

The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 4:5-31

Topic

God compares the Babylonians to a devouring lion or a fierce windstorm that will catch Judah off-guard and dressed as a harlot

Title

"The Lion, the Wind, and the Harlot's Wardrobe"

Introduction

Two clergymen were standing by the side of the road holding up a sign that read, "The End is Near! Turn around now before it's too late!"

They planned to hold up the sign to each passing car.

As the first driver sped past, he yelled, "Leave us alone... we don't believe in that religious stuff!"

From around the curve they heard screeching tires and a big splash.

One clergyman said to the other, "Do you think we should just put up a sign that says, 'Bridge Out' instead?"

On a more serious note, early warning systems that give clear messages can definitely save lives. Japan has spent millions of dollars to build a sophisticated early warning system for earthquakes and experts say that it helped save millions of lives and mitigated the damage from the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. While the massive 9.0 magnitude earthquake and tsunami flattened much of northeastern Japan, the damage would have been far worse had Japan not had its early warning system in place.

In our text the prophet Jeremiah is sent to forewarn Judah of a terrible calamity coming upon them. In their case it was an invader from the north that would ravage and devastate them as God's judgment for their sin.

It got me thinking about our own responsibility to warn folks about God's coming judgment, both upon them as individuals for their sin and upon this entire planet in the form of the Great Tribulation predicted in the Book of the Revelation and elsewhere.

1 Thessalonians 5:2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

1 Thessalonians 5:3 For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

Truth be told, you and I are God's early warning system to a people on a planet headed for judgment!

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Are God's Forewarning To The World That His Judgment Is Approaching, and #2 You Are God's Forewarning To The World That His Judgment Will Be Awful.

#1 You Are God's Forewarning To The World
That His Judgment Is Approaching
(v5-18)

Scholars disagree on exactly how to organize the opening chapters of the Book of Jeremiah. There are a series of twelve or maybe thirteen separate sermons he delivered to the southern kingdom of Judah over a period of forty years leading up to their being overrun and carried away captive to Babylon. We are in a portion of Jeremiah's second sermon.

Jeremiah 4:5 Declare in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem, and say: "Blow the trumpet in the land; Cry, 'Gather together,' And say, 'Assemble yourselves, And let us go into the fortified cities.'

Jeremiah 4:6 Set up the standard toward Zion. Take refuge! Do not delay! For I will bring disaster from the north, And great destruction."

In those days you were warned of an invading army by the blowing of the trumpet and the setting of signal fires, here referred to as setting-up "the standard."

Invasion always came from the “north” because of how Jerusalem was situated.

Jeremiah 4:7 The lion has come up from his thicket, And the destroyer of nations is on his way. He has gone forth from his place To make your land desolate. Your cities will be laid waste, Without inhabitant.

The future invader is described as a “lion” coming to devour its prey. We know it was Babylon ruled by King Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah 4:8 For this, clothe yourself with sackcloth, Lament and wail. For the fierce anger of the LORD - Has not turned back from us.

Though the danger was physical, the reasons for it were spiritual. God was bringing the destruction as a judgment for their sin and their failure to repent.

It's become popular to declare almost every catastrophe on our planet a judgment from God. Some might be His direct judgment, but we can't know that and, so, our response ought to be one of compassion to those affected.

Jeremiah 4:9 "And it shall come to pass in that day," says the LORD, "That the heart of the king shall perish, And the heart of the princes; The priests shall be astonished, And the prophets shall wonder."

Jeremiah 4:10 Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Surely You have greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, Saying, 'You shall have peace,' Whereas the sword reaches to the heart."

Was Jeremiah really accusing God of deceiving the people? Maybe.

I think a better reading of this would be to understand that the “king” and the “princes” and the “priests” and the “prophets” were all telling the people that there was nothing to worry about. They were predicting peace and safety. Meanwhile there were genuine prophets, like Jeremiah, who were revealing the truth.

The people were “deceived” because they were listening to what they wanted to hear. God gave them over to their own choices.

Jeremiah 4:11 At that time it will be said To this people and to Jerusalem, "A dry wind of the desolate heights blows in the wilderness - Toward the daughter of My people - Not to fan or to cleanse -

Jeremiah 4:12 A wind too strong for these will come for Me; Now I will also speak judgment against them."

Jeremiah 4:13 "Behold, he shall come up like clouds, And his chariots like a whirlwind. His horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us, for we are plundered!"

