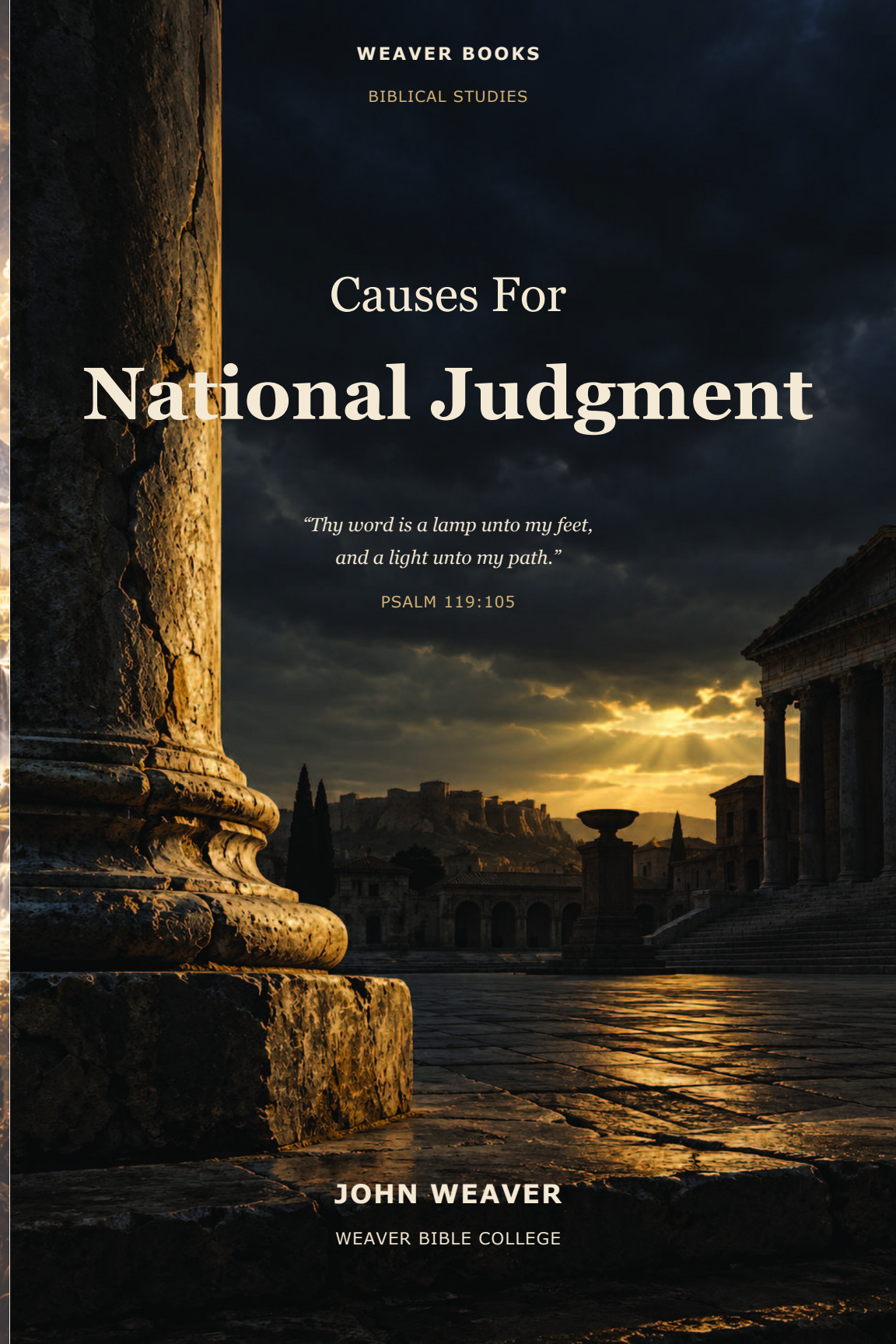
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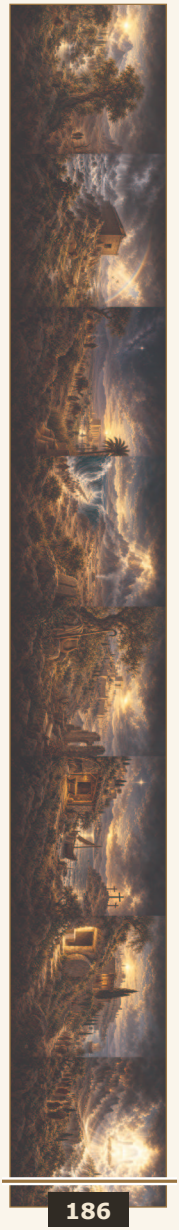
"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105



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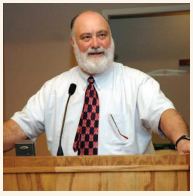
Righteousness exalteth a nation.

PROVERBS 14:34, EXCERPT

John Weaver examines national judgment through the responsibilities of rulers, teachers, and hearers. These messages consider corruption, covenantal unfaithfulness, and the refusal to acknowledge chastisement. The volume calls attention to spiritual causes beneath public symptoms and asks whether the authority of God's Word is being upheld or quietly displaced.

"You cannot violate any of the remaining nine commandments without violating number one first."

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

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CHAPTER 1

Causes for National Judgment

Part One of Two

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 5:1-13 (KJV)

Introduction and Context

"Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now and know and seek in the broad places thereof, if you can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth, and I will pardon it."

"And though they say the Lord liveth, surely they swear falsely. O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth? Thou hast stricken them that they have not grieved. Thou hast consumed them that they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than a rock. They have refused to return. Therefore I said, surely these are poor, they are foolish. For they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God."

> "I will get me to the great men and will speak unto them. For they have known the way of the Lord and the judgment of their God. But these have altogether broken the yoke and burst the bonds. Wherefore, a lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evening shall spoil them. A leopard shall watch over their cities. Everyone that goeth out then shall be torn in pieces, because their transgressions are many and their backslidings are increased."
>
> "How shall I pardon thee for this? Thy children have forsaken me and sworn by them that are no gods. When I had fed them to the full, then they committed adultery and assembled themselves by troops in the harlot's houses. They were as fed horses in the morning, everyone made after his neighbor's wife. Shall I not visit for these things, said the Lord? Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"
>
> "Go you up upon her walls and destroy. Make not a full end, take away her battlements, for they are not the Lord's. For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously against me, saith the Lord. They have belied the Lord." That is, they've lied against the Lord and said, "It is not he, neither shall evil come upon us. Neither shall we see sword or famine and the prophet shall become wind and the word is not in them."

"Thus shall it be done unto them." In light of current events, the circumstances in which we are now living, and the depravity and immorality of Americans in general, I thought it wise not only to repeat but also to reinforce certain truths from the Word of God. After looking at our text, I think you will come to one conclusion: people have not changed at all. We are still sinners, wicked, and rebellious.

We must remember that although God often speaks of nations or countries, a country or nation is made up of individuals. Therefore, in order for a nation to repent, the individuals in that nation must repent as well.

In Jeremiah chapter 5, God gives us a number of very pointed causes for national judgment. In context, these causes are addressed

particularly to Judah and Jerusalem. He also mentions in verse 11 the house of Israel. Thus, the northern and southern kingdoms are involved, usually Judah and Jerusalem here. But although He is speaking particularly to Judah and Jerusalem, that does not mean there are no applications to the other nations that exist. God is immutable; God does not change.

Sin is still sin, whether it is in the sixth century or the twenty-first century. God hates sin just as much today as He hated it in the days of Jeremiah. Mark this down as a principle: the reasons, or causes, for which God judged Judah, Jerusalem, and Samaria 2,500 years ago will be the same causes for which He judges nations today. God is immutable; He does not change.

One other thing must be said. When we read Jeremiah chapter 5 and look at these sins, these causes for national judgment, they are not minor by any stretch of the imagination. Yet because of our perverseness and depravity, most people would not count them as major sins. When we think of major sins, we think of brazen idolatry, fraudulent economics, and high-handed treason. Those things deserve national judgment, but we tend to regard some of these others as minor. What we tend to think of as minor often contains, in seed form, all the major sins.

When God forbids any sin, He also forbids anything that leads up to that sin. These so-called minor sins appear minor to most people, but they are simply the sins that lead up to the major sins.

