

**UNIT 7 JEREMIAH AND THE PROPHETIC MOVEMENT LESSON 10****"DIVINE JUDGEMENT IS UNIVERSAL"****STUDY PASSAGE: Jeremiah Chapters 46-52**

It must not be forgotten that Jeremiah had been appointed a prophet to the nations (1:5,10). Though primarily he addressed the people of his own country, he, at the same time, also delivered pronouncements against Israel's neighbouring nations (cf. 25:15-38). There were three reasons for this:

Firstly, because they did not submit to the Lord as King over all nations (10:6,7).

Secondly, they had influenced faithless Israel to their ways and idols (10:1-5).

Thirdly, because they had oppressed and plundered Israel (10:25).

These all amounted to not acknowledging the Lord as the only True and Living God (10:10). Consequently, God's wrath was upon them. Though judgement might begin at the House of God, it was not to be confined there (25:29). In fact, judgement at Jerusalem was the guarantee of judgement worldwide. This final section of the book of Jeremiah is a collection of oracles pronouncing doom against Israel's foreign neighbours.

Judgement had a two-fold purpose. It punished the wicked, thus indicating God's character; and it demonstrated God's living reality and sovereignty. When we remember that the book of Jeremiah is compiled in such a way that it intends to speak God's Word to the reader, we will look to this final section for a significant final message. Essentially, this is that the judgement of a sovereign God is universal.

1. WHO ARE TO BE JUDGED?

Jeremiah 46:1, is a summarising title to these chapters. Although in what follows specific countries are mentioned, they are meant to be typical examples of God's universal condemnation. See how this becomes evident.

Egypt is the first nation selected for denouncement. It relied on its mighty army for its strength and security (46:2, 5,6,12). It committed the offence of wanting to control the world, especially Judah (46:8), and of trusting in many gods, including Apis, the sacred bull (46:15). The Lord's sovereignty will be evidenced by the overthrow of Apis and God's bringing back home of the scattered Israelites (46:18,27,28).

The next country warned is Philistia (47:1). This is a group of Philistine cities, west of Judah and Israel. They were the closest enemies of Israel. Verse 1 possibly refers to an attack undertaken by Necho, while enroute northwards to the Euphrates (in 609 BC). This would make this prophecy of chapter 47 earlier than that of chapter 46, implying that the arrangement of these oracles is logical rather than chronological.



Other countries selected for condemnation were Moab (48:1), Ammon (49:1), Edom (49:7), Damascus (49:23), Kedar and Hazor (which were certain nomadic tribes located in the Syrian desert east of Judah, 49:28) and Elam (49:34). The geographical locations of these territories imply universal judgement. These peoples had previously placed their confidence in such things as fortresses, soldiers, pagan gods and bowmen, but the Almighty God shall overcome these. God's judgements will be tempered with mercy to Moab, Ammon and Elam, for they will become prosperous again (48:47; 49:6, 39).

The final nation to be dealt with is Babylon (50:1). Jeremiah's impressive prophecy was sent with the delegation that went to Babylon in the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign, six years before the fall of Jerusalem. It was given a public reading, and then sunk in the Euphrates, as Babylon itself would sink before its conqueror (51:59-64). The Medes (51:11) would pour in on Babylon from the north like the sea. God's people are warned in advance to be out of the way when it happens. Babylon was God's instrument to punish his people (as the Assyrians had been earlier), but God could not overlook her sinful pride. He cannot ignore evil; judgement must always come.

Two important facts emerge from these utterances of judgment:

- a) Judgement is pronounced against nations. It is not individual judgement that is the prophet's concern here, although no doubt the responsibility was upon each individual. The Prophets had a strong sense of national solidarity, and their messages are addressed to each nation as a whole.
- b) Judgement is pronounced with an air of certainty. It is not merely a threat. It is not merely a suggested possibility. It is asserted with the sense of conviction that it is as good as done. This is how it is when God speaks.

2. WHY IS UNIVERSAL JUDGEMENT SO SIGNIFICANT?

Obviously, judgement is decreed against wickedness and godlessness. Judgement is universal because wickedness and godlessness are universal. But why does Jeremiah concern himself with judgement on the international scene in this final section of his book? After the clever build-up of emotionally charged atmosphere throughout his earlier arrangement of prophecies and narratives, and the spiritually penetrating utterances thus far, has he been distracted to an anti-climatic conclusion? Or is there deep significance in this international array of candidates for judgement?

Jeremiah 46:27,28 is a very interesting little oracle. It indicates two highly important matters.

- a) It shows that Israel's judgement is only a part of the wider universal judgement upon all nations. This implies that all nations alike are deserving of punishment. Why was this an important lesson for Israel, which enjoyed such a privileged relationship with God? Notice that the geographical arrangement of the nations arrayed for judgement by the prophet on the one hand implies universal judgement and on the other hand indirectly focuses upon Jerusalem at the centre. Far from being exempt from punishment, Israel's privileged status carried greater responsibility.
- b) This little oracle offers encouragement. God promises to rescue Israel and bring it home in peace (v.27). It is a promise that is not deserved. It is all of grace. God "will not make an end of you". Israel's grounds for encouragement are according to



mercy, not merit. When we look closely at the collection of oracles, which Jeremiah compiled against the final nation dealt with in this section (chapters 50 and 51), some of the pronouncements actually concern Israel, rather than that other country. God will use the punishment of Babylon as a means of restoring Israel and Judah to its own land renewing the covenant with them. Exile will discipline a wayward and wanton nation, guiding it back to the spiritual obligations of the covenant (50:4,5,19,20,24; 51:5, 45).

