

Sounding the Alarm

July 30 — *Jeremiah 2:23-5:19*

Today In Your Reading...

Jeremiah shared some of his first prophecies with the people of Judah. They were sharp slaps in the face. "My people have betrayed Me," says the Lord, "like a faithless wife who leaves her husband. They are prostitutes who are unashamed of their sins; they have many lovers, many idols. How can I pardon them? Even their children have turned against Me. They swear by gods that are no gods at all! I fed My people until they were satisfied and they thanked Me by committing adultery and lining up at the city's brothels. Should I not punish them for this?" (5:7-9).

The Lord was angry with the people of Judah and He was going to deliver them to their enemies. "**Sound the alarm throughout the land.** Run for your lives! Flee to the fortified cities. Send a signal toward Jerusalem. Flee now! Don't delay! For I am bringing terrible destruction upon you from the north. A lion stalks from its den, a destroyer of nations; and it is headed for your land!" (4:5-7).

The destroyer of nations was Babylon, a mighty people who were consuming the ancient world one nation at a time. Jeremiah could not bear the thought of watching the annihilation of his people. "My heart, my heart," he cried, "I writhe in pain! My heart pounds within me! I cannot be still... How long must this go on! How long must I be surrounded by war and death?" (4:19-21). It is not the last time Jeremiah will mourn His people. He will write a book pouring out His grief. It is called *Lamentations*. For this reason, Jeremiah is known as the "Weeping Prophet."

Imagine being alive when America falls. Imagine watching the people of this country destroyed by an invading nation. The elimination of all that once was, the eradication of the land of liberty, would be a painful event to endure. What was

Jeremiah supposed to do but be faithful to cry out to those around him the messages God had given him. But, no matter how much he wailed, no matter the passion behind his pronouncements, his country was too far gone. **The people's hearts were hard and their ears were deaf to the voice of God.**

Daily Reflection

In what ways are the people of America a lot like the people of Judah?

"My people," God says, "are foolish and do not know Me. They have senseless children who have no understanding. They are clever enough in doing wrong, but they have no talent at all for doing right" (4:22).

How does this relate to our country today?

What do you think God could or should do to wake Americans from their slumber, to turn them back from their rebellion? Do you think it would work? Why or why not?

Tear Your Robe

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July 31 — *Jeremiah 5:20-6:30; 2 Kings 22:3-20; 2 Chronicles 34:8-28*

Day 212 — 153 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We continued some of Jeremiah's prophecies concerning the people of Judah, which sound a lot like the declarations of Isaiah. The people have rebelled against God, their judgment is coming, and the end is near. However, Jeremiah's message was different than Isaiah's in that *it was the last one God would send*. "This is your last warning, Jerusalem. If you do not listen, I will empty the land... I am filled with fury and I'm weary of holding it in" (6:8-11).

God's patience with His people had reached its end and He was now ready to pour out His wrath upon them. However, one man was able to postpone this judgment because of his humility and repentance — the young king, Josiah. Josiah was the last of the good rulers of Jerusalem. With his leadership, Judah's destruction was delayed. What happened?

When King Josiah ordered the Temple to be restored, one of the priests found the Law of God which had been given to Moses. When the Law was brought to Josiah and read aloud to him, he realized that he had inherited a wayward kingdom, one that had forgotten its origin and lost its way. It grieved him deeply to know that God's people, who had such a bright beginning had neglected their responsibilities, shamed themselves, and disappointed the Lord.

Josiah's response to hearing the words of the Lord and understanding the sins of His people was to tear his clothes. Tearing one's clothes was a sign of sorrow, grief, or despair. It was a common practice among the Jews, first mentioned when Jacob and Reuben tore their clothes over the loss of Joseph (*Genesis 37:29, 34*). Josiah was deeply bothered by the apostasy of the nation and the Lord noticed his concern. "You were sorry and humbled before the Lord when you heard what I said against the city and

its people... You tore your clothing in despair and wept before Me in repentance. So I have indeed heard you. You will not see the disaster I am going to bring on this place. I will not send it until after you die and have been buried in peace" (*2 Kings 22:19, 20*).

Daily Reflection

Though we live in a different age, we are not different than those who lived during the time of Josiah. Somehow we expect to find peace and prosperity by following our own way, when, in reality, *the ways of man only lead to dead ends*. **We cannot expect the effects of peace and prosperity while we ignore the cause of them**, that is *the gracious hand of God*. We cannot ignore the instructions of God's Word without expecting the penalty for doing so. With obedience there is blessing, but with defiance and disobedience, there are consequences.