We know dogmatically, certainly, and absolutely that God will judge nations for these causes. Why? Look in Jeremiah 5:9: “Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord? And shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?” Look at verse 29. He repeats it: “Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord? Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?” We know, then, that God will send national judgment for certain sins. What are some of those sins?

First Cause: Implacable in Comprehension

I want to give you five. Hopefully, we will cover three of them today. The first cause of national judgment is found in verses 1 and 2 and 4

and 5: they were implacable in their comprehension. Implacable simply means unyielding. When I say that they were implacable in their comprehension, it means that they were not willing to listen to God or to Jeremiah.

They thought they had truth and everything they needed. Therefore, they had no time for God or Jeremiah. Jeremiah was God's man, God's prophet, God's mouthpiece, and God's representative.

Scripture teaches this simple principle very clearly: when an individual, a family, a church, a nation, or a people refuse to hear God's truly appointed representative, at the same time they are refusing to hear God. Put another way, when a nation or a people forsakes God's man, at the same time they forsake God. The man is not God; he merely represents Him.

Consider 1 Samuel 8:7–8. Israel wanted a king that they might be as other nations, and God said to Samuel, “Hearken unto the voice of the people and all that they say unto thee, for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. Now listen. According to all the works which they have done, since the day I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, even to this day, wherewith they have forsaken Me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee.” Samuel, they forsook Me, and they are going to forsake you. They will not listen to Me, and they will not listen to you.

Jeremiah 7:13 says, “And now, because you have done all these works, saith the Lord, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but you heard not, and I called you, but you answered not.” Now hear verses 23 through 28: “But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be My people, and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward. Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day, I have even sent unto you all My servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them, yet they hearkened not unto me. Yet they hearkened

not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck, and did worse than their fathers."

God sent the prophets, but He said, "Yet they hearkened not unto me." When you do not hear the prophets, you do not hear God. "Therefore thou shalt speak all these words unto them, but they will not hearken unto thee. Thou shalt also call unto them, but they will not answer thee. But thou shalt say unto them, This is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the Lord their God, nor receiveth correction: truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth." They would not listen.

Our Lord said as He sent His disciples out in Matthew 10:40, "He that receiveth you receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." The opposite is also true. If you refuse the representative of Christ, you refuse Christ. If you refuse Christ, you refuse the Father who sent Christ.

Our Lord said specifically in Luke 10:16, "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me." When anyone refuses to hear the true representative of God, he is refusing to hear God. When one refuses to hear the representative of Jesus Christ, he is refusing to hear Christ; and when he refuses to hear Christ, he refuses to hear the Father who sent Him.

Let me show you how perverse, how rebellious, the people of Judah and Jerusalem had become. They were so implacable. Look what God says in verse 1: "Run you to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if you can find a man," that is, a single man, "if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth, and I will pardon it." God told Jeremiah to run up and down through the streets of Jerusalem. If he could find one man—one man—who really and genuinely wanted the truth, understood the truth, and was willing to execute judgment, God would pardon the whole nation.

Before I get off verse 1, this is important. Look at verse 1 again: "Run you to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now and know, and seek in the broad places thereof. If you can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment or justice, that seeketh

truth, and I will pardon it." This verse teaches us that truth and justice stand or fall together. If you have truth, you are going to have justice; if you have justice, you are going to have truth. If you have no truth, you will have no justice, and if you have no justice, you will have no truth. Psalm 89:14 says, "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face." Justice, or judgment, mercy, and truth stand or fall together.

It is a sure sign of destruction when anyone is unwilling to hear the truth or to be concerned with judgment or justice. If I tried to teach you and you refused to hear me, why would you do that? Either because you already think you know it all, you do not want it, or you are so perverse that you do not have time to listen to it. Follow me? These people said, in effect, "We have it. We know it. We do not care what you say, and we do not care what God says."

Remember, these people were professing people of God. They were supposedly covenantal people. So verse 2 says, "And though they say the Lord liveth, surely they swear falsely." Many in Jerusalem and Judah could talk the talk, but they would never walk the walk. Likewise, many today are willing to ride the horse of Christianity, but they are not willing to get off the horse and walk the truth of Christianity.

They have a profession, but no possession, no real, genuine interest in Jesus Christ. They say one thing and do another; they are absolutely, totally ignorant and perverse. Though they say, “Surely the Lord liveth,” God says, they swear falsely: “I don’t really mean it”—religious lingo to them.

God said to Jeremiah, “You run to and fro through the streets of Judah and Jerusalem. If you can find one man, one man that really wants the truth and one man that really executes justice and judgment, I will pardon the whole nation.” God added, “You might find one that's going to say, ‘The Lord liveth.’” But he is swearing falsely; he has no desire for God or His law.

Jeremiah did not find such a man. Look at the conclusion he came to in verse 4: “Therefore I said, surely these are poor, they are foolish. They know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God.” Jeremiah thought the reason he could not find any man

among all these people was because they were uneducated and ignorant, the poor class, in the lower economic portion of the city. We do not expect people like that to know anything. Jeremiah said, “I figured out what my problem is.”

“I need to get me to the intelligentsia, to the educated, to the elite, to the rulers. I need to get to the great ones, the men of the city, because surely these are going to know.” After saying he could not find any among the poor people, he said, “I will get me to the great men and will speak unto them, for they have known the way of the Lord.”

“And the judgment of their God.” These were the educated, the intelligentsia: the college professors, journalists, news media, lawyers, judges, princes, and congressmen. “These have known the way of the Lord.” But what does he say? “But these have altogether broken the yoke and burst the bond.” They had rebelled worse than the common people. Notice that “they have known the way of the Lord” is past tense.

They might have known it at one time. Do you remember what the Apostle Paul said in Romans chapter 1, talking about those perverse, wicked, ungodly reprobates? They did not like to retain the knowledge of God. So they cast God off and went into idolatry and sodomy and every other perversion under the sun. These had known, but they did not like to retain the knowledge of God, and so they burst the bonds and broke the bounds. They did not like the limits and boundaries that God had placed upon them by His divine authority, so they forsook those limits and boundaries, and they stole and usurped authority that had never been given unto them. That is why the psalmist in Psalm 2 said, "The kings of the earth and the rulers of the earth have set themselves together and they said, let us burst his bonds asunder and cast his chains away from us." We do not like the limitation that God has placed upon us.

When Jeremiah got to the great men of the city, he found they were worse than the poor, ignorant, uneducated folks. The problem in Ezekiel's day was the problem in Jeremiah's day, and the problem that we have in America today is the same problem that Jeremiah and Ezekiel had in their days.

"There's a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey. They have devoured souls. They have taken the treasure and precious things. They have made her many widows in the midst thereof." So God condemns the prophets.

"Her priests have violated my law. They have profaned mine holy things. They put no difference between the holy and the profane. Neither they show difference between the unclean and the clean. They have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them." So now God tackles the priests.

"Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves, ravening the prey to shed blood and destroy souls and get dishonest gain." He then hits the prophets again.

"The people of the land have used oppression and exercised robbery to vex the poor and needy. Yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully." Notice God hits the prophets, the priests, the princes, and the people. The whole gamut from top to bottom was absolutely and totally corrupt.

Now go back to Jeremiah chapter 5 and look at verses 22 and 23. Here is the summation; here is why it was exactly as it was in Jeremiah's day, Ezekiel's day, and our day. Jeremiah 5:22 says, "Fear ye not me, saith the Lord? Would ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it? And though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it." Ah, says God. "But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone." What did He say? "Fear ye not me."

What did the Apostle Paul say was the problem with men in general in Romans chapter 3 and verse 18? "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Do you not fear Me? No. Mark this down according to Jeremiah chapter 5: when a person, a family, a church, a people, or a nation is unwilling to yield to truth, listen to the Word of God, or listen to righteousness and judgment, they are implacable—that is, obstinate, stubborn, and hard-hearted. They merit and bring upon themselves the righteous judgment of God.

Look at verse 9: "Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord? and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"

Remember, nations are made up of individuals. When you refuse to hear the truth, abide by the truth, and obey the truth, you condemn yourself to be judged by God. The very first cause God gives in Jeremiah chapter 5, the first cause for national judgment, is being implacable in comprehension: unyielding, unwilling to listen, heed, or be warned, and unwilling to receive the truth of God.

