

Jeremiah 14-17: The Background of 2 Chr. 6
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A. Overview

A second important background to Jer. 14 is 2 Chr. 6. After God raises the threat of a series of punishments for infidelity in Lev. 26, Solomon in 2 Chr. 6 proposes the temple as the solution for those punishments.

Solomon took seven years (1 Kings 6:37,38) to construct the temple in Jerusalem, and then dedicated it with a great ceremony. A central part of the ceremony was a long prayer that is recorded in 2 Chr. 6:12-42. In the prayer he asks God to hear the prayers that people bring to him by way of the temple. In 2 Chr. 7, God replies.

Here we note:

1. The prayer has a very regular structure, which we will outline. One feature of the outline is a description of the kinds of national disasters for which people will seek help at the temple.
2. The problems that Solomon anticipates are the same as those in Lev. 26. He is seeking a solution to the threat of Lev. 26.
3. God's answer differs subtly from Solomon's request.

B. The Structure of the Prayer

See the grid chart. Each segment of the prayer is an "if-then" statement, and includes most or all of these pieces, which form a chiasm:

1. IF:
 - a) A description of national disaster.
 - b) A recognition that this may result from spiritual disaster (sin). God uses disasters to chastise his people for their sin.
 - c) The people perform some religious ceremony, usually repentance and prayer.
 - d) The prayer is directed toward the temple that Solomon has just built. (The center of the chiasm; clearly, this is where Solomon's attention has focused.)
2. THEN:
 - a) God should hear from heaven.
 - b) He should forgive the spiritual problem.

c) He should solve the physical problem.

3. This prayer shows that, in Solomon's mind, the purpose of the sanctuary was quite different from that of the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was a mechanism for God to dwell in the midst of a pilgrim people (Exod. 25:8). The Temple was a means for a settled people to petition God. One emphasizes God coming to his people; the other emphasizes the people coming to God.

C. The Prayer and Lev. 26

Compare the problems anticipated in Lev. 26 and those that Solomon wants to solve. Run across the disasters that are described: 6:24, 26, 28, 34, 36

	Lev. 26	2 Chr. 6
1. Plague	14	28
2. Drought	18	26
3. Wild beasts	21	(28)
4. Invasion, siege	23	28
5. Exile	27	36
6. Aggression		24,34

The last is interesting. Solomon seeks God's help, not only to restore the people when they sin, but as an implement of colonial expansion.

D. God's Answer

God's answer, in 7:13-14, follows the basic outline of Solomon's prayer, but certain points are worth emphasizing.

1. The point about the temple is gone completely! Solomon is almost trying to make the temple magical in some way. God refuses to be controlled by a magical god box.
2. The requirements for being heard, in 7:14, are quite specific. Solomon sometimes requires only prayer or confession. God requires these elements:
 - a) "called by my name." There are two kinds of people in the world: those who are God's people, and those who are not. Ex: We are "Christians," those who belong to Christ. We are called by his name. Only those who are his have any basis to expect his help in the disasters of life.
 - b) "humble themselves." As long as we think we know it all, we are without hope, for God cannot speak to us. Humility is the attitude that makes us receptive to what others have to say. Before we ask God for the fix, we must hear what he has to say about our sin.
 - c) "pray." This is the main thing that Solomon had in mind, but it is only effective in the context of these other things.

- d) "seek my face." This idiom occurs in two narrative contexts:
- 1) 1 Kings 10:24, "all the earth sought Solomon's face, to hear his wisdom"
 - 2) 2 Sam. 21:1, "there was a famine, ... and David sought the Lord's face, and the Lord answered, 'It is for Saul.'"
- Thus the attitude seems to be to seek for guidance, for advice. We are not only to ask the Lord to solve our problem, but we are to seek his wisdom for our ensuing decisions. This is what ensures that we will not fall back into the same problem.
- e) "turn from their wicked ways." The evidence of real spiritual life is that we do not persist in our sin.

3. In 7:13, God promises deliverance only from drought, locusts, and pestilence, the local disasters. He says nothing about foreign invasion.

There seems to be a scale of disasters.

- a) In Lev. 26, the order is pestilence, then drought, then beasts, then invasion, siege, and exile.
- b) Compare 2 Sam. 24:13-14, where David chooses pestilence or famine over military defeat.

Thus the suggestion is that if the people heed the early warnings, they can turn back to God, but when their sin is bad enough to require external intervention, they can hope for little relief. By then, they have so hardened their hearts that any repentance is likely to be feigned.

E. Application

Here is a roadmap for how we are to walk before the Lord. If we trust in a ritual, we will never reach him. Only a personal relationship of humility and dependence on him will bring happiness.