

The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 9:2-26

Topic

Jeremiah lamented that the disobedience of Judah had them on a course that would force God to turn their beautiful land into a desolate wilderness

Title

“The Call of the Wilderness”

Introduction

To illustrate biblical Christianity we often liken our lives on earth as believers in Jesus Christ to wandering in a wilderness. One author put it somewhat poetically, saying,

To every child of God this world, with all its conceived pleasures, is nothing but a wilderness - far from his Father's house; far from that goodly land which he so ardently longs to see and to possess. This is the view which every saint takes of earth; and it is a just one. What the wilderness was to the children of Israel in their journey to the promised land, this decaying scene is to the believer in his progress heavenward. It is not his rest; it is not his home. On the contrary, it is a wilderness world of trouble, from which he is coming up out of, and traveling to the mansions above.

Without in any way detracting from that great illustration, I must say that there is another way “wilderness” can describe our lives, one that is less poetic and more tragic. It is this: **If we are not careful, we can turn our lives into a spiritual wilderness.**

In our text Jeremiah mentions the word “wilderness” no less than three times. As we will see, the disobedience of the people of God brings judgment upon them that turns their land into a physical wilderness. It is to show them that their sin has already turned their lives into a spiritual wilderness.

Our reading of this text will prompt us to ask of ourselves two questions: #1 Are You Turning Your Life Into A Spiritual Wilderness?, or #2 Are You Turning Your Life Over To Spiritual Wonderment?

#1 Are You Turning Your Life
Into A Spiritual Wilderness?
(v2-22)

One interesting feature of these verses is that Jeremiah speaks in three of them and each time he does - in verses two, ten and twelve - he mentions the word "wilderness."

At the time Jeremiah spoke the Jews were still dwelling in relative comfort in and around Jerusalem. He was therefore predicting the future time when God's judgment would turn their land - literally - into a wilderness.

Meanwhile, as you read through the chapter, you see that their lives were already a desolate spiritual wilderness.

No believer wants their life to turn into a spiritual wilderness! That being the case, let's see what we can learn from the disobedience of the people of Judah.

Jeremiah 9:2 Oh, that I had in the **wilderness** - A lodging place for travelers; That I might leave my people, And go from them! For they are all adulterers, An assembly of treacherous men.

"Lodging places," in those days, weren't comfortable and they were dangerous. To prefer life on the road, going from lodging place to lodging place, was quite a commentary on the sad state of life in Jerusalem.

Jeremiah said that "they are all adulterers." Either everyone was literally committing adultery, spiritual or otherwise; or everyone had changed their mind about what constituted it and were OK with it.

Just because other believers are doing certain things, it doesn't mean it's OK for me to do them. Just because certain standards have grown lax, it

doesn't mean my standards need to be lowered. If an entire "assembly" of people are headed in a direction, it doesn't make the direction right.

I see a lot more flaunting than ever before of behaviors that were once considered things that might stumble other believers. It's not healthy for either party and, at least for some, it's a surefire way to turn life into a spiritual wilderness.

Jeremiah 9:3 "And like their bow they have bent their tongues for lies. They are not valiant for the truth on the earth. For they proceed from evil to evil, And they do not know Me," says the LORD.

Jeremiah 9:4 "Everyone take heed to his neighbor, And do not trust any brother; For every brother will utterly supplant, And every neighbor will walk with slanderers.

Jeremiah 9:5 Everyone will deceive his neighbor, And will not speak the truth; They have taught their tongue to speak lies; They weary themselves to commit iniquity.

Jeremiah 9:6 Your dwelling place is in the midst of deceit; Through deceit they refuse to know Me," says the LORD.

Jeremiah 9:7 Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: "Behold, I will refine them and try them; For how shall I deal with the daughter of My people?

Jeremiah 9:8 Their tongue is an arrow shot out; It speaks deceit; One speaks peaceably to his neighbor with his mouth, But in his heart he lies in wait.

Jeremiah 9:9 Shall I not punish them for these things?" says the LORD. "Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?"