Second Cause: Incorrigible in Chastisement

Secondly, there is another reason: these people were incorrigible in chastisement. You know what an incorrigible delinquent is—a child who will not listen? Chastisement does him no good. The same thing is true here. Look at Jeremiah chapter 5, verse 3: "O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth?" Jeremiah says concerning the people of Judah, Jerusalem, and Israel, "Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction."

"They have made their faces harder than a rock, they refuse to return." Isn't that amazing? "Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved." I have seen one child in my entire life—well, I take that back—two children in my entire life, that no matter how much you whip them or how hard you whip them, they would not cry. Here is what he says: "Thou hast stricken them, they have not grieved. Thou hast consumed them, but they refuse to hear correction."

When people are implacable in their comprehension, when they refuse to hear the truth, the very next step, the very next stage, is that they become incorrigible in chastisement. That is, no amount of chastisement will do them any good. They become desensitized. They become hard-hearted. They become solidified in their sin and in their rebellion.

This is a common thing. We do not think it is very common, but yet it is. In Isaiah chapter 1, verse 5, God asked concerning the people in Isaiah's day, "Why should you be stricken anymore?" He continued, "You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head,

there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores that have not been closed, neither bound up nor neither mollified with ointment."

Verse 7 says, "Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire, your land strangers devoured in your presence and is desolate as overthrown by strangers." What God was saying was, "Why would you be stricken with me? What good is it doing me to chastise you anymore? All it does is make you harder and more solidified in your rebellion against me."

When a child will not receive correction and chastisement, he is gone. When a people will not receive correction and chastisement, they are gone. Jeremiah 8:6 gives us a very clear representation, a very clear picture, of this: "I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright."

“No man repented him of his wickedness saying, What have I done? Everyone turned to his course as the horse rushes into battle.” You know how a horse rushes into battle? He runs headlong. He is totally and completely unaware of the danger and destruction. He just rushes headlong straight into the enemy. God said, no man repented of his wickedness saying, What have I done? “I haven’t done anything. Why should God judge me?” And then he just rushes headlong, right straight into judgment.

It is because of their unfaithfulness, their wickedness, and their rebellion that God has smitten them, yet they refuse to acknowledge it. They refuse to repent. They refuse to be grieved for their wickedness and their rebellion.

Their attitude was much like the wicked woman in Proverbs 30, verse 20. God says, “Such is the way of the adulterous woman. She eateth and wipeth her mouth and said, What have I done?” It does not bother her. What has she done wrong? God is talking about individuals who are incorrigible in their chastisement.

Now notice what God says concerning those who will not receive correction and chastisement. Proverbs chapter 3, verse 11: “My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord.” That is, do not despise Him. “My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of correction. For whom the Lord loveth, he correcteth, even

as a father, the son in whom he delighteth." Now God says, do not despise chastisement.

In Proverbs chapter 5, verse 1, He tells the son to attend: "My son, attend unto my wisdom and bow thine ear to my understanding. That thou mayest regard discretion and that thy lips may keep knowledge." Verse 7 says, "Hear me now therefore, you children, and depart not from the wisdom of my mouth." Verse 21 declares, "For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all of his goings." Now look in chapter 19 and verse 13.

Now God has cautioned us to hear His chastening and His words. Proverbs 19, verse 13, says, "A foolish son is the calamity of his father." Often in the Bible, God refers to children and adults as fools. A fool in the Bible is not some mentally deficient person; a fool is someone who will not listen. Thus, a foolish son is the calamity of his father. In verse 19 He says, "A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment. For if you deliver him yet thou must do it again." Why? He will not listen.

Proverbs 28, verse 7, says, "Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son, but he that is companion of riotous men shameth his father." If you keep the law and obey God, you are a wise son. But if you are a companion of wicked and riotous men, you shame your father.

What in the world is going to happen to someone who simply will not listen, who will not receive instruction, correction, or chastisement? Proverbs 29, verse 1, gives the answer: "He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." God says, I will warn you; and when you are often reproved, yet it does no good, I will destroy you suddenly, and that without remedy.

In other words, there is nothing you can do about it. You cannot stop it. It will happen so quickly that you will not have time to blink an eye, and it is over. Jeremiah 42 gives what I will call a classic illustration of being incorrigible in chastisement.

Nebuchadnezzar had come into the land and basically destroyed it. He had taken many people captive and left only a few alive, the poorest of the people. Beginning in verse 1, Jeremiah records: "Then all the captains of the forces, Johanan the son of Kareah, and

Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people, from the least even the greatest, came near and said unto Jeremiah the prophet, Let we beseech thee our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for us unto the Lord thy God, even for all this remnant. For we are left but a few of many, as thine eyes do behold us, that the Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do. Then Jeremiah the prophet said unto them, I have heard you. Behold, I will pray unto the Lord your God, according to your words and it shall come to pass that whatsoever thing the Lord shall answer you, I will declare it unto you. I will keep nothing back from you."

"Then they said to Jeremiah, the Lord be a true and faithful witness between us if we do not even according to all things for which the Lord thy God shall send thee unto us."

The people had come to Jeremiah in trouble and great straits. God had judged them. Nebuchadnezzar had torn down the city, burned the temple, destroyed everything, and taken all those people. Only a few were left. They asked Jeremiah to pray for wisdom and God's will: "Will you do that?"

"Yes," he said. "I will do that. I will tell you everything God tells me; I will withhold nothing." They gave him their word: "The Lord be a true and faithful witness amongst us and between us. Whatever God tells you, that is what we are going to do." That ought to make any pastor's heart rejoice. Jeremiah did pray.

In chapter 43, verse 1, Jeremiah had made an end of speaking to all the people "all the words of the Lord their God, for which the Lord their God had sent him to them, even all these words." Jeremiah told them what God said: "Go not down into Egypt." God would bless and protect them if they stayed in the land.

"Then spake Azariah, the son of Hoshaiah, and Johanan, the son of Kareah, and all the proud men, saying unto Jeremiah, Thou speakest falsely. The Lord our God hath not sent thee to say, Go not into Egypt, sojourn there. But Baruch the son of Neriah setteth thee on against us, for to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they might put us to death, and carry us away captives of Babylon. So

Johanan the son of Kareah and all the people obeyed not the voice of the Lord to dwell in the land of Judah."

They had said, "We're going to do whatever the Lord tells you." But when they received the message they did not want, they said, "God didn't tell you that." They went down into Egypt because it was what they wanted to do. They would not listen to God or to Jeremiah.

In chapter 44, verse 10, God says, "They are not humbled even in this day, neither have they feared nor walked in my law nor in my statutes, that I may set before you and before your fathers. Therefore, thus said the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I will set my face against you for evil and to cut off all Judah." They went down into Egypt, and God set His face against them to cut them off.

"And I will take the remnant of Judah that have set their faces to go into the land of Egypt, but sojourn there and they shall be consumed and fall in the land of Egypt. And they shall even be consumed by the sword and by the famine. They shall die from the least, even to the greatest by the sword and by the famine, and they shall be an execration."

"And an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach. For I will punish them that dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem by the sword, by the famine, by the pestilence. So that none of the remnant of Judah that are gone in the land of Egypt to sojourn there shall escape or remain, they that should return into the land of Judah, to which they have a desire to return to dwell there. For none shall return, but such as shall escape."

What did God just say? He said, "You're going down to Egypt. I've told you not to. Fine, go on. I'll kill you all down there." They were afraid of Nebuchadnezzar, but God was going to send him against Egypt shortly, and they would be there. Why did God judge Judah and Jerusalem to begin with? Because of their idolatry, because they refused to receive chastisement and correction.

Then all the men who knew that their wives had burned incense unto other gods, and all the men that stood by, a great multitude, even all the people that dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros,

answered Jeremiah, saying, "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we've done, we and our fathers, our kings, our princes, in the cities of Judah, in the streets of Jerusalem. For then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven and to pour out our drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine. And when we burn incense to the queen of heaven and poured out drink offerings unto her, did we do that without our men?"

