

REPENT OF INJUSTICE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 72:1-17
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 22

JEREMIAH 22:1-10

1 Thus saith the LORD; Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word,

2 And say, Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah, that sittest upon the throne of David, thou, and thy servants, and thy people that enter in by these gates:

3 Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.

4 For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people.

5 But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation.

6 For thus saith the LORD unto the king's house of Judah; Thou art Gilead unto me, and the head of Lebanon: yet

surely I will make thee a wilderness, and cities which are not inhabited.

7 And I will prepare destroyers against thee, every one with his weapons: and they shall cut down thy choice cedars, and cast them into the fire.

8 And many nations shall pass by this city, and they shall say every man to his neighbour, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this great city?

9 Then they shall answer, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them.

10 Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.



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I. For Judah

22:1a. *Thus saith the Lord* is a common introductory phrase that tells the reader that a new prophecy is beginning.

1b. *Go down* is probably a directional command. Jerusalem features elevation changes. So the directive suggests that Jeremiah receives it while at or near the temple and therefore will need to walk downward to get to *the house of the king of Judah*.

The king currently sitting on Judah's throne is probably Jehoiakim.

2a. What Jeremiah is about to speak is an authoritative message.

2b. Referring to *the throne of David* confirms the sense that this prophecy is directed toward all David's royal heirs and not necessarily to a single, specific *king of Judah*. Jeremiah explicitly extends this challenge to the king's court and all his *people*. The *gates* are the entrances to the palace. Everyone should listen to and be responsible to respond to Jeremiah's words, but especially the leaders.

3a. Again, Jeremiah emphasizes that *the Lord* is speaking. Jeremiah himself is only the messenger.

3b. This is the point of leadership failure. *Judgment* is to ensure fair treatment but is not limited to that. It also extends to developing and maintaining healthy, honest, and respectful relationships at all levels. To *execute . . . righteousness* is to create and maintain those kinds of relationships. Even so, we should not see too much of a distinction between judgment and righ-

KEY VERSE

Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.

—Jeremiah 22:3

teousness, given their many uses as parallel terms in Hebrew poetry.

God's character sets the standard for what is just and right. Both must be expressed toward everyone at all times. And it is the leaders who are to set the example.

3c. Oppression flourishes where justice and righteousness are absent. In such circumstances, *the oppressor* can cheat and steal without consequence. The three kinds of victims mentioned are the most vulnerable in the ancient world. *The stranger* (a non-Israelite living among the covenant people) should have legal recourse for righting *violence* done to himself and his family. *The fatherless* and *the widow* are most susceptible to poverty, lacking a family breadwinner.

4. God promises again to extend David's legacy to David's royal descendants if they *do this thing*—namely, practice justice and righteousness. The bottom-line: Do those *sitting upon the throne of David* desire to keep their positions?

5a. A warning against refusing to *hear* and heed God's *words* is in keeping with the blessing/curse pattern established early in the history of Israel.

5b. To *swear* is a particularly weighty way of making a promise. The more significant, permanent, or powerful the thing sworn on, the more definite and absolute the promise. There is nothing and no one more significant, permanent, or powerful than God. He will make sure He fulfills this promise if Judah refuses to respond obediently.

The phrase *this house* refers both to David's descendants and to the physical structure of their dwelling. If Judah's leaders disregard God, they will not only be dethroned; they also will be without a physical residence in Jerusalem.

II. For the Nations

6a. Again, Jeremiah restates that the words he speaks come from *the Lord* and

are addressed to *the king's house*. There should be no mistake about either the source or the intended recipients!

6b. God uses imagery to affirm how precious His people are to Him. Other than the text before us, mention of Gilead and Lebanon occur together in the same verse only in Zechariah 10:10. Just three verses later, that prophet speaks of fire destroying Lebanon's "cedars" and "oaks of Bashan"—an area lying north of and adjacent to Gilead. The coming destruction will be heartbreaking. Though David's lineage is precious to the Lord, He will dispossess its kings if they don't change their unjust ways.

7. The *destroyers* to whom God refers are the Chaldeans. Reference to *thy choice cedars* may refer either to (1) trees of the forest or (2) the cedar used in construction for the wealthy, especially the king's palace. Considering the first possibility, the felling of trees is a natural thing for a besieging army to do for building its siege ramps and towers.

The victorious besiegers will burn everything of significance before leaving for home. Judah will be a deconstruction zone. The sense of the verse is of priceless things destroyed that need not have been.

8. People of the ancient Near East generally linked the rise and fall of *nations* to the power of a nation's deities. Jerusalem's status as a *great city* has earned Judah a reputation for following a very powerful deity. This is what God intended (Genesis 12:1-3).

The injustice that infects Jerusalem and Judah does not draw the nations toward the just and holy God. Instead, the nations around Jerusalem see no difference between Judah's way of life and theirs, between their gods and Judah's God. And

when those nations see the defeat and captivity of God's people, they will link it to God's activity. The extent of the destruction will accomplish what Jerusalem and her injustice had not: nations will acknowledge God in at least one sense.

9. God's plan from the beginning has involved inviting others to experience and follow Him.

But in our text we see the opposite. Jerusalem's injustice does not draw the nations to seek God, since they see no difference between Judah's actions and their own. So God plans to draw their attention to His ways of justice and righteousness by disciplining Judah for failure to model God's character. That would invite others to see God for who He is. The forthcoming devastation will be seen as divine in origin. The predicted *answer* is nothing new.

10a. This lament is usually understood to refer to Josiah, Judah's last righteous king (2 Chronicles 35:25). Mourning *for the dead* is a significant ritual for cultures worldwide; the ancient Near East is no exception. Jeremiah's words suggest that there is a fate worse than death.

10b. Shallum succeeded Josiah as king in about 609 BC. Shallum led Judah back into the evils of Josiah's predecessors; he was king for only three months, then was exiled permanently to Egypt.

It seems odd to mourn the exile of an evil king yet not grieve the death of a godly king. The force of Jeremiah's prophecy has been God's warning of destruction and exile if Judah's leaders refuse to practice justice. Shallum is to serve as an example of the grief of all the exiles. Jeremiah holds him up as a warning of his hearers' own possible future.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Does your example invite God's justice?

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

REPENT OF INJUSTICE

Into the Lesson

Get while the getting is good.

Think of reasons why the above sentence represents a correct worldview by which to live, and reasons why it represents a defective worldview.

Today's text will cast light on whether this axiom is biblically valid or defective.

Into the Word

Read Jeremiah 22:1-10. Take notes under the appropriate headings:

- I. What the leaders should do
- II. How God will respond
- III. What disobedience will bring
- IV. What the nations will conclude

Answer the following questions with a partner or small group:

How are God's statements regarding justice and injustice *similar to* His statements in the other lessons in this unit studied so far?

How do God's statements regarding justice and injustice *differ from* His statements in the other lessons in this unit studied so far?

Into Life

How is your church doing in ministering to each category of people?

Victims of injustice

Foreigners

Widows

Orphans
