

Book of Jeremiah

Lesson 2: The Rejection of Impenitent Israel

Reading: Jeremiah 3:6-4:31

Review

Last week we studied the background and calling of Jeremiah and examined his first speech to the nation of Judah. Jeremiah was set apart before his birth by God to be a "prophet to the nations" during the darkest period in Judah's history. He began his work during the 13th year of King Josiah, the last good king of Judah. From this point on, Judah descended into a decline that would finally end in Babylonian captivity and destruction in 586 BC, mirroring the captivity of Israel by Assyria in 722 BC. Jeremiah's task was to warn the people of the impending judgment coming at the hands of the Babylonians, call them to repentance and spiritual restoration, and deliver God's promise of a return to the land after 70 years of captivity while reminding the remnant left in Canaan to remain faithful to God.

In Jeremiah's first speech, God sets forth His indictment against the people. He recounts the devotion of Israel's early days, their defection from God in the wilderness, and their continual pursuit of idols. As a result, Israel has been treated like a slave by other nations, subject to invasions by its neighbors. Instead of returning to God for protection, Judah seeks security through foreign alliances. Such alliances fail to provide the security sought and instead becomes a web that entangles them further and ensures their destruction. In spite of all the evidence, Judah denies its guilt and believes that God's anger has abated due to the reforms of King Josiah. However, the reforms did not result in a change of people's hearts, and Judah continued its spiritual harlotry as an unfaithful wife to God. In spite of such unfaithfulness, God invites Judah to return to Him in true repentance.

1. How was "backsliding Israel" more righteous than "treacherous Judah" (3:6-11; Ezekiel 16:51-52)?
2. Under what conditions would God receive backsliding Israel again (3:12-13), and why was it important for Judah to hear it (2:23, 35)?
3. What changes would occur with the restoration of the people to the land, and what did it mean for Judah (3:16-18)?