Of course, the men knew what was going on. Then Jeremiah said unto all the people, to the men, to the women, and to all the people who had given him that answer, saying, "The incense that you burn in the city of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, you and your fathers, your kings, and your princes, and the people of the land, did

“Not the Lord remember them and came it not in his mind?” In other words, this is why in Judges you begin with: “So that the Lord could no longer bear because of the evil of your doings and because of the abominations which you’ve committed. Therefore is your land a desolation and an astonishment and a curse without an inhabitant, as it is this day. Because you have burned incense and because you’ve sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord, nor walked in his law, nor in his statutes, nor in his testimonies, therefore this evil has happened unto you, as at this day. Moreover, Jeremiah said unto all the people and all the women, Hear the word of the Lord, all Judah that are in the land of Egypt.”

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, You and your wives have both spoken with your mouths and fulfilled with your hands, saying, We will surely perform our vows that we vowed to burn incense to the queen of heaven and to pour out our drink offerings unto her. You will surely accomplish your vows and surely perform your vows. Therefore, here you are, the Lord, all Judah, that dwell in the land of Egypt. Behold, I have sworn by my great name, saith the Lord, that my name shall no more be named in the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, The Lord God

liveth. Behold, I will watch over them for evil and not for good. And for all the men of Judah that are in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by the famine until there be an end to them."

What did God say? You wouldn't listen to me. Why did I chastise you to begin with? Because of your sin and your wickedness? Now you're down in Egypt; you've disobeyed me again. Now you're telling me you're going to burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and pour out drink offerings unto her. Don't you ever learn? God said, all right, fine. Don't receive chastisement. Don't receive correction. I'll just judge you and destroy you.

If you go back in your Bibles, Jeremiah chapter 5, look at verse 9. Listen carefully. God's chastisements are designed to turn us from our evil and our wicked ways. When we refuse to be chastened by God, when we refuse to receive correction by Him, we merit and bring upon ourselves certain and sure destruction. Jeremiah 5, verse 9: What does God ask?

"Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord? Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" Two reasons so far God has given for sending national judgment: when you are implacable in your comprehension, when you simply will not listen, and when you are incorrigible in chastisement, refusing correction and refusing to learn. Here is the third reason, in verses 7 and 8: they were infidels in covenantal relations. God asks, "How shall I pardon thee for this?"

Third Cause: Infidels in Covenantal Relations

"Thy children have forsaken me and sworn by them that are no gods. When I had fed them to the full, then they committed adultery and assembled themselves by troops in the harlot's houses. They were as fed horses in the morning, every one neighing after his neighbour's wife." They were infidels in covenantal relations. Infidelity means unfaithfulness, so we could say that they were unfaithful in covenantal relations. Infidelity in covenantal relations is a cause for national judgment. Covenantal faithfulness is required by God in every area of life.

Their infidelity was first and foremost Godward. We speak of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word testament simply means covenant: the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Whether you lived in the Old Testament or are alive in the New Testament, God's people are always a covenantal people. These people violated their covenant first toward God. What is the first commandment? "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

You cannot violate any of the remaining nine commandments without violating number one first. When you reject the one true and living God as God, you set yourself up as God, or set up something or someone else, and then begin to violate those commandments. God says in verse 7, "How shall I pardon thee for this? Thy children have forsaken me and sworn by them that are no gods." Why did the children forsake God?

They forsook God either because they were following the example of their parents or because they were never taught the precepts of God's law. Both answers are correct, but the answer emphasized repeatedly in the Bible is that they were following the examples of their fathers. If their fathers were idolatrous, would they teach the law of God to their children? Obviously not.

In Jeremiah 2:13, God is accusing them and charging them with infidelity in their covenantal relations: “For my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken Me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” Whenever you forsake the one true and the living God, you are going to hew you out a broken cistern. That is, you are going to have a false God.

In Jeremiah chapter 3, they say, “If a man put away his wife, and she go from him and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted? But thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again unto me, saith the Lord.”

Now look what God says to Judah and Jerusalem: “Lift up thine eyes unto the high places, and see where thou hast not been lain with.” In other words, where you have not committed spiritual adultery. “In the ways thou hast set for them as the Arabian in the

wilderness, and thou hast polluted the land with thy whoredoms and with thy wickedness, therefore the showers have been withholden, there have been no latter rain, and thou hast a whore's forehead and refuses to be ashamed. Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art the God of My youth?”

"Will He reserve His anger forever? Will He keep it to the end? Behold, thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldst."

Jeremiah then says, "Surely as a wife treacherously departed from her husband, so have you dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, said the Lord. A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping in supplications of the children of Israel. They have perverted their way. They have forgotten the Lord their God. Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God, truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills and from the multitude of the mountains."

In other words, no idolatries. "Truly the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel, for shame hath devoured the labor of our fathers from our youth, their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us, for we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even in this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God."

God says, your children have forsaken me. Why did the children forsake Him? Because the fathers had forsaken Him.

Idolatry is rightly referred to in the Bible as spiritual adultery and spiritual whoredoms. Why? Because in idolatry, you take God's blessings and providential provision, and then give thanks, praise, honor, and worship to an idol or a false god. While claiming to be God's people, they were violating their covenantal oath.

They were professing Christians but practical pagans. That almost sounds like our land today. Here was a people that received everything from the hand of God, and then gave God's honor and glory to idols. People have not changed. We are still the same today. We ascribe God's providential blessings and provisions to luck,

chance, fate, and fortune: "Boy, was I lucky." No, you were not lucky. It was the blessing of God. We take God's praise and give it to idols.

We worship at the altar of convenience and comfort and compromise instead of the altar of Jesus Christ. We have forgotten our oath. We have forgotten our covenant. In 1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 12, the Apostle Paul tells Timothy, "...fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good confession before many witnesses."

Paul said, Timothy, you better remember that good confession that you confessed before many witnesses. What is he talking about? I do not care which commentator you get, whether you choose an Arminian or Calvinistic commentator. Every commentator that you read on 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verse 12 will tell you that the good confession Timothy made before many witnesses was at his baptism. Do you know what you confessed in your baptism? Jesus Christ is Lord.

Everyone that I have ever baptized, that is the first question I ask them: Do you confess that Jesus Christ is Lord? The word Lord means boss, owner, master, sovereign. When you are baptized, here is the picture: you are dying to yourself and your sins as you are buried with Him in baptism, and then raised to newness of life in Him as you emerge a new creature in Christ to obey Him.

But you have given a covenantal oath. You have said that Jesus Christ is Lord. Are you listening? When we violate that covenantal oath, when we say with our lips that Jesus Christ is Lord and then live practically as pagans, denying His Word, His authority, and His law, like Judah and Jerusalem in Jeremiah 5, we are professing Christians but practical pagans.

Go back to Jeremiah chapter 5, because I want you to see first and foremost that their covenantal infidelity was God-ward. He says, "they have forsaken me, sworn by them that are not God." But secondly, note that their infidelity was man-ward. He says in verse 7, "How shall I pardon thee for this? Thy children have forsaken Me, and sworn by them that are no gods. When I had fed them to the full, then they committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops

in the harlot's houses. They were as fed horses in the morning, every one nayed after his neighbor's wife."

When a people commit spiritual adultery, they will not hesitate to commit physical adultery. If you violate your covenantal relationship in that which is greatest between you and God, you will not hesitate to violate your covenantal relationship in that which is least between you and your mate. Remember what the unjust judge said in Luke 18:1-2: "Do I fear not God, nor regard man?" If I have no fear of God, if I have no respect for my covenantal relationship with Him, am I going to have any regard for man, or for my covenantal relationship with man? No. The answer is absolutely not. When one does not fear God, he has no regard for man.

One reason there is so much adultery, fornication, dishonesty, fraud, and corruption in our land today is this very simple fact: We have forsaken our covenantal relationship with God. We have no fear of God; therefore, we have no regard for man. We do not care.

Look in your Bibles at Jeremiah 5:8. This is God's Word, not mine. In verse 7, the latter part says, "When I fed them to the full, then they committed adultery and assembled themselves by troops in the harlot's houses. They were as fed horses in the morning, every one made after his neighbor's wife." Three thoughts come quickly from this verse. First, spiritual adultery always precedes and leads to physical adultery. Secondly, when one who has forsaken God is fed, like a fed horse, he uses his strength and energy not for God, but for sin and rebellion. Thirdly, though they were fed as horses in the morning, everyone ate after his neighbor's wife. As men cannot be satisfied with God, who is sufficient for all things, likewise they cannot be satisfied with their mates. Isn't that interesting? God says they neigh after their neighbor's wife as a horse.

