

A BACKSLIDDEN NATION (Jer. 4:12-25)

This morning, we saw how the Lord Jesus told His disciples about the upsurge in opposition preceding His return, and how [Mk. 13:13](#) he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. He mentioned also, [5 Take heed lest any man deceive you](#). ... That has been a constant warning for the people of God, from the Old Testament through to the New, and up to modern times for deception has always been a formidable foe.

When he was about seventeen Jeremiah was called to be a prophet. The Lord told him, [Jer. 1:9](#) Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. [10](#) See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant. ... *A mammoth task* and ridiculously impossible if Jeremiah had to do it on his own.

From the outset of his ministry, Jeremiah had been battling with the careless attitudes of the children of Israel. The moral pattern of the ungodly had seeped in and polluted them. At first, the people had enjoyed their relationship with God, [Jer. 2:2](#) Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. [3](#) Israel was holiness unto the LORD, and the firstfruits of his increase. ... [7](#) I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof ... However, but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination.

From the days of plenty, they spiralled into periods of famine, wilderness and backsliding, so-much-so what started in the pulpits seeped into the people, [Jer. 2:8](#) The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit ... [11](#) ... my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit ... [13](#) For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water ... and the land had dried up spiritually, [Jer. 3:3](#) the showers have been withholden, and there hath been no latter rain.

Nevertheless, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God held out promises to them, [14](#) Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: [15](#) And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding ... [17](#) At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of

their evil heart. ... That was what God was looking forward to! But they were becoming hard to Him, and yet He had Jeremiah appeal again, **22** Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.

Such patience! God's patience is more than any nation deserves for we deserve not His commendation, but His condemnation. The children of Israel persistently ignored Him. They put apostate religion in His place and they ended up not knowing the difference between the true and the false.

Of course, they had religion ... but their religion was so ridiculous God told them, **Jer. 5:2** though they say, The LORD liveth; surely they swear falsely. They then arrived at the place where God said, *Enough!* ... **20** Declare this in the house of Jacob, and publish it in Judah, saying, **21** Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not: **22** Fear ye not me? saith the Lord ... **23** But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone. **24** Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God ... And yet again, the Lord brings them back to the 'preachers in the pulpit', **30** A wonderful [*shocking, appalling*] and horrible thing is committed in the land; **31** The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?

And yet, the Lord kept a remnant, - a faithful people called out of the spiritual wilderness, **Jer. 6:16** Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. **17** Also I set watchmen over you, saying, *Hearken to the sound of the trumpet.* But they said, We will not hearken. ... The Lord continued to send out His message, despite their stubbornness. They had a great inheritance, and yet they chose to jeopardise it, even desecrating His temple in Jerusalem, **Jer. 7:11** Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord.

They *must* have been approaching the point where returning to the 'old paths' became almost impossible for **8:5** they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return. ... You could not get through to them! And do you sense the Lord's frustration, **7** Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord. ... The people are fully convinced in their error, **9** they have rejected the word of the LORD; and what wisdom is in them? ... **12** Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the LORD. **13** I will surely consume

them, saith the LORD: there shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade; and the things that I have given them shall pass away from them ... Spiritually, they would be fruitless and barren.

How do you feel when you look out upon a nation which shares so much in common with the privileges the people of Israel enjoyed? God has blessed and protected us. He made our nation to become the British *Empire* with missionaries travelling all over the world with the Gospel. But when the emphasis on the Gospel began to wane, the Empire began to disintegrate, to what we are today ... a country which does not know what it is anymore ... The British Isles face break-up. ... Do you see the similarity we share with the children of Israel ... and do you see how appropriate its warnings are today?

