

July 28

Jeremiah 7-9

I'm Jack Arant Director of International Student Ministries, and I'm back with you again today to look at our reading from today, July 28. Today we are in Jeremiah chapters 7, 8 and 9.

We begin with the Lord's instruction to Jeremiah to stand at the gate of the temple and proclaim his message. To the people of Judah and Jerusalem the temple was like a protective good luck charm. It would protect them from disaster. By Jeremiah's time the temple stood for around 300 years. In their minds there was no way that God would allow the destruction of the nation because of this sacred place that bore his name. The faith of the people centered on this building and the rituals surrounding it, but it had no effect on their sinful lifestyle of murder, adultery and idol worship. It reminds me of a mafia boss adhering to religious traditions to insure God's favor. "We are safe" they told themselves, "we have the temple of the Lord!" They are then told to look at what happened to Shiloh. It was the main place for worship before the time of Jerusalem and the temple. That once important center of worship was gone – destroyed by the Philistines. That same fate will soon come for the temple and Jerusalem.

The next part of the chapter refers to the worship of the Queen of Heaven. Now, who is this "Queen of Heaven?" This was the Phoenician goddess Ashtoreth, the goddess of fertility. Here it shows that they had special holidays with traditions of cakes and offerings to offer to this goddess and other foreign gods. God was so angry with these practices that he told Jeremiah not even to pray for them. Their stubborn waywardness after many warnings had put God over the edge. Jeremiah will personally be rejected for bringing this message. Now all that's left is to grieve and lament over the terrible things that are about to happen to the nation and the people.

The very last of chapter 7 reveals even more of the shocking practices that were taking place in the worship of foreign gods. Topheth and Ben Hinnom have the meaning of burning. The unthinkable sacrifice of children as burnt offerings was taking place. God himself is aghast that his people would even consider such a thing. Because of this, God would use this very place to slaughter the people. Instead of Valley of Burning, it would be renamed the Valley of Slaughter. The people and their leaders would have their bodies exposed like refuse on the ground in that same valley for the evil they had done. Further, those who were carried off into exile would be so miserable that they wish for death rather than life.

Chapter 8 goes on to express the Lord's wonderment at the waywardness of his people, amazed at their dull response as they experience the consequences of their sin. They refuse to return to him. More and more disaster is pronounced upon them, like a judge piles on a stiff sentence to a criminal.

As the end chapter 8 and the beginning of chapter 9, we get a picture of the heart of God as he weeps through his prophet. In this passage are some of the saddest words ever spoken; "the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." Jeremiah is overwhelmed with sorrow. He could weep day and night for the slain of his people.

It's true; stubborn sinners deserve the Lord's punishment. It is because of his mercy that we are not consumed. He has revealed his salvation to us through Christ and now we are his messengers of reconciliation. As I read the words of this weeping prophet I'm reminded of Jesus. He wept over Jerusalem. He was described as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Jesus wept.

While I reflect on these verses, some questions come to mind:

Is the world any less lost now than it was then?

Is there still danger and destruction ahead for those without Christ?

Since I am a believer and have the spirit of Christ in me, could it be that my heart should break for the lost around me?

It is good for us to read these words to remind us of God's heart for a lost world. My prayer is that the Lord would give us a heart like his.

Live in his word today, and as you go about your day make your boast in the Lord, as we are instructed at the end of our reading!