Let me give you an illustration. Many years ago, we had a stud horse named Little Bit. As you probably guessed from the name, he was anything but little. Names are very often contrary to reality, like Honest Abe. Honest Abe was not honest, and Little Bit was certainly not little. He was a huge, huge horse.

Little Bit had three or four mares in the stall with him, but they were insufficient. Oftentimes I would get a call, sometimes during

the night: “Preacher, your stud horse is over here at my farm trying to get in with my mares five miles down the road.” We would have to get up, go get the horse, and bring him back. He wanted all of them. The horse was unsatisfied with his mares.

Now look at what God said: “They were as fed horses in the morning, every one made after his neighbor's wife.” You ought to watch horses in the morning after they have been fed, on a good, cool, crisp morning. They love to run and show themselves. God says that is exactly the way men are when they reject His covenant. They reject their covenant with each other and rush after other men's wives.

When men violate their covenant with God, and therefore have no regard for covenants with each other, they reduce themselves to the level of animals. Psalm 49:12 says, “Nevertheless, man being in honor abideth not, he is like the beasts that perish.” Verse 20 says, “Man that is in honor and understandeth not is like the beasts that perish.” God says plainly that those who forsake Him and violate His covenant will also violate their covenants with each other.

Now look back at Jeremiah 5:9: “Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord? And shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?” I have given you three reasons why God will send national judgment: when a people are implacable in their comprehension, incorrigible in chastisement, and infidels in their covenantal relations. God said, “I'll judge them.”

Applications

Applications from the Text

God says, “Run you to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now and know, and seek in the broad places thereof. If you can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth, and I will pardon it.” Learn this simple truth: Judah and Israel had the law of God. The tabernacle and the temple were in Judah, in Jerusalem. But truth ignored, denied, unvalued, unregarded, or overlooked is worthless. What good did it do Judah and Jerusalem to have the temple, the tabernacle, and the law? They did not read it, obey it, or practice it. What good does it do you to have a Bible if you

never read it or obey it? Truly, the man who can read but will not read is no better off than the man who cannot read.

What good is your Bible if it lies on the table and you never pick it up? God said in Hosea 8:12, "I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing." Unhappily, God's Word and God's law are counted as a strange thing in this land today. It does us no good to have the truth if we will not study it and apply it. That is the first application.

Look at verse 2: "And though they say the Lord liveth, surely they swear falsely." Talk is not only cheap; it is insufficient. We have to obey the Word of God in our lives. Profession without possession is useless, and our actions often belie our profession. Titus 1:16 says, "They profess that they know God, but in their works they deny him being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." They profess to know God, but in their works they deny Him.

Verses 4 and 5 give a third application: Jeremiah said, "Therefore I said, Surely these are poor, they are foolish, they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God. I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the Lord, and the judgment of their God: but these have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds."

These things are connected. In verse 1, truth overlooked, ignored, unregarded, and unvalued is worthless. In verse 2, profession without actions, without work, is worthless.

In verses 4 and 5, truth and knowledge rejected, despised, and forgotten lead to either anarchy or tyranny. When one rejects the law of God, he will either end up in anarchy, where every man does that which is right in his own eyes, respects no authority, and regards no man, or in tyranny and despotism, where someone must come up with an iron fist and bring order out of chaos.

The truth is, we must be ruled either by the Bible or by the bayonet. That statement is not original with me. Robert Winthrop, Speaker of the House in 1849, said this before the United States House of Representatives:

"All societies of men must be governed in some way or the other. The less they have of stringent state government, the more they must rely on individual self-government. The less they rely on public law or physical force, the more they must rely on private moral restraint. Men and the Word must necessarily be controlled either by power within them or by power without them. Either by the Word of God or by the strong arm of man. Either by the Bible or the bayonet. It may do for other countries and other governments to talk about the state supporting religion here under our own free institutions. It is religion which must support the state."

When he said religion must support the state, he did not mean by taxation.

What did he mean? He meant we support government by not needing it, by having self-control, self-government, and self-restraint. The more we have of self-government, the less we need of stringent state government. And you are going to find, folks, as our country progresses on the road to destruction, when people reject the truth and refuse to be chastised, they are going to be destroyed. We will end up either in absolute anarchy and chaos, or despotism and tyranny.

Conclusion and Call to Obedience

Now the question you have to ask is this: Are you part of the problem or part of the solution? How are you part of the problem? By disobeying the Word of God. How are you part of the solution? By obeying the Word of God, doing what is obedient and what is right.

Let us pray. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we do ask for Your grace and Your mercy in our lives. We pray, Lord, that You would teach us and show us the absolute importance of personal obedience in every area of our lives. And may we see, Lord, where we are headed, so that we can make the necessary preparations. Thou didst say, "The prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself." Give us grace, Lord, that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Causes for National Judgment

Part Two of Two

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 5:25-31 (KJV)

God says, "Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you."

"For among my people are found wicked men: they lay wait, as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich. They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge."

"Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?"

Review of First Three Causes

> Jeremiah chapter 5 is certainly very clear on at least five of these points. The first three we covered last week. It is interesting, when you consider today's politically correct mentality and the immorality in our land, that some of these things are considered by most people as light sins. But God certainly considers them heinous, vile, and wicked, which is evidence that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and our ways are certainly not God's ways.
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> One of the first three reasons given to us in Jeremiah chapter 5 for which God will send national judgment was that God charged the people of Judah and Jerusalem with being implacable in their comprehension. That is verses one through five.

They were unwilling to listen, unwilling to learn, and unwilling to obey. God told Jeremiah to run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem and see if he could find just one man who understood and would execute justice. God said, "I'll pardon the whole nation if you can just find one." Of course, he could not find one man. Here was a people so implacable and unyielding that they would not listen to Jeremiah or to God. For this cause, God said, He would send national judgment: "Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"

Secondly, these same people were incorrigible in chastisement, as seen in verse 3. They would not positively respond to chastisement. Instead, chastisement only made them more hardened in their sin, more rebellious, more stubborn, and more wicked. God said in Proverbs 29 and verse 1, "He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." These people were incorrigible in their chastisement; they would not respond. Therefore God asked, "Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"

Thirdly, God charged them with infidelity in covenantal relations. First, that infidelity was Godward: "How shall I pardon thee for this?" "Thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are

no gods." Secondly, it was manward. "When I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses. They were as fed horses in the morning: every one neighed after his neighbour's wife."

When there is no fear of God, there will be no regard for man. When someone commits spiritual adultery—that is, idolatry, leaving God—it is but a small step to commit physical adultery. If you are dishonest in that which is greatest, it will be no big thing to be dishonest in that which is least. God therefore rightly compared them to animals: "every one neighed after his neighbour's wife." When we forsake God, we descend to the level of animals. Again He asked, "Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"

Fourth Cause: Iniquitous Conduct of Civil Rulers

Today we come to the fourth and fifth causes for which God will send national judgment. The fourth cause pertains particularly to civil rulers and those in positions of authority. I tell you this in advance because, as we consider these passages, I want us to see whether there is a parallel in our country today, and whether we recognize in our nation anything that existed in Judah and Jerusalem. The point will become clear as we proceed. Look at verses 25 through 28; we will read them very quickly.

He says, “Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you. For among my people are found wicked men: they lay wait, as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich. They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked. They judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge.”

Here is the fourth cause for which God will judge a nation: they were iniquitous in their conduct. As we look at this passage, one might conclude by casual observation that it refers to all classes of men in general. Certainly, that is true in one sense of the word. There are many applications of this truth. But when these verses are considered in their context and in light of what is specifically stated,

the passage refers primarily to civil rulers, judges, and those in authority.

The Word of God says specifically that these men lay wait, set traps and snares, and catch men; that they become exceedingly rich and overpass the deeds of the wicked—which I will explain later—and that they fail to judge the cause of the fatherless and the needy. Very obviously, we are talking about some very wealthy, deceitful men in positions of authority and power, men who should be doing what is right but are doing what is wicked. The passage, as I will show you, deals with men who are iniquitous in their conduct.

