

Jer. 4-6, The War Against Judah
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A. Overview

1. ch. 3-6, God's judgment on Judah.
 - a) 3:6-10, Judah fails to learn from Israel.
 - b) 3:11-4:2, God's dealings with Israel.
 - c) ch. 4-6, the judgment that Judah will receive
2. 4-6 is chiastic
 - a) 4 and 6 are descriptions of battle against Judah: *what* will happen. Characterized by alarms, cries from the people, descriptions of the enemy and of the destruction that is coming. We have the feeling that we are watching a news broadcast of a street battle, with one voice crying out here, another there--much like the broadcasts from China last month. Or a drama. Little "he said...she said," but just the voices alternating. Relatively little discussion of the people's sin.
 - b) ch. 5: *Why* this judgment must fall. Cf. 5:9, 29.
3. The key to ch. 4 is tracing the alternation of speakers. Tentatively trace as chiastic in exchanges.
 - 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.
 - 3) 4:22 God: coordinate p: The people's sinful ignorance.
 - 4) 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. 4:3-9 God warns Judah to prepare for judgment.

Now we turn from the emphasis on Israel in the last section, to Judah (the southern kingdom) and Jerusalem (its capital). God gives the

nation two sets of instructions: one to follow if they want to avoid judgment, the other if they don't. **Illustration:** Like a parent saying to a child, "If you behave yourself this time when we go out, I won't spank you. If you misbehave again, you'd better have your extra thick pants on."

1. 4:3-4. First alternative: Repent, to avert God's wrath.

a) He gives them two metaphors of repenting. Both highlight the danger of outward spirituality that is not genuine; both suggest that a new start is needed. Contrast Heb. 5,6, where the appropriate action is not to "get saved over again," but to press on to maturity. There we are dealing with one who truly is a believer; here, with one who has never been converted.

1) 4:3, agricultural metaphor.

a> "Fallow ground" is ground that has never been cultivated. Full of weeds and thorns.

b> Don't just "sow among the thorns." The Savior's parable of the soils shows what will happen then: the thorns will choke out the seed. This represents a shallow sprinkling of spiritual interest over an unchanged life.

c> Instead, need to change the new plot of land from wild to cultivated. Need to dig out the rocks, burn off the weeds and thorns, and then plow up the hard soil before you can use it.

2) 4:4a, metaphor of circumcision.

a> Circumcision was the ceremony by which a person became a member of the Jewish nation.

b> By asking them to circumcise their hearts, he suggests that outwardly they are God's people, but inwardly they are not.

c> They need to be God's people inwardly, not just outwardly.

b) 4:4b. If you don't repent, my anger will come against you, and nothing can quench it.

c) **Application:** How hazardous it is to follow Christianity outwardly! God's unquenchable wrath burns against those who just try to counterfeit true faith. It would be better never to know the gospel, than to know it and follow it outwardly, but not really believe it.

2. 4:5-9, Second Alternative: Be prepared to respond to God's coming judgment.

He describes the judgment, and on either side suggests two possible responses, only one of which will actually work.

We'll start in the middle, then work out to the ends.

