

Jer. 4:14-29 The War Against Judah
July 8, 1989
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A. Overview

1. ch. 4-6, the judgment that Judah will receive.
4 and 6 are descriptions of battle against Judah: *what* will happen. Like a play or a newsreel, speakers alternate without any warning, and often without being spoken to. Ch. 5 tells *why* this judgment must fall. Cf. 5:9, 29.
2. The key to ch. 4 is tracing the alternation of speakers. If we group the exchanges, we have a three-level chiasm. The notion of coming judgment pervades all three layers. The three levels bring into focus three additional concepts: the invitation to respond in repentance (outer members); God's agency in bringing judgment (second level), and sin as the cause (in the center).
 - a) God's warning and Jeremiah's incredulous response
 - 1) 4:3-9 God -> Judah: quotation p: "Prepare for Judgment"
 - 2) 4:10 Jeremiah -> God: quotation p. This isn't what you said before.
 - b) Announcement of judgment and people's lament
 - 1) 4:11-13a God -> Jer: quotation p: God will indeed bring judgment.
 - 2) 4:13b People:)OWY L/FNW. K.IY \$UD.FD:NW.
 - c) Sin and its result (2x)
 - 1) 4:14-18 God -> Judah. reason p: Cease from your sin, for judgment is coming.
 - 2) 4:19-21 Jeremiah: Alas for the coming destruction.
 - 1) 4:22 God: coordinate p: The people's sinful ignorance.
 - 2) 4:23-26 Jeremiah: coordinate p: Description of destruction
 - d) Announcement of judgment and people's lament
 - 1) 4:27-29 God: judgment is coming, under God's sovereign control.
 - 2) 4:30 Jeremiah: Hears Judah wailing over suffering from sin
 - e) God's warning and Jeremiah's incredulous response
 - 1) 5:1-2 God -> Judah: Just find a righteous man, if you can.
 - 2) 5:3-6 Jeremiah: I think I can ... but I can't!

B. 4:14-18. God calls the people to turn from their sin.

Presented as a reason paragraph: command followed by motivation.

1. Command, 14. Cleanse your heart from evil. The verse emphasizes that sin is *internal*, and must be corrected there first of all, not by outward symbols. It is "within you" that "vain thoughts" ("wicked imaginations") lodge to

corrupt you. Compare the surpassing righteousness required by our Lord in Matt. 5:21-22; 27-28; where hatred is as bad as murder, and the lustful look brings the guilt of adultery. Expounded more fully in Matt. 15:10-11, 16-20.

2. Reason, 15-18. The coming exemplary siege of Jerusalem.

a) The heralds, 15: First Dan, in the far north of the country, then Mount Ephraim, the tribal abode of Manasseh and Ephraim, the southern part of the old northern kingdom, just north of the boundary between Israel and Judah. (Look in Bible map.) These announcements trace the approach of the invading army from the north.

b) The audience, 16a: both the Gentiles and Jerusalem. Why is this announced to the Gentiles? To invite them to the conquest.

c) The judgment, 16b-17a. Notice two details.

1) Foreigners. Cf. David in 1 Chr. 21:13, preferring the Lord's chastening to foreign invasion; 1 Cor. 6:1, the shame of saints going to court before unbelievers. The land has fallen so far that internal correction will not avail, and God must use an external rod.

2) "Like keepers of a field." Fields are not close to houses: houses are located on the hillsides, keeping the fertile valleys open for cultivation. When harvest draws near, there is the threat of pilfering, and so people commonly camp out around their fields to guard the produce from theft. Cf. Boaz sleeping at the threshing floor. At this time of year, the fields would sparkle with the campfires of the watchers. So the enemy camps will spring up around Jerusalem, but now to ravage, not to protect.

d) The reason for the judgment, 17b-18: the nation's sin. Here characterized in three ways.

1) The one offended: "It's me against whom she has rebelled."

2) The nature of the deeds: "Your ways, that is, your arbitrary doings." The verb when applied to man always connotes irresponsible action.

3) Its result: "This your evil--how bitter it is; how it strikes to your heart." Man cannot sin with impunity. Sin will bring sorrow, bitterness, anguish of soul.

C. 4:19-21 Jeremiah mourns over the coming destruction.

He describes his pain; explains the reason for it; and yearns for the pain to end.

