



Lesson 13 May 23rd, 2020

Repent of Injustice

MIDDLE SCHOOL/HIGH SCHOOL

Study Scripture – Jeremiah 22:1-10

Background Scripture – Jeremiah 22

Key Verse:

“Thus says the LORD: “Execute judgment and righteousness, and deliver the plundered out of the hand of the oppressor. Do no wrong and do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, or the widow nor shed innocent blood in this place.”

Jeremiah 22:3

INTRODUCTION

Why do we run from God? This of course has to do with repentance. It also has to do with the love for Injustice, something that seems to be so prevalent from the days that man sinned in the Garden of Eden. It certainly appears that we run away from God most of the time because we are looking for an easier way to live.

It is unbelievable that sensible human beings can come to think that a god of wood or stone or some other material that they make up for themselves has power. It is even quite unbelievable that human beings can think that they are gods when they look around them and see the mess that people have made of human existence.

The only logical explanation for why people run away from God is that people want to pretty well do much of what they wanted. That's exactly what they did when they ran away from God. They do not want to face their inadequacies and certainly do not want to be convicted of their sin. So they indulge in revelry and all kind of evil pleasures, prostitution, crime, abuse of others, stealing, heaping up material possessions for themselves, and even doing sacrifices of human people.

Human beings do not really want to believe that obedience to God is much more important than the desires of the flesh. So they run away from God and eventually when they get tired and run out of gas then they like the prodigal son might one-night turn to God. Sometimes as one writer says: **“You get to the point to where the slop of this world will start to taste horrible and you will see that God is not only good but loving and forgiving”.**

Of course we know that the Holy Spirit is the person that works to bring human beings away from the slop of the world. Human beings are quite incapable of helping themselves.

So we will follow the advice of this writer:

“Don't let the evil desires of the flesh start you on a path that God does not want you to go. You know it in your heart when you are disobedient. But at times disobedience takes over more out of pride than anything else. Humbleness before the Lord is a heart issue and nothing more.

The issue is between you and Jesus.

You don't need eloquent words to talk with Jesus. Talk to the Lord as you would your best friend. Because in all reality, He is your best friend.

Start today by running to Jesus instead of running from him. Ask him as you would a friend for help. When you can start to think of others more than ourselves our lives will take on a whole new fresh meaning.

Call out to Jesus, voice your concerns and trust in Him. He will NEVER let you down. Jesus saves it in his word and we know from experience this to be true”.

The people of Judah led by crooked leaders were stuck in this situation of practicing injustice and so stuck in their ways they were afraid to or incapable to repent.

Let us not think that this Lesson is one that depends on some imaginative theoretical set of ideas.

We know full well from experience that the moral, social, economic, and religious condition of any nation or society largely depends on the kind of leadership of those in power.

Sadly the church has ignored its two responsibilities. The first is to teach the nation and its rulers about the proper use of power.

Second, the church is really the only one who are the salt and light of the Earth and so they should be the ones helping the citizens to understand that they are responsible for the kind of government in power and therefore their destiny is linked to the kind of leadership they have accepted to rule over them.

There is no doubt however that this is a Herculean task. But with the help of the Holy Spirit we can face up to it by or witnessing, or doing works to help the hopeless and vulnerable, and providing encouragement to motivate the people of our nations to work against injustice.

The Bible Dictionary will help us as we look on this Lesson. It defines repentance as *metanoia*. **This means summons to a personal, absolute, and ultimate unconditional surrender to God as Sovereign. Though it includes sorrow and regret, it is more than that. In repenting, we make a complete change of direction a (180 degrees) turn toward God.**

Injustice is defined as the **Absence of justice. Violation of the right or of the rights of another. Unfairness. Wrong.**

With this in mind we can look at the very great difficulty that the prophet Jeremiah had as he states the sins of his own people, who were the chosen people of God. He was called by God as a very young man, born in a tribe of priest that had little authority among political kingpins who were twisted and deeply ingrained in sin.

We will see just how bad people can become and how impossible for them to repent and cease practicing injustice. It is dreadful to consider that for some there is no turning back to God.

Jeremiah was a prophet of the seventh century B.C. who came from Anathoth, a town a short distance from Jerusalem. Jeremiah began his ministry in the reign of King Josiah of Judah. Jeremiah was the last prophet to Judah, the Southern kingdom before the exile to Babylon. His prophetic career spanned the reigns of five kings: Josiah, Jehoahaz (Shallum), Jehoiakim, Jehoaichin (Coniah), and Zedekiah. These were the last kings of Judah, which by this time was nothing more than a vassal state, and was finally overrun by the Babylonians and the population exiled to Babylon during the reign of Zedekiah. Thus Judah ceased to exist as a nation during the time of Jeremiah, according to the prophesies of Jeremiah and a long line of other prophets.