The destruction caused by the northern invader was compared to that of a storm. When it says this "will come for Me," it means that they are God's instrument of judgment.

Jeremiah 4:14 O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, That you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?

Jeremiah 4:15 For a voice declares from Dan And proclaims affliction from Mount Ephraim:

Jeremiah 4:16 "Make mention to the nations, Yes, proclaim against Jerusalem, That watchers come from a far country And raise their voice against the cities of Judah.

Jeremiah 4:17 Like keepers of a field they are against her all around, Because she has been rebellious against Me," says the LORD.

Jeremiah 4:18 "Your ways and your doings Have procured these things for you. This is your wickedness, Because it is bitter, Because it reaches to your heart."

God's methods were extreme because their sin was extensive. His goal was their repentance. They should turn to God and from their idols.

Is God's judgment approaching? In one sense, it always is approaching. With regards to each individual on the earth, they stand condemned before God in their sins. There is none righteous, not even one. Every man is appointed to die and afterwards face a judgment for their sins.

Someone sent me a video of a traffic accident captured by a police cruiser's dashcam. On a snowy but safe highway a vehicle drifts slightly to the left. The driver overcompensates and clips a truck to his right. This sends him into oncoming traffic where his vehicle is t-boned by a semi going full speed. His vehicle literally explodes all over the highway. Whoever was in that vehicle died instantaneously. It all happened in about five seconds.

It is appointed to die and then judgment. Except that Jesus Christ has taken upon Himself the judgment for our sin. When He died on the Cross, it was in your place, as your Substitute, so that you might be saved.

The Gospel we share is a warning that this judgment is coming but that it can be avoided.

Death can come to an individual at any moment. There is also a judgment coming upon the entire planet and we know about that, too.

#2 You Are God's Forewarning To The World
That His Judgment Will Be Awful
(v19-31)

In this next section, Jeremiah describes the coming destruction upon Jerusalem as if it was the end of the world. It's frightening!

But he says, "yet I will not make a full end" (v27). It reminds me of the Lord's comments in the New Testament about the future Great Tribulation that is coming upon the whole earth. At one point Jesus remarked, "in fact, unless that time of calamity is shortened, not a single person will survive. But it will be shortened for the sake of God's chosen ones" (Matthew 24:22 NLT).

Jesus also said, "for then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be" (Matthew 24:21 ESV).

We are the 'Jeremiah's' of this generation, warning folks that destruction of a particularly awful kind is in the works.

Jeremiah 4:19 O my soul, my soul! I am pained in my very heart! My heart makes a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, Because you have heard, O my soul, The sound of the trumpet, The alarm of war.

Jeremiah 4:20 Destruction upon destruction is cried, For the whole land is plundered. Suddenly my tents are plundered, And my curtains in a moment.

When the Babylonians would come you would certainly not be safe in the cities. But neither would you be safe in “tents,” meaning trying to live somewhere in the wilderness.

Christians get ridiculed for their message, “The End is Near!”, but prepping for future disaster is currently incredibly popular. I’ve mentioned before the National Geographic Channel show, *Doomsday Preppers*. It documents people who are preparing for various end-of-the-world scenarios.

Why do people scoff at our warnings and yet prepare because they believe a catastrophe is most definitely coming?

Jeremiah 4:21 How long will I see the standard, And hear the sound of the trumpet?

When you saw the signal fire burning or heard the particular trumpet blast that warned of invasion, you dropped what you were doing and ran to safety.

In the future, in the middle of the Great Tribulation, there is a similar warning.

Matthew 24:15 "Therefore when you see the 'ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand),

Matthew 24:16 "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Matthew 24:17 Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house.

Matthew 24:18 And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.

Matthew 24:19 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!

Matthew 24:20 And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.

The “abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel” refers to an episode that will take place three and one half years into the seven year Great Tribulation. The world leader we most commonly call the antichrist (but who has many names in the Bible) will desecrate the rebuilt Jewish Temple and declare himself ‘god’ and demand to be worshipped. Those alive in the region when that event goes down, those Jews in Judea, need to run for cover!

Jeremiah 4:22 "For My people are foolish, They have not known Me. They are silly children, And they have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, But to do good they have no knowledge."

He described the sixth century Jews as undisciplined children. They were undisciplined because they did not know the Lord. They were part of His chosen people, His elect nation, but they lacked personal faith in God. They were unbelievers.