1. 19a, he explains his deep inner pain.

2. 19b-20, the reason for the pain: the destruction that God has threatened.
3. 21, he yearns for the pain to end.
4. **Application:** Here is a sign of true faith--to believe God's warnings of judgment so deeply that we mourn over them as though they had already come to pass. We should be as moved with God's warnings of judgment against sin as Jeremiah was. What a motivation this would be both to holiness in our own lives and to evangelism toward the lost!

D. **Summarize the first three members of the chiasm**

Watch for these same themes to return now in reverse order.

1. 3-10, God's warning and Jeremiah's incredulous response (God and Jeremiah)
2. 11-13, Announcement of God's judgment and people's lament (God and the people)
3. 14-21, Sin and its result (God and Jeremiah)

E. **4:22 God describes the people's sinful ignorance.**

Like 4:14-18, emphasis here is on the sin of the people that leads to judgment.

Three positive/negative statements, couched in wisdom language. Each looks at a different aspect of folly, a different facet of how we may fail to be wise in the Lord.

1. We may be foolish in our *relation* to God. The folly of denying God: Ps. 14:1 (but there *nabal* instead of *awil*); Prov. 1:7. Proverbs describes the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom; so it is listed first here, and the next two follow from it.
2. We may be foolish in our own *ambition*. The word for "sottish" occurs elsewhere only in Ecclesiastes, and there it is common, so we are probably to understand it in the sense of the folly that is characteristic of that book, the folly of personal ambition that pretends man is the master of his own fate. Once we have denied God, we set ourselves up as lords, and pretend that we are in control.
3. We may be foolish in our *conduct*, knowing how to sin but not how to be righteous. The final step. Having denied God and become captains of our own fate (or so we think), we are singularly ill-equipped to search out and submit ourselves to God's law, but readily fall into sin.
4. **Application:** This is a university town; the quest for wisdom permeates all that we do. We need to remember God's standard

of wisdom. It begins with knowing and worshipping him. Then it requires us to recognize our own finiteness and creatureliness, and to live in righteous submission to God rather than in rebellion against his law.

F. 4:23-26 Jeremiah describes the destruction

Four times "I have seen," emphasizing what it will be like. Four separate pictures of the desolation.

1. Reference to Gen. 1, before creation. The earth has returned to its original chaos, before the hand of God had formed it.
2. The mountains, the symbols of stability as the earth's pillars, quiver. Compare the use of architectural symbolism to describe the earth and the heavens in Job 9:5,6; Ps. 75:3 (earth has pillars); Deut. 32:22; Ps. 18:7 (earth as foundation of the hills); Ps. 82:5 (earth has foundations); Ps. 104:2,3 (heavens are a tent curtain); 2 Sam. 22:8 (earth as foundation of the heavens); Job 26:11 (heaven has pillars). The whole house of creation is crashing down in a heap.
3. Depopulation. Not a living thing left, not even the birds.
4. The fruitfulness of the land is destroyed; its cities desolate. The effects of man's civilization are destroyed.

G. 4:27-29 God declares that he is bringing judgment, under his own control

Jeremiah's last statement might seem t that the desolation will be absolute and irremedial. God reminds him that though it will be terrible, still it is under God's control. We have here a chiasitic summary/amplification. The first point of v.27, that of complete desolation, is amplified in v.29. The second point, of the Lord's control, is worked out in 28.

1. Complete desolation (27a, 29). The people will flee from the cities in order to hide from the invaders.
2. God's control
 - a) Summary, 27b. He will not make a "full end." Cf. 5:10,18. The persistent promise of a remnant throughout the judgments announced by the prophets. He can make this promise because the judgment is under his control.
 - b) Detail, 28. Yet that control is, for the present, focused on destruction, and thus there is no hope for those who are caught up in it. The same sovereign power that will guarantee a remnant, also implies that there can be no protection from the wrath.
3. **Application:** Many religions have two gods or sets of gods:

one good (to bring happiness), and another evil (bringing sadness), and the two are always fighting, because each is sovereign only in its own domain, and neither can overcome the other. While there are both good and evil spirits, the Bible is clear that God is sovereign both in happiness and in suffering. No one can block the blessings that he offers; but no one can deflect the judgments that he brings. This is a double motive for trusting in him alone.