

What is wrong with Zion’s repentance in these verses?

Our shorter catechism provides a good summary of what is repentance:

“Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin,  
and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ,  
does, with grief and hatred of his sin,  
turn from it unto God  
with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.”

What’s missing in these verses?

Is there a true sense of sin?

“Our iniquities testify against us – our backslidings are many” (14:7)

Is there an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ?

“O you hope of Israel, its savior in time of trouble...” (14:8)

“You, O LORD, are in the midst of us, and we are called by your name” (14:9)

Is there grief and hatred of sin?

“We acknowledge our wickedness, O LORD, and the iniquity of our fathers,  
for we have sinned against you.” (14:20)

Is there a turning to God?

“We set our hope on you, for you do all these things” (14:22)

Is there a purpose for new obedience?

It’s not explicit – but I think it’s there.

In other words, there’s *nothing* obviously missing here.

This looks and sounds like true repentance  
because it *is* true repentance!

What God is saying is that there *is a time* when it is too late to repent.

There is a point at which God says, “Time’s up!”

What is that point?

Judgment Day.

After all, what God is describing in these verses is nothing less than *hell*.

But if you think about it,

the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC was a picture of the final judgment.

God poured out a picture of the final judgment upon his own people,

so that we might see what sin deserves –

so that we might see that the wages of sin is death.

Indeed, all that Jeremiah describes in these verses is what happened to *Jesus* as well.

Our passage tonight has a fairly simple structure.

There are two case studies –

the drought in verses 1-12,  
and the coming sword and famine in 14:13-15:4

In each case study, there is a common pattern:

The situation, Jerusalem's plea, and God's refusal to hear them.

The drought serves as a warning of the final judgment.

The sword signals the coming of God's final judgment.

And the whole passage concludes with the reason *why* this is happening.

This is happening because my people persistently and stubbornly rejected me.

If you will not love and serve the LORD your God,

the only possible outcome is hell.

Today, because of what Jesus has done,

you can have confidence that *if you repent, God will forgive.*

But you need to understand that if you refuse to repent – if you insist on rebelling against God,  
then there is a day when God will no longer forgive.

And in the same way, the day-to-day disasters that happen nowadays  
are reminders – warnings of the judgment to come.

When you hear of wars and rumors of wars –

when you hear of famine, plague, and drought –

you should remember that one day God will call all of us to his judgment seat.

What will you say?

What will be *your* plea before God?

There's an old song that says it well:

What can wash away my sin?

*Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

What can make me whole again?

*Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

## **1. The Drought (14:1-12)**

### **a. The Situation: No Water for the People, the Ground, and the Animals (v1-6)**

We start with:

*The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah concerning the drought:*

<sup>2</sup> *“Judah mourns,*

*and her gates languish;*

*her people lament on the ground,*

*and the cry of Jerusalem goes up.*

<sup>3</sup> *Her nobles send their servants for water;*

*they come to the cisterns;  
they find no water;  
they return with their vessels empty;  
they are ashamed and confounded  
and cover their heads.*

<sup>4</sup> *Because of the ground that is dismayed,  
since there is no rain on the land,  
the farmers are ashamed;  
they cover their heads.*

<sup>5</sup> *Even the doe in the field forsakes her newborn fawn  
because there is no grass.*

<sup>6</sup> *The wild donkeys stand on the bare heights;  
they pant for air like jackals;  
their eyes fail  
because there is no vegetation.*

In verses 1-6, Jeremiah describes the situation –  
the cisterns are empty –  
the farmers have no crops –  
even the ground is “dismayed,”  
and the wild animals perish.

As God had said, “Cursed be the ground for your sake.”

Just as Adam’s sin brought God’s curse on the whole of creation,  
even so, the whole of creation suffers because of Israel’s sin.

The judgment of God has a tremendous leveling effect!  
The nobility of Jerusalem is no better than a common farmer.  
And the farmer is no better than the wild donkey.

There is no vegetation.  
Man and beast suffer alike.

Remember that in the Exodus, when God delivered Israel from Egypt,  
the death of the firstborn was not merely the firstborn of *man*,  
but also the firstborn of animals.  
God’s judgment on humanity falls *also* against the realm that man was designed to rule.

Sin not only affects your soul – it also affects your body,  
and every other aspect of creation.

In verses 7-9 we hear the plea of Israel for forgiveness:

**b. The Plea: “You Are the Hope of Israel – Do Not Leave Us!” (v7-9)**

<sup>7</sup> “*Though our iniquities testify against us,  
act, O LORD, for your name's sake;  
for our backslidings are many;  
we have sinned against you.*

<sup>8</sup> *O you hope of Israel,  
its savior in time of trouble,  
why should you be like a stranger in the land,  
like a traveler who turns aside to tarry for a night?*

<sup>9</sup> *Why should you be like a man confused,  
like a mighty warrior who cannot save?  
Yet you, O LORD, are in the midst of us,  
and we are called by your name;  
do not leave us.”*

Like I said earlier – this is a *good* prayer for forgiveness.