- a) 4:6b-7, Judgment: Here is the form that God's unquenchable anger will take if they persist in their sin.
- 1) "Evil from the North," because that's the direction from which Mesopotamian nations invaded the land of Canaan. Recall 1:13, the seething pot tipped from the north.
 - 2) To give a more vivid picture, the Lord describes the invader as a lion who has just wakened up and is looking for breakfast. The scene here is like some Grade-C horror movies I used to watch: the monster is coming, and getting closer, and closer, and closer.... I used to run out of the theater when things got too hot. But Judah won't be able to take that option.
- b) 4:5-6a, First Suggested Response: Get ready to fight. Command to say two things, the first a summary for the second.
- 1) "Blow the trumpet." Cf. Num. 10:1-10. The means of assembling the people together and rallying them for war.
 - 2) The series of instructions in the second "say" are all directed toward getting the people inside the fortified cities. The "standard" is a banner, a visual signal corresponding to the trumpet sound. Raised on the hills, it would warn the people in the outlying hamlets to rush to the city.
 - 3) But how successful will this be? 7b, "Thy cities shall be laid waste, without an inhabitant." So it won't do much good to hide in them.
- How then can one respond to this coming judgment?
- c) 4:8-9. Second Suggested Response: Sit down and have a good cry.
- 1) 4:8a, The symbols of mourning: sackcloth and wailing.
 - 2) 4:8b, What they say. Perhaps read *\$FB* as participle: "YHWH's anger just won't go away."
 - 3) 4:9. King, prince, priest, prophet shall all be astonished and without answer (the very ones who led the people into this mess in the first place, 2:8,26. NB: It's standard in business for Mr. Big to work out a way to avoid any blame by passing it off on those under him. Things must really be bad here for the leaders not to have any scape-goats.
- d) **Application:** Don't toy with the wrath of God. There's no way to escape it, once it falls. As v.4 says, it's unquenchable.

The only escape is to avoid it up front, by responding promptly to God's word in repenting of sin and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. Otherwise, you have nothing to look forward to except a good cry.

C. 4:10 Jeremiah complains that this revelation is at odds with what God has previously revealed.

1. The message of peace that Jeremiah reports is from the false prophets: cf. 14:23. As both that passage and this show, the difference between true and false prophets is often so slight that even a true prophet needs help in distinguishing them. Jeremiah has heard the false prophets, and is halfway persuaded that what they say is true. But now he hears directly from the Lord, and realizes that things don't match up.

2. Application:

a) Beware the deceitfulness of false teaching. It can look very, very good. 2 Cor. 11:13-15.

b) Don't rely on what others teach you. Be a Berean, Acts 17:11. Receive what others teach you with an open mind, but then search it out in the Scriptures for yourself. There are two errors to avoid: thinking that you don't need Bible teaching; and thinking that if an eloquent teacher says it, it must be right. My job is to help call your attention to things in the Bible that you might not notice by yourself. Your job is to weigh and evaluate what I say, "prove all things, hold fast that which is good" (1 Thes. 5:21), and by the way, tell me what doesn't hold up!

D. 4:11-13a God affirms that he will indeed bring judgment.

This paragraph has a rather strange structure, which has led to some confusion over its meaning. The basic form is a quotation paragraph, which had a quote formula identifying the speaker and the subject, and then gives the content of the quotation. Usually such paragraphs have the quote formula first: "Thus saith the Lord: 'I will bring judgment upon you...'" But this one is chiastically arranged, with the quote formula in the middle, and the quotation in two parts, one on either side. We'll start with the formula, then consider the contents.

1. 4:12b, the quote f: the "also" goes not with "now" (I'll give judgment both now and some other time), but with "I," and has the sense of "as a matter of fact." It is a direct response to Jeremiah's complaint in the last section we considered. "As a matter of fact, I will declare judgment against them."

In establishing the parallel with the second half of the chiasm, the "I" here is critical: shows that God is in

control of the coming judgment.

2. 4:11b, 12a, First Quotation. Introduces the metaphor of the xamsin for the coming judgment, but does not make the literal reality clear.

a) Regular breezes come from the sea, from the west. They are cooling, steady, and arrive like clockwork in the afternoon. Can use them to winnow grain, and cleanse it of its chaff.

b) But sometimes one gets a wind from the west, off the desert. That wind is hot, dusty, and gusty. Can't use it for anything. It leaves everyone feeling hot, grouchy, and miserable. Such a "wind" will come "unto" (or "for") me.

3. 4:13a, Second Quotation. Now we learn what the xamsin metaphor represents: the invading enemy, its swiftness and inevitability represented by meteorological phenomena.

E. 4:13b The People cry out in realization of their doom.

Contrast what the people actually say ("We are spoiled") with the mourning that God enjoined upon them in v.8 ("The fierce anger of the Lord is not turned back from us"). The difference shows the contrast between godly sorrow and the sorrow of this world (2 Cor. 7:10).