeremiah would stand and yet the Lord would not listen to them. Then where should we flee to but to Christ because it says in Psalm 21 that God never withheld the prayer or the request of his lips. God always gives Christ what he asks for.

So the time may come when God won't hear Moses and Samuel and Elijah but he will always always always hear the prayer of his Son. Oh, may this drive us to him, to the one who is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God through him. The problem with this people was that they refused to come in God's way but we must get to the high priest, to the blood of sprinkling, and when we do we have the assurance that, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Take that promise to him. However long we have delayed, whatever sins are in our present, in our past, flee now to Christ. Think of the thief on the cross. He had a whole life of sin behind him, a history that only knew sin and prayerlessness and wickedness and evil, and now the time he is on the cusp of the time when no intercession will prevail for him and yet right with his dying breath he said, "Lord, remember me." And the death of the man beside him, the man who is God's fellow, that death covered that lifetime of sinful wickedness and prayerlessness, and the great high priest there on the basis of his blood did not cast out that wicked sinner.

Now though is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation and the warning of God's word is this, "Take heed. Take heed. Don't presume upon future mercy." I can say to you with all the authority of the word of God that now there is mercy in Jesus Christ for you, that if you come to him now you have mercy, you have forgiveness. He will hear you for Jesus' sake but you have no assurance of future mercy if you neglect present mercy. Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation. And my dear friends, there is a time, there is a time coming, how solemn to think a day of judgment when the Lord will say, "Cast them out of my sight." And on that day for those who refused the gospel, for those who refused Christ, the Lord will say in a final way, "I am weary of repenting and though Moses and Samuel and Jeremiah and your godly parents and brothers and sisters and great grandparents and Christ himself, Christ himself on that day will not be an intercessor for you." The Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins. Then it will be too late but the purpose of all of this, the reason we can read passages like this right in God's word is not so that we would despair now, it's so that it would drive us now to seek the Lord while he may be found and to call upon him while he is near, and to let the wicked man forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and to turn unto the

Lord and he will, there's his promise for you now, he will have mercy upon him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon. Today if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. Amen.