Thus we see that both God's wrath and God's mercy upon His own people were to be discerned in the context of universal judgement. This is the significance of universal judgement, and the significance for Jeremiah's arrangement of prophecies concerning the nations as his Book's concluding section.

Other prophets also delivered utterances of condemnation against the nations, and arranged such utterances strategically in their respective books.

Amos uses a geographical treatment in condemning nations. The first three nations under condemnation, named by their capital cities, were heathen nations unrelated to Israel. The next three were "cousins". Judah, the seventh, was the brother-nation to the South. Thus judgement creeps nearer until it falls on Israel itself (Amos 1:3,6,9,11,13,2:1,4,6).

Joel's predictions of judgement on other nations was seen to be because of their cruelty to Israel and Judah (Joel 3:1-21 esp. verses 1-3, 19-21).

The theme of **Isaiah's Book** is, "Redemption by Judgement" (1:27). The nation must be purged of its wickedness by judgement before enjoying the blessings of God in His merciful salvation. The interesting arrangement of his prophecies includes a middle section of oracles on universal judgement (13-24) and concludes with a section of oracles on assurance of Redemption (40-66). Thus they are strategically compiled.

Similarly, **Ezekiel's** structure is significantly arranged. Chapters 1-24 describe the guilt and condemnation of Jerusalem. Then follows the wider background of universal judgement of the Nations (25-32). Finally, the book concludes with prophecies of restoration and blessing (33-48). Notice that condemnation of each country is because of guilt in its relation to Judah.

Some prophetic works are entirely concerned with a Gentile nation. This is the case with **Obadiah**. He prophesied that Edom would be punished and defeated along with other nations that were the enemies of Israel. Edom was Israel's age-old enemy to the south east and it not only rejoiced over the fall of Jerusalem, but took advantage of Judah's plight to loot the city and help the invader.

The Book of **Nahum** is a poem celebrating the fall of Nineveh, the capital of Israel's ancient and oppressive enemy, the Assyrians. The fall of Nineveh is seen as the judgement of God upon a cruel and arrogant nation.

Universal judgement places Israel's judgement in its proper perspective. It indicates that she is no better than any other nation. Her privileged, enlightened knowledge of God and His ways did not prevent her from sinning, and did not make her any different in nature from all the other pagan nations round about. Possession of the Law was not practice of the Law. Israel was equally deserving of punishment as her neighbours, and her judgement was in fact, a sharing of God's outpoured wrath upon all peoples.



What then was God's purpose in giving the Law to Israel? Not to absolve her from guilt and condemnation, but to highlight them. It showed that Israel had fallen short of the glory of God and was in need of salvation – not only from judgement, but from her corrupt nature also. Universal judgement was upon guilty pagans, who had remained independent of God, in the confidence of their own self-sufficiency following immoral and idolatrous practices: this is especially evident in the arrogant indifference to Israel's witness about the True and Living God and in the brutal plundering of that 'Chosen People'. But Israel had been guilty of just the same wickedness and godlessness, even though she was that 'Chosen People'. Therefore, the consequences for her were the same.

The judgement of Israel, against the background of universal judgement, pointed up her guilt and desperate need of salvation, not merely nationally but spiritually. It was through her judgement that she was to find salvation under the hand of God, undeserved, and all of grace.

When we understand this, and link it with the prophecies of a coming Saviour King, a New Covenant, and Restoration with a renewed spirit, the Christian humbly acknowledges the wonderful ways of God and rejoices in the fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

3. WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JEREMIAH'S APPENDIX?

Chapter 52 is a Historical Postscript to Jeremiah's prophetic oracles. It parallels very closely the section of the historical narratives of 2 Kings 24:18-25:30. Its intention is to remind readers that Jeremiah's words had been partly fulfilled. It deals with the fate of Zedekiah, Jerusalem and of Jehoiachin. The final paragraph contains words of encouragement for the depressed exiles.

QUESTION 1

In Jeremiah 48 and 49, many nations are condemned. Who are they and what are the respective targets of judgement in which these peoples previously placed their confidence. (48:1, 7,18,26,27,29,30,35,41,42, 49:2, 4,7,16,25,29-31,35)?

QUESTION 2

For whom was Nahum's message directed (Nahum 1:1)? How was Divine vengeance upon this nation nevertheless salvation for Israel (Nahum 1:15; 2:2)?

QUESTION 3

The Israelites thought that the Day of the Lord was a Day of judgement for others and gladness for themselves. What was Amos' opinion of that (5:18-20)? What was his reaction to the idea that disaster could not strike Israel as it might other peoples (9:7-10)?

QUESTION 4

What had Jeremiah been predicting for the nation of Judah and its leaders throughout his book? What does the Historical Appendix report about the end of that nation (52:3-5, 27-30)? What happened to its leaders (52:7-11,24-27)?



QUESTION 5

In the light of Deuteronomy 18:18-22, what authority does the appendix give to the writings and prophecies of Jeremiah? What responsibility does it place upon the reader?

QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:

We have come now to the conclusion of our studies in Jeremiah and the Prophets. What is the most compelling personal conviction that you have gained in the course of these studies? How has Jeremiah helped you in your concepts of God and His ways? How would you assess our own country in terms of whether or not it deserved, or was moving towards, national judgement?