

FPFWC Christian Development



Called to God's Work of Justice
May 2020

Spring Quarter

May 16, 2020

Lesson #3 – Practice Justice

SCRIPTURE TEXT – 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.—Jeremiah 21:12a

ICE BREAKERS

1. How should we respond, if at all, to those whose prayers reflect their own desired outcomes more than openness to God's will? (v.8)
2. How would you respond to someone who says that the Lord's promise to punish contradicts the claim that “God is love” in 1 John 4:8? (v.14)

LESSON BACKGROUND

The prophet Jeremiah ministered from about 626 to 575 BC. That ministry was to a people—the Judeans—who had disobeyed the Lord on a level far beyond the mundaneness of a late term paper. As a result, serious consequences loomed. God had sent prophet after prophet to warn both kings and commoners of pending destruction. But they didn't listen. They acted as though they had God's favor no matter what; they viewed Jerusalem's temple as a good-luck charm (Jeremiah 7:4).

The northern kingdom, Israel, had been taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 BC (2 Kings 17:6). A century later, the survival of the southern kingdom of Judah was by no means assured. The Assyrians were still the dominant military and political power in the ancient Near East.

King Asnapper (Ashurbanipal) of Assyria died in 627 BC. Although he had been a strong ruler, his death laid bare serious internal weaknesses in Assyria. Disorder and revolt erupted in every part of that empire. Nineveh, the capital city, was destroyed in 612 BC (see the book of Nahum); the last vestiges of Assyrian might were wiped out at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC (Jeremiah 46:2).

The consequences of Assyria's decline were felt in Judah. After a reign of about 30 years, King Josiah was killed in battle in 609 BC. That happened as he attempted to halt the Egyptian army from aiding the remnants of the Assyrian army (2 Kings 23:29). The Chaldeans (Babylonians) stepped into the power vacuum left by the collapse of Assyria under the Babylonian king Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadrezzar (reigned 626-605 and 605-562 BC, respectively). The son is also known as Nebuchadnezzar (see 25:1). Chaldea (Babylon) came to dominate much of Assyria's old territory. The last kings of Judah reigned in subservience to the Chaldeans before the final exile of 586 BC (chap. 24, 25).

Jeremiah 1:2 places the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry at around 626 BC. The book of Jeremiah preserves a prophetic ministry that took place over the course of the next several decades—through the reigns of five Judean kings and a governor.

LESSON COMMENTARY

21:8-10. The people had two clear choices: **the way of life** and **the way of death**. The **way of death** was selected by those who chose to remain in the city. They would die by **sword, famine, and pestilence**. The **way of life** was selected by those who surrendered (the one who **goes out** to the **Chaldeans**, another name for Babylonians). This was the only hope for those still alive because God had **set [His] face against this city for harm and not for good**.

21:11-14. Jeremiah next focused on the sin of the remaining **king of Judah**, Zedekiah. The **house of David** was supposed to **administer justice every morning** and to **deliver** the rights of those who were oppressed. Since the king refused to heed God's warning, God would **punish** him for his evil deeds, and **kindle a fire** to **devour** Jerusalem and its **forest[s]** and **environs** (cf. [4:4](#); [17:4](#); [21:12](#)).

Evidently the king felt secure in Jerusalem, which had been impenetrable, and asked, **who will enter into our habitations?** He saw no need to obey God's injunction. Because of this proud self-reliance coupled with arrogant disobedience, God would punish the king and his people.

LESSON NUGGET – Although Zedekiah was not a man of faith, he wanted God's help. Jeremiah told him, "Babylon is not fighting against you, God is!" People ignore the Lord until they desperately need His help, and then they discover He is their enemy.

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary; Wiersbe Bible Commentary; The Word For Today Bible; and Standard Sunday School lesson.*