We confess our sins.

We acknowledge that the LORD alone is our hope and our savior.

God alone can save.

We are called by *his* name.

Therefore we ask him to act – not because of who we are, but because of who *he is*.

Some commentators think that Israel is insulting God  
by comparing him to a stranger or traveler –  
or by asking are you like a “mighty warrior who cannot save?”  
But there are many Psalms that use precisely this sort of language.

The problem with this prayer is *not* the content!  
The problem with this prayer is the *timing*.

After all, what is this prayer asking God to do?  
This prayer is asking God to forgive Jerusalem and save Israel –  
at precisely the moment when God’s purpose is to bring judgment upon Israel.  
But it’s too late!

As the LORD says in verse 10:

**c. The Refusal: “I Will Not Hear Their Cry... I Will Consume Them” (v10-12)**

<sup>10</sup> *Thus says the LORD concerning this people:  
“They have loved to wander thus;  
they have not restrained their feet;  
therefore the LORD does not accept them;  
now he will remember their iniquity  
and punish their sins.”*

God hears their confession and says,  
“That’s right, they have sinned.  
But the wages of sin is death.”

And now Israel must die.

And Jeremiah says in verse 11,

<sup>11</sup> *The LORD said to me: “Do not pray for the welfare of this people. <sup>12</sup> Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence.”*

Repentance is not enough.

Fasting is not enough.

Burnt offerings and grain offerings is not enough.

God says, “I will not hear their cry...  
I will not accept them.”

The point is *not* that Jerusalem needs to do *something more*.

The point is that Jerusalem is utterly and entirely incapable of doing *anything* that would cause God to save them.

And that hasn't changed!

Repentance cannot save you.

Fasting cannot save you.

Doing all the religious things that God calls you to do cannot save you.

Nothing can for sin atone –

*Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

Naught of good that I have done –

*Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

Our second point drives this home.

## **2. Sword and Famine (14:13-15:4)**

### **a. The Situation: Prophets Who Prophecy Lies (v13-18)**

Because there are *other* prophets who would assure Jerusalem of God's favor:

<sup>13</sup> *Then I said: “Ah, Lord GOD, behold, the prophets say to them, ‘You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.’” <sup>14</sup> And the LORD said to me: “The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds. <sup>15</sup> Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who prophesy in my name although I did not send them, and who say, ‘Sword and famine shall not come upon this land’: By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed. <sup>16</sup> And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem, victims of famine and sword, with none to bury them—they, their wives, their sons, and their daughters. For I will pour out their evil upon them.*

Famine and sword –  
what does it have to do with us?

It has been a long time since North America had any real experience of these things.  
We tend to think that famine, sword, pestilence, and captivity  
are problems for other people –  
but not for us.

That's exactly what the false prophets in Jeremiah's day were saying!

Disaster came upon the northern kingdom of Israel 100 years before –  
but that's because Israel had turned away from the LORD –  
Jeroboam had built the golden calves at Bethel and Dan.  
Ahab had introduced Baal worship.  
But in the days of Josiah, Jerusalem's worship had been reformed!

Famine, sword, pestilence, and captivity –  
these things happen to *other* people!  
Not to God's chosen people!

There are still false prophets who would tell you that there is no judgment day –  
that God will never condemn anyone.

Those who preach universal salvation today are saying exactly the same thing  
as the false prophets in Jeremiah's day:  
they preach "peace, peace, when there is no peace."  
They say that God will never judge sin.

But while God *will* bring judgment upon his rebellious people –  
while God will judge the living and the dead –  
that does *not* mean that God takes pleasure in the death of the wicked!

As the LORD says to Jeremiah in verses 17:

<sup>17</sup> *"You shall say to them this word:  
'Let my eyes run down with tears night and day,  
and let them not cease,  
for the virgin daughter of my people is shattered with a great wound,  
with a very grievous blow.*

Remember that the God who brings judgment against humanity  
is the same God who became incarnate in our humanity  
so that he might bear the judgment that we deserved!

"The God who judges is also the God who weeps." (quoted in Wright, 171)

Jesus will gaze out over Jerusalem, and *weep*.

<sup>18</sup> *If I go out into the field,  
behold, those pierced by the sword!  
And if I enter the city,  
behold, the diseases of famine!  
For both prophet and priest ply their trade through the land  
and have no knowledge.’”*

The false prophets and the faithless priests have wreaked havoc on Judah.

You see the fruit of the false teachers throughout Europe and America today.  
There may not be a famine of bread in Europe and America today.  
But there is a famine of hearing the Word of the Lord.

In my former congregation  
we once had a visitor who said that she appreciated the sermon,  
but since she was Baptist, she thought that she'd look around.  
After she had visited every church in town and the surrounding area she came back  
and said, "You are the only pastor in this area who actually preaches the Bible."