Jeremiah's ministry began during the reign of Josiah a godly king who made valiant efforts to rid the nation of idolatry and turn them back to their God, Jehovah. Although Josiah reigned thirty-one years and during this time idolatry was suppressed and temple worship restored, his reforms did not really take root with the people and their show of piety to the reforms was just that, a show.

This revival under King Josiah was a on the surface revival in fact, the prophetess Huldah had told him that though the people would follow him in his attempt to reform the nation and return to God, they would only do so because they loved him and not because they loved God. Thus the extensive reforms



of Josiah to remove idolaters and the places of idol worship failed to turn the people's heart. This was not from lack of effort or zeal on Josiah's part. No king prior to Josiah did as much to rid the land of its places of idol worship as recorded in 2 Kings 23:25. Jeremiah admired and commended the King for his good work but even then he knew that the fate of the nation was already sealed through what God had revealed to him and the prophetess Huldah.

Josiah understood that being king meant he had to comply with the standards set in Deuteronomy and 1 Samuel. Under him the people prospered. But we have to compare him to the kings that followed him for all of them failed to comply with God standards and this led to the destruction of the people and the taking of Judah into exile.

The following brief recap of the reigns of the last four kings shows a time of turbulence and uncertainty as the nation emasculated and shorn of its sovereignty lurched to its destruction still steeped in idolatry; and this in the face of God's continual warnings through the prophet Jeremiah and others.

Josiah's reign marked the final leveling off before Judah continued on its inexorable slide to cease as a nation, under Jehoahaz (Shallum), Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah.

Josiah reigned for thirty-one years but died at the young age of thirty-nine. Jehoahaz reigned for three months before the King of Egypt captured him.

Jehoiakim reigned for eleven years before he died at the age of thirty-six. Early in his reign, Nebuchadnezzar took captive many in the court (Daniel 1:1).

Joachim was so bad that Jeremiah told him that he would have the burial of a donkey and he would be dragged away and thrown outside the gates of Jerusalem.

Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, reigned for three months before he was captured by Nebuchadnezzar. He and some ten thousand others were transported to Babylon. These were mostly craftsmen and smiths (2 Kings 24:16).

Jeremiah describes him in chapter 22:28-30 as

"a despised, broken pot, an object no one wants...."

*Record this man as if childless,
a man who will not prosper in his lifetime,
for none of his offspring will prosper,
none will sit on the throne of David
or rule anymore in Judah".*

It is interesting to note that Joseph was in direct line to this man and so know that if Jesus is to sit on the throne of His father David he could never have been the physical son of Joseph. But Joseph would give Jesus title to the throne of David. He adopted Jesus and gave Him all rights he had inherited from the line of David. Instead Jesus was the physical son of Mary who was a direct descendent in another line from David.

Zedekiah, the brother of Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, then reigned for eleven years, after he was installed on the throne by the Babylonians following the capture and forced exile of Jehoiachin. He was greedy, rapacious, loved materialism and fancy elaborate houses, and practiced injustice extensively. His reign ended with the capture and destruction of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:6).

Scholars are not unanimous in their opinions regarding the dates of specific verses in the chapter we study today; but there seems to be no doubt that all of the prophecies in this section pertain to the reigns of the kings mentioned above.

Jeremiah is sometimes referred to as the 'weeping prophet' for his personal anguish over the inevitable fate of God's people. The burden of the certain destruction of the nation, their hardened indifference to their imminent demise and their entrenched idolatry and moral,



spiritual and civil degeneration, on top of personal insult and injury drove the prophet to deep sorrow and tears.

Surprisingly or not as our Text will show, through Jeremiah, God continued to call the people to repentance through personal messages to the succession of kings following Josiah. Although the fate of the nation was sealed, they were going into exile, God still held out the opportunity for forgiveness and reconciliation to them. The rulers and the people spurned God's message from Jeremiah, nonetheless the prophet's message must have brought some comfort to the faithful remnant in Judah.

To gauge the extent of the moral and spiritual decay, and the hardened apostasy in Judah, consider that Jeremiah began prophesying some years before Josiah's reforms began. Also note that these reforms continued for thirteen years. Yet, despite this the people of Judah never wavered in their allegiance to their idols. To be sure, they worshiped Jehovah, but not Him alone. He was just another entity in the array of gods to be served. But how far off base had the nation gone. They had actually lost contact with the word of God. They had adopted the dangerous principle of doing what was right in their own eyes. What they thought was right. Many people do what they know is wrong in the sight of God. That is bad enough. But it is equally dangerous to judge for ourselves what is right for we have no ability to judge properly -- and this is what was happening in Israel.