Synonyms and Description of Iniquitous Conduct

I have chosen my words carefully. I considered many words when I was going to describe the conduct of these men, and I chose the word iniquitous because of its many synonyms. Consider whether any of these synonyms could apply to any of our civil rulers and judges today. Iniquitous connotes such words as abominable, atrocious, bad, blameable, blameworthy, criminal, cussed, damnable, dark, disgraceful, evil, evildoing, execrable, felonious, flagrant, foul, harmful, hateful, heinous, illegal, immoral, improper, inequitable, infamous, invidious, knavish, low, malefactory, malfeasant, malicious, malignant, mean, monstrous, nasty, naughty, nefarious, noxious, ornery, rank, reprehensible, reprobate, scandalous, shameful, sinful, unbalanced, uneven, unforgiven, unjust, unlawful, unspeakable, unworthy, vicious, vile, villainous, and wicked. And that just describes their good points.

Those synonyms pretty well hit where it hurts, because truly our leaders, like those in Judah and Jerusalem, are iniquitous in their conduct. Now, if you refer back in your Bible to Jeremiah 5, verses 23 and 24, here is a general principle that relates to the people. Notice that he begins talking about the civil rulers immediately thereafter. In verse 23 he says, “But this people”—which would include the civil rulers—“this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone. Neither say they in their heart, ‘Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.’”

Biblical Parallels: Catching Men and Deceit

Notice, “neither say they in their heart.” Here are people in such a state of rebellion to God and His law that they do not even conceive or think of the possibility of returning to God or recognizing God. Consequently, God says in verse 26, “For among my people are found wicked men.” These wicked men, like Nimrod, are mighty hunters against the Lord. If they are mighty hunters, what is their prey? According to the Bible, in verse 26, they catch men. Their prey is men. How do you catch men? Not necessarily by murdering men, though that is a possibility, but by deceiving them, controlling them, regulating them, and dictating to them. If you look back to Jeremiah 5 and verse 5, you will understand this: “I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the LORD, and the judgment of their God.”

"But these"—the great men, the rulers—"but these have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds." In other words, God's boundaries mean nothing to them. God's limitations have no effect upon them.

Matthew Henry, the commentator, says concerning these men that they were spiteful and malicious. That's almost descriptive of our rulers today, isn't it? Spiteful and malicious. Such are properly wicked men, men that delight in doing mischief.

Alice and I were listening to the news last night. Do you know what our government is considering doing? Taking all of those so-called non-combatant Muslims whom they have kept in Gitmo, Guantanamo Bay, for all these years. They are not only thinking of releasing them in America, but are also saying that they will have to be subsidized. In other words, they will have to be on welfare, and your taxes will have to support them while they make a new life. Why don't you just send them back to their country where they came? You have to be either the most stupid person in the world or the most treacherous to come up with some of these ideas.

Matthew Henry says they were spiteful and malicious. Such are properly wicked men, men that delight in doing mischief. They were found—that is, caught—in the very act of their wickedness.

"As hunters or fowlers lay snares for their game, so did they lie in wait to catch men and made a sport of it, and took as much pleasure as if they had been entrapping beasts or birds. They contrived ways of doing mischief to good people, whom they hated for their goodness, especially to those that faithfully reproved them, and to those that stood in the way of their preferment, or whom they supposed to have affronted them, or done them an unkindness, or those whose estates they coveted. So Jezebel snared Naboth for his vineyard, nay they did mischief for mischief's sake."

Modern Examples of Government Overreach

Matthew Henry said they hated those for their goodness, especially those who faithfully reproved them or stood in their way. He is referring to Isaiah 29. Isaiah and Jeremiah are talking about exactly this. Isaiah 29:21 says, "That make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought."

They make a man an offender for a word. They do not like what he says, and they lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate. That is for anyone who rebukes them, who does not agree with them, or who does not like what they are doing. They are willing to turn aside the just for a thing of nought. In other words, they have no sense of justice and no sense of right and wrong. They simply take pleasure in turning aside the just and that which is right for a thing of nought.

In our politically correct land, just like in Isaiah's day and Jeremiah's day, one may indeed become incarcerated, put in prison, or murdered simply for using the wrong terminology or associating with those designated as politically incorrect people. This has been in the news. The Missouri Information Analysis Center put out a report just a week or so ago. The report was so atrocious, so vile, and so wicked, and caused so much uproar, that they had to withdraw it. Most states now have what are known as fusion centers, where information comes in and then a report goes out to law enforcement. The Missouri Information Analysis Center report specifically describes supporters of presidential candidates Ron Paul, Chuck Baldwin, and Bob Barr as militia-influenced terrorists.

The report instructs the Missouri police to be on the lookout for supporters displaying bumper stickers and other paraphernalia associated with Constitutional Campaign for Liberty and libertarian parties. The MIAC report specifically links these supporters to militia-influenced terrorists. Police are educated in the document that people who are anti-abortion, who own gold, display an assortment of United States flags, or even talk about the film Zeitgeist view the police as their enemy, and it conflates them with domestic terrorists like Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, Olympic bomber Eric Rudolph, and other domestic militia groups charged with plotting terrorist attacks.

Now let me give you a definition of a word. The word conflates literally means to merge together, to identify, or to make one. So if you voted for Ron Paul, Chuck Baldwin, or Bob Barr, if you have a bumper sticker on your car that supports them, if you have a U.S. flag—or if you are against the Federal Reserve, or believe the Constitution says no state shall make anything but gold and silver as legal tender—you are as bad as Eric Rudolph and Timothy McVeigh and any other militia group planning domestic terror.

By the way, the main flag they identified as wicked, vile, and atrocious was the flag of the coiled rattlesnake that said, “Don’t Tread on Me,” which was the flag of the American Revolution—a historic flag. Here is the state of Missouri telling its state troopers and police to be on the lookout for anybody with a bumper sticker that says Ron Paul. Now, Missouri got caught.

My question is, how many other states have put out this same information and have not been exposed as of yet? In fact, the governor of Missouri came out and said that he endorsed the report, but thought it was unwise for it to have been sent out. What? All I am trying to show you is this: Isaiah 29:21 and Jeremiah 5 are just as applicable today.

Here are people who do not like to be rebuked, reproved, or disagreed with. Now look at verse 27 of Jeremiah 5. Here is a further description of these wicked men: “As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich.”

Exceeding the Wicked and Ezekiel's Warning

Matthew Poole, the commentator, gave an interesting comment on this verse: “As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit.” In other words, they fill their houses with the goods and wealth of those whom they deceive and overreach—ill-gotten gains, a metonymy of the efficient, as the fowler carries his cage along with him, wherein he puts the birds which he catches to keep them safe so that they get not away.

When once they are caught, and also by their appearance and singing entice others, therefore they become great and waxen rich, showing how and what manner they got their riches—by deceitfulness. Therefore by this means there such as gotten by a lying tongue and are therefore called in Scripture “the treasures of wickedness.” So, actually, what you have in verse 27 is a picture of what these men are doing in reality. Just as a man snares and traps birds and then keeps them in a cage to make sure they do not get away, so these men got their riches by wickedness. They are keeping the people in that cage so they can continue to fleece them.

Verse 28 goes further: “They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge.” John Calvin, on verse 28, says: “Here the prophet reproves those who were high in dignity, station, and wealth, and who wished at the same time to be deemed inviolable because they’re the rulers of the people.” In other words, “We can do no wrong. We’re over you. You do what we’re telling you. You keep your mouth shut.”

He continues: “He has spoken before generally. But now he assails the higher orders, the king’s counselors, the priests, the judges, and all endowed with authority. He says that they were swollen with fatness and that they were shining though they had exceeded.”

Notice in verse 28: “they are waxen fat, they shine, they overpass the deeds of the wicked.” They overpass the deeds of the wicked. Remember that Judah and Jerusalem professed to be the people of God. Jerusalem is where the tabernacle was.

It was where the temple was, where the teaching priests and the Levites were. And yet this people are charged with going over, above, and beyond the pagans. It seems that when a self-professed believer strays, nothing hinders him from his wickedness. Likewise, when a professed Christian nation forsakes God, nothing hinders it from exceeding the heathen and the pagans.