Jeremiah 4:23 I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form, and void; And the heavens, they had no light.

Jeremiah 4:24 I beheld the mountains, and indeed they trembled, And all the hills moved back and forth.

Jeremiah 4:25 I beheld, and indeed there was no man, And all the birds of the heavens had fled.

Jeremiah 4:26 I beheld, and indeed the fruitful land was a wilderness, And all its cities were broken down At the presence of the LORD, By His fierce anger.

This is an exaggeration of the extent of the coming destruction. It would seem as if the earth had never been created - "without form, and void." Don't you marvel at the aftermath photos of tsunamis and earthquakes and hurricanes? Doesn't the extent of the destruction take your breath away from you?

The future Great Tribulation is going to exceed all that. The entire planet will be involved as waters are turned into blood, as the sun is given power to burn men, as the ecosystem is destroyed. At one point a demonic army is unleashed to torment unbelievers.

Jeremiah 4:27 For thus says the LORD: "The whole land shall be desolate; Yet I will not make a full end.

Jeremiah 4:28 For this shall the earth mourn, And the heavens above be black, Because I have spoken. I have purposed and will not relent, Nor will I turn back from it.

"Yet I will not make a full end." In the sixth century God would save a remnant. We know the history. After seventy years of captivity in Babylon the Jews would return and rebuild.

Just so, after nearly two thousand years of being dispersed all over the world, the Jews returned and are returning to Jerusalem to rebuild. The

existence of the nation of Israel in her ancient land is a most significant fulfillment of prophecy in the Bible.

Jeremiah 4:29 The whole city shall flee from the noise of the horsemen and bowmen. They shall go into thickets and climb up on the rocks. Every city shall be forsaken, And not a man shall dwell in it.

The leaders of Judah were telling the people that Jerusalem would not fall because within it was God's Temple and He would defend it.

They weren't realizing that the Temple was a symbol of God's desire to fellowship with them. If they were going to reject Him, sin against Him, replace the worship of God with idols, what good was a Temple in which the people hypocritically went through religious motions with no emotion for their God?

This section of sermon number two ends with a comparison of Judah to two women. They were compared to women in one of two conditions.

Jeremiah 4:30 "And when you are plundered, What will you do? Though you clothe yourself with crimson, Though you adorn yourself with ornaments of gold, Though you enlarge your eyes with paint, In vain you will make yourself fair; Your lovers will despise you; They will seek your life.

God consistently compared Judah to a harlot in order to emphasize the seriousness of her idolatry. The description of them as harlots was more than just spiritual. In fact, the pagan deities they worshipped alongside God, Molech and Baal, required them to engage in perverted sexual orgies. What God was pointing out here is that those deities would be of no help in the day of their calamity.

The things we substitute for God, that take the place of Jesus in our hearts, can never satisfy. And when we really need help, they are powerless.

Jeremiah 4:31 "For I have heard a voice as of a woman in labor, The anguish as of her who brings forth her first child, The voice of the daughter of Zion bewailing herself; She spreads her hands, saying, 'Woe is me now, for my soul is weary Because of murderers!'

On the day of their destruction the Jews would be like a woman in labor. You know, if a woman is having a baby, there's no stopping it to run for her life out into the wilderness.

You can't help but hear Jesus saying to a future generation in Jerusalem, "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!" (Matthew 24:19).

The Great Tribulation that is coming upon planet earth will be awful (for lack of a better word). It's described from chapter six of the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ all the way through chapter nineteen.

It's coming is inevitable. We see the signs. Israel, of course, is the chief sign. But each week we see trends in other areas that have been prophesied as 'signs' we are in the days just prior to the Great Tribulation.

A Christian should understand the times. The Gospel is a warning to individuals to avoid the judgment that follows death, but also to escape the judgment coming upon this planet.

We think that unbelievers see us as religious fanatics holding up a sign that says, "The End is Near!"

In reality, the whole tone of modern life is to say, "The End is Near!" if we don't act. Whether it's the constant coverage of global warming, or the explosion of documentaries or dramatizations of various end-of-the-world scenarios, people are expecting calamity.

They're just not making the spiritual connection. That's where we come in with real early warning help for them!

We know all about "the end." We know that it is really the beginning of eternal life. Let's take advantage of the times. Unbelievers are the ones holding the "End is Near!" signs. We are the ones with the solution.