We are similar to the people of Judah. We have clothed ourselves with our righteousness. We have placed confidence in our abilities, and in our reasoning and wisdom. We think that we know better than God, that we don't need His help or His Word in our land. Even in the Church, we have become deaf and blind. We have strayed from pure doctrine and embraced that which is false. *What is good, we now call evil, and what is evil, we now call good*.

It is time for us to tear our robes and humble ourselves before Almighty God. It is time to repent of our national sins and admit that we are guilty of apostasy, turning our back on Him. If we respond as Josiah did, perhaps the Lord will spare us, even restore to us His favor. What about you? **Whose robe of righteousness are you wearing — yours or His?** Consider your ways and commit to glorifying your God. *Tear your robe of self-righteousness* and walk humbly in obedience.

The Key to Our Revival

Today In Your Reading...

We read the second half of Josiah's reforms in Judah. Remember he had ordered the restoration of the Temple and in the process rediscovered the books of Moses which contained the laws of God. After hearing them read, Josiah was moved to begin a nation-wide revival.

We also covered the prophecies of Nahum today, whose messages were aimed at the kingdom of Assyria and its capital at Nineveh. Remember that the prophet Jonah was sent to Nineveh, years earlier, to call the people to repentance, to which they responded and God spared the city. However, by Nahum's time, we can clearly see that the Assyrians had reverted to their old ways. God's patience had run out, and He was now ready to judge and destroy them. "The Lord is slow to get angry, but He never lets the guilty go unpunished" (1:3).

To eliminate the kingdom of Assyria, God used the people of Babylon. With their allies, the Medes, Persians, and Scythians, the Babylonians destroyed Nineveh (612 BC) and, then, a few years later, defeated the Assyrians once and for all at the epic Battle of Carchemish. "Nineveh lies in utter ruin," wrote Nahum, yet no one will regret your destruction... All who hear it will clap their hands for joy" (3:2, 19). **Nations rise and fall, according to God's plan and purposes.** Babylon will now dominate the ancient world.

Speaking of falling nations, Judah was still in a moral decline and had angered God with its idolatry. He had sworn to destroy His own people for their sins. However, the actions of the righteous King Josiah had postponed their judgment. "Never before had there been a king like Josiah, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and soul and strength, obeying all the laws of Moses; and, there has never been a king like him since" (2 Kings 23:25).

Daily Reflection

What specifically had Josiah done to ignite a revival in Judah? He cut down, smashed, and burned the idols of the land. He removed and executed all false prophets and priests and desecrated their temples and altars. He cleansed the Temple and reinstated the Levitical leaders, then called the people to account for obeying the Mosaic laws and keeping the sacred festivals and sacrifices. So Josiah had eliminated "all the detestable idols and required everyone to worship the Lord, and throughout the rest of his lifetime, they did not turn away from the God of their ancestors" (2 Chronicles 34:33).

Do you remember what prompted this revival? **It was the rediscovery and reading of God's Word.** When people take seriously the words of God and make it a priority to obey them, the Lord will do a work in their hearts and minds.

Is God's Word a priority in your life? What about in the life of your family, your church, or your nation?

What is it about the words of God that can restore a life, a marriage, a family, or a nation?

What else can you learn from Josiah, regarding his character, his courage, or his leadership?

Mountain Climbing

Today In Your Reading...

We observed messages from two of the minor prophets — Habakkuk and Zephaniah. We call them minor prophets, not because they are any less important than others, but because their letters or books were short compared to *Isaiah* or *Jeremiah*. Their prophecies were similar in nature to the others we've been reading. They were predicting the fall of Judah to Babylon.

For example, the Lord told Habakkuk, "Look and be amazed. Watch and be astounded at what I will do! For I am doing something in your day, something you wouldn't believe even if someone told you about it. I am raising up the Babylonians to be a new power on the world scene. They are a cruel and violent nation who will march across the world and conquer it" (1:5, 6).

The Lord also told Zephaniah, "Stand in silence, in the presence of the Sovereign Lord, for the awesome day of the Lord's judgment has come. The Lord has prepared His people for a great slaughter and has chosen their executioners... I will crush Judah and Jerusalem for their Baal worship... Because of their sins, I will make them as helpless as a blind man searching for a path" (1:4, 7, 17).