Turn to Ezekiel chapter 5 and note how specifically God spells this out. Beginning with verse 5: "Thus saith the Lord GOD; This is Jerusalem"—remember, Jerusalem was a covenantal people—"Thus saith the Lord GOD; This is Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her." All those countries and nations were pagan. "And she hath changed my judgments into wickedness more than the nations, and my statutes more than the countries that are round about her: for they have refused my judgments and my statutes. They have not walked in them. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye multiplied more than the nations that are round about you, and have not walked in my statutes, neither have kept my judgments, neither have done according to the judgments of the nations that are round about you; Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, am against thee, and will execute judgments in the midst of thee in the sight of the nations."

What did God say? You are worse than the pagans. "You didn't want my statutes? You didn't want my laws? You didn't want my judgments? You want to live like the heathen? I will judge you like the heathen." Look at verse 29: "Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"

Fifth Cause: Indifference in Calling of Prophets and Priests

Now watch the progression. These people were implacable in their comprehension; they would not listen or learn. Next, they were incorrigible in chastisement; they would not receive correction. Then they were infidels in their covenantal relations, willing to forsake God, their mates, and men, along with their covenants and agreements. Nothing stopped them. Is it strange, then, that such a

people now have rulers who are iniquitous in their conduct? A wicked people want wicked rulers, because wicked rulers will not condemn a wicked people. They are doing the same thing the people are.

Indifferent in Their Calling

God says in verse 29, "Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" The judgment of God is absolutely sure, certain, and absolute. It is not a matter of if God judges, but when God judges. For God said, "Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"

Think about our country so far. How do we compare with those first four causes for national judgment? I do not know about you, but I believe we are plum ripe for the picking. And I believe God is the picker.

Here is the fifth reason: America is indifferent in its calling. Look in verse 30: "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land. The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?"

Neither the prophets nor the priests took their callings seriously. They were willing to sell themselves and sell their ministries for gain and popularity. They were willing, and had rather, to be accepted by the people than to be accepted by God.

Have you heard the phrase, a seeker-friendly church? Have you heard the term mega-church? How many people do you think would flock to hear Jeremiah preach? Or Ezekiel? Or Isaiah? Or John the Baptist?

Let me tell you what has happened in this land today. Second Peter 2:15 tells us about such men who not only existed in Jeremiah's time, but exist today. Peter writes, "Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness." Balaam was the false prophet. These prophets and preachers today have forsaken the right way and followed the way of Balaam.

The ministry had become so perverted that Jeremiah exclaims, "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land." Then he tells us what that wonderful and horrible thing is: "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so."

How False Prophets Steal God's Word

The word wonderful in verse 30 emphasizes horror and disbelief. It literally means that which is amazing, horrifying, and absolutely astounding. Have you ever heard or seen something that left you at a loss for words, so that your mouth just fell open? You cannot believe what you are seeing or hearing.

This is what happens here in Jeremiah. A tremendous, horrifying thing has happened, exceeding all human conception. It cannot be comprehended. By the two words that he uses here, wonderful and horrible, he intimates that the impiety of the people could not be expressed in such words or even conceived by the mind. It was such a monstrous and horrible thing. What is so monstrous? What is so horrible? Here is what is so monstrous and horrible: “The prophets prophesy falsely.”

“And the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so.” Sometimes the word translated priest here is also translated as princes. Thus, there may be a collusion between the prophets or preachers and the princes, the civil rulers. If it is interpreted as priest, there is still a collusion between the two main religious elements against the people. What is so monstrous that the prophets prophesy falsely and the priests or princes bear rule by their means?

Let me put it bluntly: when a profligate people stand up for profligate rulers, the height of corruption has reached its zenith. I cannot even conceive of anyone who believes the Bible endorsing or associating with 99% of our civil rulers.

Notice again: “A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land.” The prophets prophesy falsely. First, there are those who prophesy falsely. They did not preach the truth. They did not speak the truth. Undoubtedly, there were prophets who deliberately sought

to mislead and deceive the people. We find them all the time in the Bible.

They were in Jeremiah's day. They were in Isaiah's day. They were in our day. They were in the New Testament day. There were others who may not have intentionally deceived or intentionally misled, yet they did. I don't know if you've ever thought about this question or not. But if someone is going to replace the Word of God and preach and teach falsely, what are they going to replace it with? Now you've got to understand, in reality, the Word of God cannot be replaced. You understand that. But very obviously, not everybody preaches the Word of God. And have you ever thought about this? That man by nature has a natural aversion and distaste for God and His Word. Oftentimes, unsaved men, carnal men, prefer to hear half-truths and outright lies rather than the Word of God. So how then can a false prophet deceive someone?

Well, let me show you. Jeremiah 23, beginning at verse 30. I want you to watch this. This is how false prophets deceive: “Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour. Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD.”

"And do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD."

Jeremiah gives us three ways in which the word of God is stolen, butchered, and replaced. In each instance, the prophets are doing what God forbids, and God specifically says, "I am against them." I do not want God against me. I do not mind the people being against me, but I do not want God against me. So how is the word of God stolen and butchered?

In verse 31, He says, "Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour." First, you can steal God's word by taking it away. The word of God may be stolen by totally ignoring it, refusing to preach and teach it. Generally, however, His word is stolen when preachers refuse to

preach the whole counsel of God. All you have to do is leave out the offensive sections of the Bible, those sections most people do not want to hear. You simply teach positive thinking. You teach that man by nature is good, and that if you work hard enough and are sincere, God is going to let you into His heaven.

You leave off that you are a sinner, wicked, reprobate, and ungodly, and that God demands that you repent and turn from your wicked ways. What are you doing? You are stealing God's word by refusing to preach the totality of God's word. You do not have to throw this Bible away to steal God's word; you simply refuse to preach all of it.

What did Paul write in 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 16? "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is"—"profitable." If all of God's Word is profitable, all of God's Word should be preached. But God is against the false prophets who steal His words. They take from. Notice verse 31, Jeremiah 23: "Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith." Here is another way that you can steal God's Word.

This time you're not taking away; this time you're adding to. So they're preaching and teaching a gospel of their own making. They're teaching and preaching their own interpretation that arises from their own imagination. In other words, they're not only diluting the Word of God by adding to it, they are, in essence, perverting it as well. And God places a curse upon all those who add to.

Deuteronomy 4 and verse 2 says, "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you." God says you're not to add to and you're not to take from. Revelation 22 verse 18 says, "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book." God says that you're not to take from and not to add to. You may steal God's Word by taking from it, and you may steal God's Word by adding to it.

And yet there is a third way. In verse 32 of Jeremiah 23, he says, "Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the

LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD." The third way is, they're not necessarily adding to or taking from; they're merely substituting for. They teach their dreams, their desires, their whims, whatever they please; they simply do not take and teach the Word of God.

Do you realize that if I were to advertise on the first Sunday in May, we're going to have a comedy fest, and I'm going to tell you some of the most hilarious jokes you've ever heard in your life—come and be entertained, come and be tickled, come and be delighted—I could have people standing outside? Or if I dream a dream: let me tell you what I've dreamed. God spoke to me in a dream. No, God speaks through His Son Jesus Christ. He speaks through His Word. Anytime you substitute for, you are taking away from the truth of God. You are deceiving people and depriving them of the Word of God.

The People's Love for False Teaching

Jeremiah said, “the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means.” There was a collusion between the preachers, the princes, and the priests. Instead of correcting the false prophets, the priests discovered that they gained from it. It benefited them. Let them go. They would build a crystal cathedral, a shiny new temple. The prophets, priests, and princes got together to deceive, ruin, and control the people.

Here is the saddest part. Most people today do not even think that most of the big-time preachers—and I am certainly saying not all, but most—really have no true regard for the Word of God. That is why they are always invited to the White House and congressional meetings. You do not find someone who takes a strong stand for the kingship of Christ and the importance and infallibility of Scripture being invited. Most people do not want to think that there is collusion between the National Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches, and civil rulers. Yet there is such a collusion. Look at Jeremiah 5:31: “The prophets prophesy falsely, and the

priests”—or the princes—“bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so.”

Why would God’s professing people, or a professing Christian nation, love to have it so? False preaching and teaching appeal to the flesh. They pamper man’s pride and remove guilt from his conscience, so that he may sin with impunity. They relieve him of responsibility and accountability. Historically and biblically, false preaching and false teaching always lead to licentiousness, wickedness, injustice, and tyranny. Error in the religious or spiritual realm will always lead to error in the political or civil realm.

