

Unit III: Called to God's Work of Justice

Just Rewards

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 86:1-13

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 21

PRINT PASSAGE: Jeremiah 21:8-14

Key Verse—O house of David, thus saith the LORD; Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest my fury go out like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings. (Jeremiah 21:12, KJV)

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“This is what the LORD says to you, house of David: Administer justice every morning; rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done—burn with no one to quench it.” (Jeremiah 21:12, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Understand divine justice described by Jeremiah.
- Appreciate that God is a God of justice.
- Make a personal commitment to justice and advocacy for justice.

*Key Terms

Babylonians (verse 9)—Hebrew: *Kasdi* or *Kasdimah* (kas-dee’): inhabitants of Chaldea; “Chaldeans” (KJV).

Falleth (verse 9)—Hebrew: *naphal* (naw-fal’): to desert; “surrenders” (NIV).

Fruit (verse 14)—Hebrew: *peri* (per-ee’): actions (fruit used metaphorically); “deeds” (NIV).

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

Some members of my generation may remember parents and grandparents warning us about our misbehavior with phrases like “All right, keep it up and I’m gonna getcha!” “Boy, I done told you once and I ain’t gonna tell you no mo’!” “When I get you, I’m



The Biblical Context

The priestly prophet Jeremiah was called and commissioned by God as a youth. His prophetic ministry spanned a period of more than forty years and beyond during the reigns of Judah's last five kings. Jeremiah's life was one full of conflict and opposition because of his messages primarily to Judah. He called the people to repent of their idolatrous ways to avoid God's judgment through the invading Babylonians. When they refused, Jeremiah pleaded with them to surrender rather than resist to avoid total destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Jeremiah was accused of treason, tried for his life, publicly humiliated, and thrown into a pit. One of his major antagonists was Pashhur, the chief officer in charge of the Temple police. He had Jeremiah arrested, beaten, and placed in stocks for prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem because of their sins. Pashhur released him the following day and heard the fate that awaited his family and him as captives in Babylon (chapter 20). Following this incident, the king sent two officials to Jeremiah requesting that he "inquire of the Lord" on their behalf concerning Nebuchadnezzar's final siege of Jerusalem. The lesson text is Jeremiah's response from the Lord.

gonna pay you for old and new!" These and similar warnings were not idle threats. If we were foolish enough to ignore them, we soon painfully discovered what they meant. When we got our just rewards for our disobedience, the "switch" was often wielded in time by the original rappers' cadence, "Didn't-I-tell-you-not-to-do-that-no-mo'?" There were times when our wrongdoing would not and could not go unpunished, and the punishment we received was for our good. What is true about parental discipline in the physical world is also true in the spiritual world. God, our spiritual Father, has given us His standards accompanied by warnings of the consequences when those standards are disobeyed. He is longsuffering and compassionate, but He can be provoked to discipline those who deliberately disobey Him. His chosen people, the Jews, learned this the hard way. Israel, the Northern Kingdom, suffered military defeat and dispersion by the Assyrians. Judah survived for a while due to the efforts of godly kings to turn the nation back to God. However, after the death of Josiah those that followed him led the people deeper into idolatry and rebellion against God. Through Jeremiah's ministry, Judah's last king Zedekiah learned that God had had enough. Judgment was imminent, and He was not going to relent until Judah received her just reward for her wickedness.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

A Final Chance (*Jeremiah 21:8-10*)

KJV

8 And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death.

9 He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth out, and *falleth* to the *Chaldeans* that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey.

10 For I have set my face against this city for evil, and not for good, saith the LORD: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.

NIV

8 “Furthermore, tell the people, ‘This is what the LORD says: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death.

9 “Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague. But whoever goes out and *surrenders* to the *Babylonians* who are besieging you will live; they will escape with their lives.

10 “I have determined to do this city harm and not good, declares the LORD. It will be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he will destroy it with fire.”

The enemy, the full weight of the Babylonian army, is literally at the front door. A temporary lifting of the siege of Jerusalem had occurred earlier and provided misguided hope among those who refused to believe and accept the conditions of Jeremiah’s prophecy. Now, faced with the most powerful and ruthless military machine in the Middle East, Zedekiah and his officials want Jeremiah to intercede to God on their behalf. Their hope is that God will relent and cause the Babylonians to withdraw again. The request was futile because God had determined that Jerusalem and the surrounding cities would be destroyed and all who resisted would be killed or executed (see verses 1-7). Only two options were open to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: “the way of life and the way of death,” as Jeremiah described them (**verse 8**). Those who desired the possibility of saving their lives could surrender to the Babylonians. Those choosing to continue resisting faced certain death in battle or as victims of famine and disease (**verse 9**). Warfare in the Middle East at this time dictated that only surrender to the aggressor would spare a threatened city. There was no other way for Judah but to accept this final chance to live because God had turned His face, or removed His favor, from Jerusalem and its inhabitants (**verse 10**). God was using the Babylonians as His disciplinarians, so surrendering to them was equivalent to surrendering to His will. By surrendering, Judah would be admitting their guilt and the desire to submit to God and His will. In the spiritual realm, these same options are set before humankind—the way of life and the way of death. The way of life is choosing to repent, accepting the gift of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, and submitting to the will of God. Those who elect the way of death refuse this offer and choose eternal separation from God.