Despite the terrible destruction that was headed his way, I love Habakkuk's response, "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms and there are no grapes on the vine, even though the olive crop fails and the fields are empty, even though the flocks die in the fields and the cattle barns are empty, yet **I will rejoice in the Lord!** I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He will make me as sure-footed as a deer and bring me safely over the mountains" (3:17-19). As God would punish the wicked of Judah, the righteous would suffer too; yet **Habakkuk did not fear or complain, but, instead, he chose joy.**

Daily Reflection

Habakkuk's response reminds me of what Job said, "I came naked from my mother's womb and I will be stripped of everything when I die. The Lord gave me everything I had, and the Lord has taken it away. Praise the name of the Lord" (1:21). When his wife said to him, "Are you going to maintain your integrity? Curse God and die!" Job replied, "**Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?**" (2:8-10).

Take a minute to rewrite Habakkuk's response with personal experiences that you face today.

Even though _____
_____ ,

even though _____

and even though _____
_____ ,

yet I will rejoice in the Lord!

Is this your typical response when things don't go your way? Obviously, it is not natural for us to be content in the midst of chaos or to trust the Lord in the midst of trials or tragedy. **Joy is a choice.** *You are choosing to rely upon your faith in God instead of reacting to your fear of the circumstances.*

Though it is not easy, when you choose joy and trust the Lord, you will be as "sure-footed as a deer." He will help you navigate the obstacles and "bring you safely over the mountain!" What mountains are you currently facing? **Rejoice in the Lord and He will help you climb them!**

Cautious or Careless?

Today In Your Reading...

The great King Josiah was killed. Tucked away in the middle of prophecies from Zephaniah and Jeremiah was the account of the king's unfortunate demise. When Josiah heard that King Neco of Egypt was nearby, in the northern valley of Megiddo, he was alarmed to the danger of invasion. What good king wouldn't be concerned?

However, Neco was not there to attack God's people; rather he was there to assist the Assyrians against the Babylonians at Carchemish. He warned Josiah not to interfere. "What do you want with me, King of Judah? I have no quarrel with you! I only want to fight the nation with which I am at war. God has told me to hurry. Do not interfere with God, who is with me, or He will destroy you" (2 Chronicles 35:21).

When Josiah heard Neco's warning, he did not believe it. Military leaders will say all sorts of things to maintain the advantage over their enemies. Josiah would not fall for that trick, especially when Neco stated that God was on his side. After God had blessed all of Josiah's efforts, he knew that the Lord was with His people. Why would He be assisting the Egyptians? Thus, he refused to listen to Neco's words.

Nonetheless, we are told that the Lord had indeed spoken to Neco and ordered him to Carchemish (v.22). How? We do not know, perhaps a vision, a dream, or a prophet. God was not assisting Egypt to gain victory over Judah or even the Babylonians; rather He was leading these nations into destruction. Still, how was Josiah to know that? Simple, all he had to do was inquire of the Lord and ask about His plans.

While I do not blame King Josiah for being alarmed or for leading his army out to war. He was simply protecting his nation from an apparent invader. However, I do find it odd that

Josiah went to war without seeking God's direction. **He assumed that he knew what was taking place** and that it was right to enter the fight. He was wrong. His assumptions led his men into danger and set matters into motion for his death. After Josiah was pierced by an arrow, he was hurried off the battlefield, back to his palace in Jerusalem, where he soon died.

The great King Josiah was dead and the people mourned. Jeremiah wrote funeral songs that the people sang for decades. They understood how this man's right actions had been a protection for their country. They were also aware of the prophecies, that their destruction was near. With Josiah out of the way, their time was short.

Daily Reflection

Have you ever gotten into trouble because you assumed that you knew what was best? Have you made a decision without inquiring of the Lord only to make things worse? Explain.

How do you avoid the trouble of false assumptions, of thinking you know what God is doing? How do you ensure this doesn't happen to you?

Assume nothing, but, instead, pray. Acting upon assumptions is unwise and rarely ends well. **Be cautious rather than careless, lest the enemy stick an arrow in you.**

Hard Head, Hard Heart

Today In Your Reading...

After the good King Josiah died, his son Jehoa-haz took the throne. He was immediately deposed and taken captive by Neco, the Pharaoh of Egypt (probably as repayment for his father's attack on him at Megiddo). Neco placed Jehoa-haz's brother Eliakim on the throne, changed his name to Jehoiakim, then used him as a puppet to pay him money.

Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and, instead of following in his father Josiah's footsteps, he did what was evil in the Lord's sight and, therefore, hastened the destruction of Judah. It was during Jehoiakim's reign that King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon sieged Jerusalem and carried away the people into exile.