Most false teaching and preaching is synergistic; it incorporates a little truth from the Bible with a great deal of error. They must have a little truth to get you to swallow the hook. It is like rat poison: about ninety-nine percent corn meal, which is good food, but the one percent of arsenic kills you. Consider Jeremiah 2:8 as an illustration of this wickedness.

"My people love to have it so." Jeremiah 2, verse 8, says, "The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit." And what did he say? My people love to have it so.

Here is how perverse the prophets and the priests were: "If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people." Let me be your preacher. I'll tell you it's all right to get drunk. That's what they're saying. But the Scripture says no drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God.

Micah 3, verses 11 and 12, gives a good description: "The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us. Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest."

Note the heads, that is, the civil rulers, judge for reward. The priests teach for hire. The prophets divine for money. Yet they will

lean upon the LORD. In other words, we're trusting in the LORD. We're doing everything contrary to God, yet we're going to lean upon Him and say, No evil is going to come upon us because we're leaning upon the LORD. Ah, said God, I'll plow you as a field that is plowed, and you shall discover you're not really leaning upon Me, and you're stealing My word.

Have you ever stopped to think that people tend to love their flesh and to love their sins? No one likes to be made uncomfortable. No one likes to be made uneasy. No one really likes to hear, "You're wicked, you're ungodly, you're reprobate, and if you don't repent, God's going to kill you." How many just love to hear that? Isaiah 30:10 records what the people told the prophets: "Which say to the seers"—that is, the prophets—"which say to the prophets, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits." They would rather hear something smooth, something palatable, and deceits than the truth. And what did he say? "And my people love to have it so."

Paul told Timothy, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." They do not want the truth. They just want someone to scratch their ears, to tickle them, and let them go.

The Question: What Will You Do in the End?

Go back to Jeremiah chapter 5 and look at verse 31. He says, "The prophets prophesy falsely, the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so." It is easy enough to despise, reject, ridicule, mock, neglect, and substitute for the word of God. But here is the question God is asking: "What will ye do in the end thereof?"

You might like it smooth and easy. You might like the deceit and the lies. But what are you going to do when God calls you into account? What are you going to do when God judges you? What are you going to do when you rebel and sin like a flood of mighty waters, and then God judges you like a flood of mighty waters? What are you going to do in the end thereof?

One thing that we know absolutely for certain is that God will judge such a nation, for He said in verse 29, “Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?”

Let me make a couple of applications. I have given you five causes for national judgment. Think about them and put them together in your mind. In Jerusalem and Judah were people who were implacable in their comprehension. They would not listen. They were incorrigible in chastisement. They would not receive correction. They were unfaithful, infidels in their covenantal relations. They had rulers who were iniquitous in their conduct. And they had prophets, priests, and princes who were indifferent as to their calling.

Now, what do you think God is going to do with such a nation as that? Let us look at Jeremiah 5:9: “Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?” Now look what He says about Jerusalem.

Applications: Deprivation of Protection and Grievous Sin

"Go ye up upon her walls, and destroy; but make not a full end: take away her battlements; for they are not the LORD's." You know what the wall was? You know what the battlements were? Those were your defenses as a people and as a nation. God said, Take them away. They're not mine. I'm not defending this people. This people do not want me. They do not want my word, my preachers, or my prophets. They don't want me, and they don't want my protection. Take away what little they've got; they're not mine. I'll let the enemy have them. Such a nation will be deprived of God's sovereign protection.

Why would God respect a people who do not respect Him? Why would God defend the people who do not defend Him?

Secondly, all of the causes that I've mentioned to you for national judgment are exceedingly grievous to the Lord. Here's one reason why: they are a misrepresentation of God, and they constitute, in reality, lying against God. Look in Jeremiah 5:11. After he says in verse 10, "take away her battlements," he says, "For the house of

Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously against me, saith the LORD."

In other words, such a nation is considered traitors. They're treacherous; they're traitors. Then he says in verse 12, "They have belied the LORD, and said, It is not he; neither shall evil come upon us; neither shall we see sword nor famine." They have belied the LORD—that is, they've lied against Him. How did they lie against Him? By misrepresenting Him and refusing to believe Him.

Verse 12 says, "They have belied the LORD"—that is, they've lied against the LORD—"and said," first, "It is not he." They're denying His personhood; they're denying God. "Neither shall evil come upon us." Now they're denying His providence: God won't do anything to us. Why, we're His people; we're His favorite nation. "Neither shall we see sword nor famine." Now they're denying His punishment. They deny His person, His providence, and His punishment.

I've heard people tell me, God will never judge America. We're a Christian nation. What? We were a Christian nation—past tense. Used to be! But now, as a nation, we belie the Lord. We lie against Him. God says such a people are nothing but traitors. Would you want to know what the penalty is for lying against the Lord?

You remember Acts chapter 5. Ananias and Sapphira had a certain land and sold it, but kept back part of the possession. They brought the money to Peter and said, “Aren’t we wonderful Christians? We’ve sold this land and we’re giving all this money to the Lord.” Peter looked at Ananias and said, “Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?” He said, “Whiles it remained, was it not thine own?” And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? You could do whatever you wanted with it. But they had kept back part of it and were pretending they had given it to the Lord. “Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.” And God killed him.

A little while later, when Sapphira came in, Peter said, “Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?” She answered, “Oh yes, and we gave it all to the Lord. Aren’t we wonderful Christians?” Peter said, “Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.” In other words, God killed

Ananias, and He killed Sapphira. What did they do? They lied to God, and they lied about God. And God killed them.

What is He charging Judah and Jerusalem with? Lying against Him. What did He do to Judah and Jerusalem? He destroyed them. Look at verses 13 through 17. Here is the third application: when God ordains judgment, He will not repent. He said in verse 13, “And the prophets”—these false prophets they trusted in—“the prophets shall become wind, and the word is not in them: thus shall it be done unto them. Wherefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts, Because ye speak this word, behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them.”

“Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far”—the Babylonians—“O house of Israel, saith the LORD: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say. Their quiver is as an open sepulchre, they are all mighty men. And they shall eat up thine harvest, and thy bread, which thy sons and thy daughters should eat: they shall eat up thy flocks and thine herds: they shall eat up thy vines and thy fig trees: they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein thou trustedst, with the sword.” God said, I’ll destroy you. I’ll not change my mind. And He did not.

Lex Talionis and Conclusion

When God's true preachers cry out about judgment and destruction, they are mocked, ridiculed, and called unloving, unkind, insensitive, and intolerant. But when you begin to hear all of God's true preachers speaking about judgment—one on the radio, another on television, another in church—you had better watch out. Why? Amos 3:7 says, "Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." When God's men begin to preach the same thing, you had better be getting ready, because God will not change.

One last application is the lex talionis of Scripture, simply the law of retribution. God always makes the punishment fit the crime. God is just, whether man is or not. Jeremiah 5:7-8 says, "How shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods: when I had fed them to the full, they then

committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses. They were as fed horses in the morning: every one neighed after his neighbour's wife."

What did God do to these people? First, He blessed them and fed them to the full. What did they do to God? They forsook Him and turned from Him. They used His blessings and provision to worship false gods and to sin against Him. So God said, in effect, You like those false gods? You like to do what they command? Then, in verse 19: "And it shall come to pass, when ye shall say, Wherefore doeth the LORD our God all these things unto us? then shalt thou answer them, Like as ye have forsaken me, and served strange gods in your land, so shall ye serve strangers in a land that is not yours." You like those false gods? God will send you as slaves where they are, and you can worship them all you like.

The nation that will not serve God will serve their enemies, and they will serve a false god. Whether in their own land or in a strange land, God will judge them, because He is absolutely just and always makes the punishment fit the crime.

There are five causes for national judgment: when a people are implacable in their comprehension, incorrigible in chastisement, infidels in covenantal relation, iniquitous in their conduct, and indifferent in their callings. God asks, “Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?” God is still on the throne and still the judge of all the earth.

Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ for Your grace and Your mercy. Teach us, and help us prepare our hearts that we may not be disobedient in any of these areas. May we honor Thee, recognize Thee, and confess and acknowledge that Thou art the one true and the living God. Thou hast given Thy word, and Thy word is truth. May we submit to it, be faithful in warning others, and show them that we are indeed a nation ripe for judgment because we have forsaken the LORD our God. We pray for repentance and an awakening. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask it. Amen.

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