Jeremiah was disgusted as he looked around him at what passed for worshipping God, **Jer. 9:1** *Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! They thought they were doing great, progressing, moving forward, but that wasn't how Jeremiah saw it, 9:2 Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! for they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. 3 And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the LORD. The situation is unsettling him for they have given up the fight and given in to the enemy! ... He was ready for 'running away' ... having no more to do with them!*

And God was watching until He could watch no longer, **6** *Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know me, saith the Lord ... 9 Shall I not visit them for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? ... 11 And I will make Jerusalem heaps, and a den of dragons; and I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant. ... They had the truth, but they exchanged it for error! They knew it was error, but they convinced themselves until it became acceptable, - they have taught their tongue to speak lies ... even though, the Lord warned them, Jer. 10:2 Learn not the way of the heathen ... 6 Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O LORD; thou art great, and thy name is great in might. ... And look at v.12 where He is reminding them of the first verse in the Bible, 12 He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens ... Get back to where you were and ... 10:2 Learn not the way of the heathen!*

But isn't it good God keeps His remnant, for Jeremiah said, **10:23** *O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his*

steps. ²⁴ O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing. ... And then he went on to tell his people again the straightforward message, ^{11:2} Hear ye the words of this covenant, and speak unto the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; ³ And say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant. He didn't change it, for he was there to be faithful, and that's what he was, irrespective of how the people received him or his message.

Ours is not to tamper with what the Word of God says, ours is simply to tell it. The world mocks, they shut their ears and they close their minds. They will not believe, they will dispute what He sends you to say, and they laugh at you, and while they are laughing at you, they are laughing at Him. They insult Him by including Him along with all the false gods. They reckon His people are a dying breed ... and that is what they were saying in Jeremiah's time also, ^{11:19} But I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, saying, Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered. ... But Jeremiah, is it all over?! Is it finished?

Not at all, he answers, for it is not man who has the final say! ^{11:20} But, O LORD of *hosts*, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I revealed my cause ... ^{12:1} Righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee. ... Lord, You have never changed. Yes, I still have my questions, ¹ Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? ... Why are the people who preach the false gospels being so successful, and why does it seem I am making no impact for You? ¹⁰ Many pastors have destroyed my vineyard, they have trodden my portion under foot, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. ... Here am I, Lord, striving to be faithful and I am not achieving anything but a desolate wilderness. But Lord, I continue to believe You have never changed!

And from a sincere heart, Jeremiah pleaded, ^{13:27} Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be? ... Lord, *when it is it going to happen!* ... It *was* going to happen, but first of all, the Lord would 'put them through the wringer'. The 'dark clouds' were gathering. ... Every other way, things were going fine in Jerusalem. There was no war, the people were comfortably well-off but the Lord was about to sort them out, ^{13:9} After this manner will I mar the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem. ¹⁰ This evil people, which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart, and walk after other gods, to serve them, and to worship them, shall even be as this girdle, which is good for nothing. ... God was so angry with them He told

Jeremiah, **14:11** Pray *not* for this people for their good. **12** When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence. ... That is how desperate a state they were in ... and they didn't know it!

How do we conclude our study? ... Jeremiah lived in dark days, and ours aren't any better! ... Pulpits polluted, the message defiled, the people hardened, God vilified ... There was nothing pretty about Jeremiah's Jerusalem ... and there is nothing pretty about society today either ... But Jeremiah did not give up, and he battled his way through the quagmire. ... And what do we learn from him? Well, we learn even great servants of God experience rejection, depression, and discouragement. It is a normal part of serving the Lord and growing spiritually. He persevered, even when it wasn't easy ... and do you know why? Here, he tells us, as he speaks about his Lord, **Lam. 3:22** It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because HIS COMPASSIONS FAIL NOT. **23** They are new every morning: GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS. **24** The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; THEREFORE WILL I HOPE IN HIM.

... At the start of his ministry, the Lord indicated how it was going to be, but He also assured young Jeremiah, **Jer. 1:8** Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord ... **19** And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee. ... And *that* is also the good news for God's people today! ... Remember the old hymn ...

*Hold the fort, for I am coming, Jesus signals still;
Wave the answer back to Heaven, By Thy grace we will.*

See the mighty host advancing, Satan leading on;
Mighty ones around us falling, courage almost gone!

See the glorious banner waving! Hear the trumpet blow!
In our Saviour's Name we triumph over every foe.

Fierce and long the battle rages, but our help is near;
Onward comes our great Commander, cheer, my comrades, cheer!

*Hold the fort, for I am coming, Jesus signals still;
Wave the answer back to Heaven, By Thy grace we will.*