God speaks of their "lies" three times and of their "deceit" four times. Why was it so easy to lie and deceive? I think the answer can be found in the phrase in verse three, "they are not valiant for the truth on earth."

To be "valiant for the truth on earth" is to agree with God's Word, His truth, as you walk with Him on the "earth." You agree with it and obey Him. And you agree with it when you disobey Him by confessing and repenting.

Used to be when a believer sinned, they would confess it, i.e., agree with God about it. They would repent from it. They would get back on track in their walk with the Lord. They were "valiant for the truth on earth."

More-and-more today we are seeing professing Christians fall into sin and then choose to continue in it on some level. Here's an illustration from real life. A husband has problems with pornography. He admits it but refuses to give his wife access to his online activities. He's not being "valiant for the

truth.” Ten times out of ten he is deceiving himself and lying to her. It’s not long before his life is a wilderness.

Jeremiah 9:10 I will take up a weeping and wailing for the mountains, And for the dwelling places of the wilderness a lamentation, Because they are burned up, So that no one can pass through; Nor can men hear the voice of the cattle. Both the birds of the heavens and the beasts have fled; They are gone.

This was Jeremiah speaking. He seemed to accept the inevitability that the areas surrounding Jerusalem must be “burned up” as a judgment by God. In light of the next two verses, it may be his way of urging the Lord to make desolate the surrounding areas but leave Jerusalem standing.

Jeremiah 9:11 "I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a den of jackals. I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant."

Well, that settles that! God would *not* spare His city or His Temple. The sin, the rebellion, the disobedience of His people would make their land **and** Jerusalem a wilderness.

Jeremiah 9:12 Who is the wise man who may understand this? And who is he to whom the mouth of the LORD has spoken, that he may declare it? Why does the land perish and burn up like a wilderness, so that no one can pass through?

This reminds me a great deal of the confusion Habakkuk, a contemporary of Jeremiah’s, expresses in his book over God’s use of the Babylonians to discipline His people.

Jeremiah 9:13 And the LORD said, "Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice, nor walked according to it,

Jeremiah 9:14 but they have walked according to the dictates of their own hearts and after the Baals, which their fathers taught them,"

Jeremiah 9:15 therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Behold, I will feed them, this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink.

Jeremiah 9:16 I will scatter them also among the Gentiles, whom neither they nor their fathers have known. And I will send a sword after them until I have consumed them."

The Jews were a people who were promised physical blessings for obedience but were warned of physical discipline for disobedience. They entered into those covenants with God willingly. This judgment was no more, but no less, than they deserved.

God's dealings with us, in the church, are more on the level of spiritual blessings. Thus we can continue to prosper physically while deteriorating spiritually. In fact, it's possible to become even *more* prosperous, in some cases, by disobeying the Lord. It masks the deterioration of our spiritual lives until we find ourselves parched and hurting in the wilderness of our sin.

The next section is especially graphic and even morbid.

Jeremiah 9:17 Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider and call for the mourning women, That they may come; And send for skillful wailing women, That they may come. Jeremiah 9:18 Let them make haste And take up a wailing for us, That our eyes may run with tears, And our eyelids gush with water.

Jeremiah 9:19 For a voice of wailing is heard from Zion: 'How we are plundered! We are greatly ashamed, Because we have forsaken the land, Because we have been cast out of our dwellings.' "

Jeremiah 9:20 Yet hear the word of the LORD, O women, And let your ear receive the word of His mouth; Teach your daughters wailing, And everyone her neighbor a lamentation.

Jeremiah 9:21 For death has come through our windows, Has entered our palaces, To kill off the children - no longer to be outside! And the young men - no longer on the streets!

Jeremiah 9:22 Speak, "Thus says the LORD: 'Even the carcasses of men shall fall as refuse on the open field, Like cuttings after the harvester, And no one shall gather them.'"

Funeral customs can seem pretty weird from culture to culture. In Judah, it was customary to hire women to mourn at funerals. The more mourners you hired, the more you showed your love for the deceased. Their much wailing and crying would encourage all those attending to have their eyes fill with tears.