Has the day really come when prophets and priests have no knowledge,  
when pastors no longer preach the Word of God?

Again, the plea of verses 19-22 is a *good* example of confession:

**b. The Plea: Remember Your Covenant – We Set Our Hope on You! (v19-22)**

<sup>19</sup> *Have you utterly rejected Judah?  
Does your soul loathe Zion?  
Why have you struck us down  
so that there is no healing for us?  
We looked for peace, but no good came;  
for a time of healing, but behold, terror.*  
<sup>20</sup> *We acknowledge our wickedness, O LORD,  
and the iniquity of our fathers,  
for we have sinned against you.*  
<sup>21</sup> *Do not spurn us, for your name's sake;  
do not dishonor your glorious throne;  
remember and do not break your covenant with us.*  
<sup>22</sup> *Are there any among the false gods of the nations that can bring rain?  
Or can the heavens give showers?  
Are you not he, O LORD our God?  
We set our hope on you,  
for you do all these things.*

Again, there is *nothing wrong* with the content of this plea.

It is a perfectly good prayer of confession –  
it is a beautiful lament!  
You are God – and we are not!  
The reason why you should save us is *not* because of anything that we have done –  
but simply for “your name’s sake” –  
“Remember and do not break your covenant with us.”

This is precisely how Israel was *supposed* to pray!

This is all my hope and peace –  
*Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*  
This is all my righteousness –  
*Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

But (verse 15)

**c. The Refusal: Send Them to Pestilence, Sword, Famine, and Captivity (15:1-4)**  
*15 Then the LORD said to me, “Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people. Send them out of my sight, and let them go! <sup>2</sup> And when they ask you, ‘Where shall we go?’ you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD:  
“‘Those who are for pestilence, to pestilence,  
and those who are for the sword, to the sword;  
those who are for famine, to famine,  
and those who are for captivity, to captivity.’*

Moses and Samuel were *famous* for their intercession for Israel.  
Moses was the prophet who gave Israel the Law.  
Then, when Israel failed the first time, in the days of the Judges,  
Samuel was the prophet who gave Israel the King.

In the days of Samuel God sent the ark of the covenant into Exile.  
But now, God will send his people into Exile.

<sup>3</sup> *I will appoint over them four kinds of destroyers, declares the LORD: the sword to kill, the dogs to tear, and the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy.*

Notice that all creation joins in the destruction of God’s people.  
Not just the sword of men – but also the dogs to tear,  
and the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy.

<sup>4</sup> *And I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth because of what Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, did in Jerusalem.*

The reference to Manasseh reminds us of how the wickedness of Jerusalem  
had been piling up over generations,  
as the rebellion of God’s people got worse and worse.



The result will be that God will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

And verses 5-9 explain why:

### **3. Why? Because You Have Rejected Me and I Am Weary of Relenting (15:5-9)**

<sup>5</sup> *“Who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem,  
or who will grieve for you?*

*Who will turn aside  
to ask about your welfare?*

<sup>6</sup> *You have rejected me, declares the LORD;  
you keep going backward,  
so I have stretched out my hand against you and destroyed you—  
I am weary of relenting.*

<sup>7</sup> *I have winnowed them with a winnowing fork  
in the gates of the land;  
I have bereaved them; I have destroyed my people;  
they did not turn from their ways.*

<sup>8</sup> *I have made their widows more in number  
than the sand of the seas;  
I have brought against the mothers of young men  
a destroyer at noonday;  
I have made anguish and terror  
fall upon them suddenly.*

<sup>9</sup> *She who bore seven has grown feeble;  
she has fainted away;  
her sun went down while it was yet day;  
she has been shamed and disgraced.  
And the rest of them I will give to the sword  
before their enemies,  
declares the LORD.”*

God is weary of relenting.  
He’s had enough!

Have you ever been *really* sick and tired of someone?  
I mean fed up and frustrated beyond anything you had ever imagined?

If so, then God has graciously given you a brief and tiny glimpse  
into his frustration with *you*.

He made you for himself!  
He made you as a garment to be bound close to himself!  
But you are just a filthy rag!  
You keep loving other things more than you love him!

This is *why* the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.  
Because so long as God is over here – and man is over there –  
God will grow weary of relenting.

Nothing will ever change!  
We'll be caught in this cycle of rebellion and repentance,  
backsliding and judgment forever!

She who bore seven has grown feeble – she has fainted away –  
her sun went down while it was yet day –  
she has been shamed and disgraced –  
and the rest of them I will give to the sword before their enemies.

What can you do to get God to change his mind and have mercy on you?  
Nothing!  
*You* can do nothing.

Judgment Day is coming.  
You stand at the edge of the abyss – with nowhere to turn!

Now by this I'll overcome –  
*Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*  
Now by this I'll reach my home –  
*Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*  
O precious is the flow  
that makes me white as snow;  
no other fount I know,  
*Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*