

Jer. 8-9, Cycles of Sin, Judgment, and Mourning
9:10-22 (MT 9:9-21): Sacred Sin
9:23-26 (MT 9:22-25): Transition
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A. Overview

1. This is the second B section in an ABCBA chiasm.
 - a) 7 and 10 concentrate on sacral sin, introducing its consequences.
 - b) The consequences and resulting mourning come more into focus in 8 and 9b.
 - c) 9a looks at the social sin that emerges.
2. The section has two parts:
 - a) vv.10-16 traces once more the causal chain from mourning to judgment and then to sin.
 - b) 17-22 emphasizes the mourning that will result from this judgment.
3. Then, in 9:23-26, we have an inverted hinge transition to the outer A section.

B. 10-16, The Causal Chain

The section is a conversation between Jer and YHWH: Jer/YHWH/Jer/YHWH. Jer. begins to mourn because of the judgment, and the Lord affirms that this judgment is purposeful, not an accident. Then Jer. asks why this judgment has fallen, and the Lord describes their sin.

1. 10, Jeremiah mourns for the hills and the grazing land. This is not tillable, but it usually does support sheep and goats, and the Bedouin live there. But now it is burned, perhaps as part of a "scorched earth" offensive by the enemy, so that no man can live there, and every living animal (merism, "from bird to beast") has fled.
2. 11, the Lord continues Jeremiah's speech as though he were speaking along, but introduces two intensifications of the disaster:
 - a) the populated cities as well as the rural areas will be devastated;
 - b) this is a deliberate action of the Lord, not just a "natural disaster".
3. 12, Jeremiah carries the discussion a step further. If this desolation is indeed intentional, who could ever understand the Lord's motives in allowing it to happen? The second half of the verse is the question asked by the wise man in the first half: "Why has the earth perished...?"
4. 13-15, YHWH explains his motives, first outlining the people's sin, then reiterating the judgment that will fall on them.

- a) 13-14, their sin. Two main components: leaving the truth and embracing falsehood.
 - 1) They have forsaken God's law and followed their own desires and false gods. Nature abhors a vacuum; man cannot be spiritually neutral. If he does not love and serve God, he will be against him.
 - 2) Note the sources of these two directions: "which I set before them" vs. "which their fathers taught them." Sin is not excused because the teacher is venerable. We need to test everything by the Scriptures.
- b) 15-16, the judgment.
 - 1) Wormwood and gall: bitter plants that make one ill. Here used figuratively: God will bring them great sorrow and pain.
 - 2) Literally, God will scatter them in exile, and destroy them by the sword.

C. 17-22, The Call to Mourn

It was the custom in Israel to hire mourners to help raise a suitably intense cry in times of sorrow. Now God advises Judah to hire mourners to help them mourn over the judgment that is coming, thus emphasizing how great it will be. We have first God's instructions to call the women, then Jeremiah's actual instruction to them.

- 1. 17-19, God's instructions.
 - a) 17, God commands them to send for the mourners.
 - b) 18, here is what you are to say to them: "help us to weep."
 - c) 19 is the motive: you will shortly have reason to mourn. Two aspects of the judgment are singled out:
 - 1) we have left the land (i.e., in exile);
 - 2) they (the invaders) have cast down our dwellings.
- 2. 20-22, Jeremiah carries out this instruction, telling the women of their duty.
 - a) 20-21, you'd better increase your ranks and train some more of you, because there will be lots of mourning to do.
 - b) 22 gives what the women are to say: an oracle of judgment. Even the mourning women take on the role of prophets, though somewhat awkwardly: the formula "thus saith the Lord" is a clumsy combination of two common formulas, as though the women are trying to sound prophetic but don't quite know how to put the words together.

Application: When you're sinning against the Lord, don't look for comfort. His judgment will cry out against you at every step.

D. **9:23-26, Transition**

The body of ch.9 (and in fact 8-9) emphasizes sin and judgment, while ch.10 is a description of how much superior the Lord is to the pagan gods. The two paragraphs in this section treat these themes, but in inverse order. Thus they move us from the grim facts of coming judgment, to a plea for repentance and trusting in the Lord.

Alternative: These may introduce in turn the two sections of ch. 10: the first describing the glory of the Lord in contrast with idols, and the second recalling the coming judgment.

1. 23-24, "Glory in knowing the Lord" (anticipates ch.10).

Where do we seek our sense of contentment and achievement? This section contrasts the false and the true sources of such satisfaction. Real contentment comes from knowing the Lord, and the next chapter tells us much more about him.

a) False sources of contentment: wisdom, might, and riches. This is a common trio. Consider other examples of it in the Bible:

1) 1 Cor. 1:26, God has not called many "wise, mighty, noble." Paul probably has this passage in mind.

2) John analyzes "all that is in the world" as "lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life" (1 John 2:16). These three areas surface in the temptations both of Eve and of the Lord Jesus. They also lie behind this trio.

a> Lust of flesh: Eve saw that the apple was "good for food." Satan urged the Lord to turn stones to bread, to satisfy hunger. The "mighty" man glories in his body.

b> Lust of the eyes: Eve saw that the apple was "pleasant to the eyes." Satan offered Christ all the kingdoms of the earth. The rich man places value in things that are pleasant to behold.

c> Pride of life: The fruit of the tree was desired to make one wise. Christ could have been popular immediately had he ridden angels down from the pinnacle of the temple. The wise man magnifies his own ego.

b) True contentment comes from having real understanding, which in turn results from knowing the Lord.

1) "Knowing God" is different from "knowing about God." the emphasis here is on a personal relationship. We can have such a relationship through faith in Jesus Christ.

2) Knowing God brings real happiness BECAUSE (not "that") of three characteristics of the Lord, to be contrasted with the "wisdom, might, riches" of the previous verse. The God

who delights in these characteristics will be a sure refuge for his people.

- a> lovingkindness, *xesed*. Faithfulness to covenant. In contrast with "wisdom" that reflects pride in dealings with others, God's dealings are marked by keeping his commitments. Thus those who trust in him will never be ashamed. He will certainly fulfill that which he has promised to do.
- b> judgment, *mišpa+*. In contrast with "might" that seeks to take vengeance on those who oppose us, the one who is rightly related to God can trust in God to judge those who do wrong. "'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' saith the Lord."
- c> righteousness, *cedaḡah*. The world values accumulation of riches. That which is of value in the eyes of God is righteousness, conformity with his standards. And God is the one who "works righteousness," producing it in the lives of his children. Thus if we know him, he will enrich us with something more valuable than gold and jewels.

2. 25-26, "Judah is uncircumcised in heart, and will be treated like an uncircumcised nation" (recalls judgment of ch.9) Ever since ch. 7, in fact, we have been faced with the solemn truth that being God's people historically does not give immunity from judgment if we disobey him. God will judge both the circumcised AND the uncircumcised; if the circumcised disobey the Lord, they are simply showing that in heart they are uncircumcised.

Compare Rom. 2:25-29 for Paul's use of this principle in the NT. Christianity is NOT a new religion, but calling the people of Israel back in the same way that Jeremiah was, from a superficial formalism to true faith and trust in God.