While the fall of Judah had been prophesied for decades, no one had ever predicted the length of time that God's people would be in exile. Jeremiah was the first to do so. He announced that their punishment would last seventy (70) years (25:11, 12). After that period, God would punish and enslave the Babylonians for their sins. "I will punish them in proportion to the suffering they cause My people" (25:14).

Right here towards the end of Judah's existence, the prophets Jeremiah, Uriah, and Ahikam came in full force to prevent its fall, to beg the king and the people to turn from their ways, but the people would have none of it. The Lord said through Jeremiah, "When you were prosperous, I warned you, but you replied, '**Don't bother me.**' Since childhood you have been that way. You simply would not listen! I have sent them again and again to you, but **you would not listen to them...** I will destroy this Temple and I will make Jerusalem an object of cursing for every nation on earth" (22:21; 26:4-6).

Daily Reflection

What was it about God's people that they would not listen to Him? Was He not concerned for their future? Was He not trying to preserve their nation? Did He not have their best interests in mind? Of course, but it didn't matter. The people wanted to do what they wanted to do.

Instead of seeing God as a help, they saw Him as a hindrance. They would rather fulfill their desires and suffer the consequences than turn from their ways and prevent disaster.

Does this describe you at all — hard of hearing? **Perhaps it's not that you are hard of hearing but simply hard-headed.** You want to do what you want to do, and you don't want anyone, not even the Lord, to get in your way. You would rather suffer the consequences of your sin than turn from it and prevent disaster.

Why are we like that? Why are you like that? Ignoring God's voice reveals a deeper problem. What is it?

Satan is crafty. He will deceive you. He will tell you that you can't help your desires, that you are not hurting anyone, or that no one will know what you are thinking or doing. He will pull you into his trap and, before you know it, you are stuck. **His ways may seem right at first, but they only lead to death.**

Is God warning you? Are you stubbornly repeating your offenses, ignoring His voice, or refusing His pleas? Are you trying to drown out His warnings to do what you know is wrong to do? **A hard head is a symptom of a hard heart.**

Shake Off the Dust

Today In Your Reading...

Jeremiah again prophesied judgment against Judah, the people of God, and the surrounding nations. He warned Egypt that Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonians would ruin their country and that its capital at Memphis would be leveled. He also predicted Babylon's eventual fall and the return of the people of Judah. "I will destroy the nations to which I have exiled you, but I will not destroy you. I must discipline you. I cannot let you go unpunished" (46:28).

The most important event today was the scroll on which Jeremiah wrote God's warnings and which Baruch read to the people of Jerusalem, the priests and other officials, and which eventually made it to King Jehoiakim. Of course Jehoiakim, in the hardness of his heart, rejected the scroll, tore it up, and threw it in the fire.

Imagine pleading with friends and family not to board a train because you knew that a bridge down the line had collapsed and that everyone on board would surely die. Now, imagine that your loved ones refused to believe you, and they climbed aboard the train anyway. How dumbfounded and heartbroken you would be, to think that you did all that you could to no avail.

Such was the ministry of Jeremiah. He pled with the people to turn from their evil ways, knowing that they were headed off a cliff. No one took him seriously. The King, his advisers, and all the people happily went to their doom. No wonder Jeremiah was known as the "Weeping Prophet."

God is often viewed by skeptics as heartless and cruel, especially in the Old Testament; but, what they fail to see, or refuse to believe, is that before He pronounced judgment on anyone, He always gave them fair warning. However, His prophets were ignored. **What was He to do with those who refused to listen?**

Daily Reflection

One of the reasons that we, as believers, do not readily share the Gospel with others is that we fear rejection or repercussions. Today, especially, there seems to be a spirit of disdain for the things of God. Have you ever experienced this type of rejection when sharing Christ with someone or when expressing your beliefs? Describe it here. How did you feel?

What are you to do when you are rejected like this? Are you to get offended, to quit talking about the things of God, or to walk away from your faith? No, of course not. Jesus told His disciples that if anyone did not receive their words to **"shake off the dust from your feet"** and go to the next person (*Matthew 10:5-14*).

Remember, Jesus called you and I to be "fishers of men" (4:19). As a fisherman, **you are not commanded to catch fish, but rather you are simply commanded to fish**, to cast your line. Not all fish will be interested, and that's okay. The people whom the Lord has drawn to Himself, by His Spirit, will be open and willing to hear you. Those are the ones you are to pursue.

Keep in mind that those who reject the Gospel are not rejecting you. *They are rejecting Christ.* As long as you openly share the good news of God, you have done what the Lord has asked. If someone takes your "scroll," tears it up, and throws it into the fire, what are you to do? **Shake off the dust from your feet and move to another fishing hole.**