The indication in these verses is that the death toll in Judah was going to be so great that they should gather all the mourning women as well as their daughters. Even that wouldn't be enough, however, so they should teach all their neighbors how to lament. Death would be everywhere, "like cuttings after the harvester."

When I turn my life into a spiritual wilderness, then all around me the things that the Lord has made beautiful and those He would have made beautiful

in His time are killed. The death toll can be quite significant as families are destroyed and careers are ruined and testimonies are tarnished.

Be “valiant for the truth on the earth.” Know what God has said, agree with it, then do it - **no matter the cost**. When you sin, agree with God about it and repent. If you are sinning, **stop!**

The way out of the wilderness you’ve turned your life into is to return to God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. You must love Him more than *anyone*, more than *anything*, else. **Then** He can renew your life as His garden and bring forth the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

#2 Are You Turning Your Life
Over To Spiritual Wonderment?
(v23-26)

The chapter closes with a call for you to live on the spiritual plane, seeking spiritual blessings and expecting spiritual rewards. See if you are excited about the perspective of the next two verses.

Jeremiah 9:23 Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches;
Jeremiah 9:24 But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD.

Are you interested in human “wisdom,” “might,” and “riches?” To put it another way, Do you value what men value - being considered wise, having power and possessions?

Or do you get all excited by knowing that God exercises “lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth.” To put it another way, Do you value what God values - lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness?

We used to sing, “Thy lovingkindness is better than life.” It means *unfailing love* or *steadfast love*. It occurs 250 times in the Old Testament. Twenty-six times we are told His lovingkindness is forever.

“Lovingkindness” is that attribute of God which leads Him to bestow upon His obedient children His constant blessings. But it is more than His desire to bless us for our obedience. A.W. Pink speaks of God’s lovingkindness as keeping us, as preserving us. He writes,

This lovingkindness of the Lord is never removed from His children. To our reason it may appear to be so, yet it never is. Since the believer is in Christ, nothing can separate him from the love of God... God has sworn that if His children keep not His commandments He will "visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes." Yet He adds, "Nevertheless My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor allow my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break" (Psalm 89:31-34).

“Judgement” doesn’t mean *judgmental*. It’s more like God’s assessment. The idea is captured in the words of Hebrews 11:6 where we read, “[God] is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” God is always assessing your life, looking to reward you.

“Righteousness” is having a right to stand before God. How can God allow sinners to stand before Him? He can declare the believing sinner righteous based on the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

If you are a believer, you stand and walk before God on your way to Heaven. He has promised you all spiritual blessings in heavenly places as you walk on the earth. He is looking to reward you when He takes you home, to Heaven, to be with Him.

There is no One like Him! Desiring to bless you... Promising to reward you... If you will only be valiant for the truth and obey Him.

As if all that isn’t enough incentive to obey the Lord, He reminds us to have a sense of urgency.

Jeremiah 9:25 "Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that I will punish all who are circumcised with the uncircumcised -

Jeremiah 9:26 Egypt, Judah, Edom, the people of Ammon, Moab, and all who are in the farthest corners, who dwell in the wilderness. For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart."

Circumcision was always an outward ritual that spoke of the need for your heart to be transformed in a relationship with God. No rite, no ritual, no rules, no regulations, can change the heart.

God spoke of His judgment coming upon all the “uncircumcised” - all nonbelievers in every nation.

These verses remind us that, today, the “Day” is coming when God will pour out upon the whole earth His wrath. That “Day” is the seven-year period we call the Great Tribulation.

*It's therefore **not** a good time to be turning your life into a wilderness!*

Instead, turn your life over to spiritual wonderment:

- Have you been declared righteous by God - justified as a believing sinner based on the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross on your behalf?
- Do you prefer God's lovingkindness which is better than life? Or are you living your own life, seeking the things of the world?
- Are you constantly thinking about the day you will see Jesus and stand before Him to receive rewards for the things you've done?

*Only one life, will soon be passed;
Only what's done for Christ will last*

Resist the call of the wilderness. **Rejoice** in the wonder of His love!