? **What Do You Think?** In view of the two choices open to humankind, how active and focused is the ministry of evangelism in your local congregation?

A Final Appeal and a Final Verdict (*Jeremiah 21:11-14*)

KJV

11 And touching the house of the king of Judah, say, Hear ye the word of the LORD;
12 O house of David, thus saith the LORD; Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest my fury go out like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

13 Behold, I am against thee, O inhabitant of the valley, and rock of the plain, saith the LORD; which say, Who shall come down against us? or who shall enter into our habitations?

14 But I will punish you according to the *fruit* of your doings, saith the LORD: and I will kindle a fire in the forest thereof, and it shall devour all things round about it.

NIV

11 “Moreover, say to the royal house of Judah, ‘Hear the word of the LORD.

12 “This is what the LORD says to you, house of David: Administer justice every morning; rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done—burn with no one to quench it.

13 “I am against you, Jerusalem, you who live above this valley on the rocky plateau, declares the LORD—you who say, “Who can come against us? Who can enter our refuge?”

14 “I will punish you as your *deeds* deserve, declares the LORD. I will kindle a fire in your forests that will consume everything around you.”

Through Jeremiah God addressed David’s dynasty, the kings who sat on the throne because of God’s covenant with David (**verse 11**). Zedekiah, the ruling king, was offered a way to mitigate God’s wrath against Judah and Jerusalem. Two things were to be done immediately: First, justice and righteousness had to be executed as prescribed in God’s law (**verse 12**). If the king obeyed, God would keep His covenant with David and maintain his dynasty or royal house. Disobedience meant disinheritance and certain destruction for Judah and Jerusalem. Second, the people of Jerusalem had to abandon the notion that their city was impregnable and the belief that they had no reason to fear (**verse 13**). Since God was “allied” with the Babylonians against them and had declared His hostility against Jerusalem, such notions were groundless. The failure of the royal house and of the people to faithfully uphold their responsibilities to the covenant had sealed the doom of Jerusalem (**verse 14a**). Like trees in a forest, Jerusalem would burn to the ground (**verse 14b**). God will neither strive with humankind forever (see Genesis 6:3) nor keep His anger forever (see Psalm 103:9). Although He is longsuffering (see Psalm

103:10), there will come a time when all who deliberately refuse to obey and submit to His will end up receiving their just rewards. Israel was God's chosen people, but He did not withhold judgment for their continued disobedience. There are nonnegotiable reminders here for the people of God today. First, every believer must take seriously God's expectation of obedience to all He has commanded in His Word. Second, our lives must become progressively more visible living examples of justice and righteousness. Finally, especially those in positions of leadership, knowing the surety of coming judgment on all humankind (see Hebrews 9:27), we must witness to the lost and point them to Christ for salvation.

? **What Do You Think?** How should the reality of a coming judgment affect our daily lives?

A Closing Thought

Because the Jews were His covenant people, God provided multiple opportunities for them to repent and maintain their relationship with Him. Their consistent refusal to do so finally led to exile from the Land of Promise. This world is on a similar downward path, and those who refuse to accept Christ and His salvation will face the just judgment of God. In view of this, the obedient among God's people must commit to live godly lives, advocate and practice justice and righteousness, and actively seek to lead others to Christ before God says "Enough!"

Your Life

The personal reminder in this lesson is that all will receive their just rewards from God, whether they have chosen the way of life or the way of death. Since you have chosen the way of life through Jesus Christ, make every effort to strive to become an obedient disciple and a godly example in this perverse society in which we live.

Your World!

It may appear that evil and those who practice it have the advantage over those who have committed their lives to the Lord. It is only God's longsuffering and His desire that none perish that He has not intervened with final judgment. One thing is sure according to His Word: the day will come when all will stand before Him to receive their just rewards for every deed they have done, good or bad.

🏛️ **Closing Prayer** Father, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, keep us mindful that we are accountable to You for our every action and attitude. Thank You for providing us daily opportunities to repent and maintain our fellowship with You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week's lesson continues Jeremiah's warnings to Jerusalem and her leaders to do the right thing as they faced God's imminent judgment. The text of this lesson is Jeremiah 22.

Home Daily Bible Readings

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| MONDAY, May 18 | "Justice for Aliens, Orphans, and Widows" | (Deuteronomy 24:17-22) |
| TUESDAY, May 19 | "God Requires Godly Rule by Kings" | (Deuteronomy 17:18-20) |
| WEDNESDAY, May 20 | "Who May Enter God's Holy Presence?" | (Psalm 15) |
| THURSDAY, May 21 | "God's Justice for the Unjust King" | (Jeremiah 22:11-19) |
| FRIDAY, May 22 | "The City Suffers for Its Disobedience" | (Jeremiah 22:20-23) |
| SATURDAY, May 23 | "Injustice Ends the Line of David" | (Jeremiah 22:24-30) |
| SUNDAY, May 24 | "Repent of Misdeeds and Unjust Actions" | (Jeremiah 22:1-10) |

Notes