As a result, they adopted the values of the surrounding pagans and so ended up worshipping the gods of the other nations. This brought on as it always does severe deterioration in morals and perverted justice. To show you what would be the corruption, idolatry, and injustice was, and the bitter mindset of the rulers of Judah we will have to quote for you what the prophet Ezekiel saw in the exiled Leaders. Their minds were so fixed in their practices of idolatry and injustice, and a total rejection of the Covenant that we are warned of what would happen to us when we keep on disobeying the Commandments of God and running away from God.

Inevitably then, their defiant, unrepentant, and remorseless apostasy pushed them beyond the point of no return. Ezekiel records his vision of the practices common in Judah at the time and provides a backdrop for us as we consider today's Lesson. Ezekiel prophesied at the same time as Jeremiah and this is what he tells us which confirms the absolute iniquity of the people in Judah and Jerusalem. Read Ezekiel 8 for a vivid and disturbing picture of the extent of the slime in the behavior of the leaders of the people of God:

Here is shown the deceitfulness and hardening of sin in full bloom. We see people steeped in religious activity, even it seems serving the true God, while at the same time engaged in idolatry. Despite Josiah's long, vigorous reform campaign, the word of God received only a surface acknowledgement, then was brushed aside, as people were willingly deluded into accepting their syncretism.

Could these people repent? Did they want to repent? Did they want to practice justice? Could they do anything else but practice injustice? This situation finds it's parallel in today's Christian circles as people who flirt with error are increasingly drawn into its embrace and are soon confidently challenging the Word of God and imposing their opinions on what is acceptable Christian behavior.

No wonder then that in today's Text the prophet will point to the injustice, social and moral decay rife in the society and which was a natural outgrowth of the people and their leaders debased spiritual condition.



Our Study is Jeremiah's message to the *house of the king of Judah, and concerning the throne of David*, and will focus on social justice in the society and the king's responsibility to ensure the equity and justice God demands. As such he deals with the temporal leaders of the nation, before he compares and contrasts the Messiah with the false spiritual leaders in chapter 23.

THE TEXT

Verse 1. In this verse the prophet is instructed to personally deliver God's message to the King directly. Unlike other instances where the king sent emissaries to inquire of the prophet or the prophet is summoned to appear before the king, here the King of Kings sends His prophet to warn His servant (Rom.13:4).

Verse 2. God through Jeremiah addresses the king as sitting on the throne of David, implying that the king's, Jehoiakim's position, his dignity and power rest on the covenant made with David and therefore he Jehoiakim should look to the example of David as a model for proper conduct. Both the king and his government is addressed, so whatever is to be said will be the responsibility of both the king and his officers.

The king and his rulers must perform their responsibilities in a godly and righteous way, something that they certainly were not doing. They were practicing great injustice. They were greatly corrupt in their administrative practices.

Verse 3. Protection of the poor involves obedience to God and movement away from crass personal materialism. This move will open their heart to listen to God.

With a degree of detail the king and his courtiers are commanded to practice righteousness and justice. Social justice is demanded particularly for the poor, weak, vulnerable and disadvantaged in the society, a group that particularly concerns God (Exod. 22:21-22). The rulers are themselves to do these things and exercise their offices toward the same end. This then is a statement on the role of government in society. The ruler is to make justice his primary responsibility. Clearly it was very weak in this area and needed to orient itself.

It was specifically mentioned that they were to be fair and to do right. They are told to take concrete steps to save the one that has been robbed from the power of those who are more powerful than they. This of course implies that the more powerful were robbing the weaker. This would mean that the king and rulers in Judah have to do specific interventions even though this would affect their friends and associates.

They were not to mistreat or hurt strangers, orphans, or widows.

They were not to kill the innocent.

Note that the king is to be addressed publicly, in the presence of the other court officials. 2 Kings 23:35 mentions that these sins of oppression of the needy and denying of justice to the poor was especially prevalent in the nation of Judah.

Verse 4. They are assured that the faithful discharge of this duty will ensure their prosperity and maintain an uninterrupted line of succession to the throne. God would ensure the blessings of the covenant with David.

This is all very gracious of God in light of the debauched and idolatrous conditions in the nation. God clearly does not desire the death of the wicked. He constantly encourages the wicked to repent and obtain eternal life.

Verse 5. The prophet also reveals the consequences of disobedience, the more likely scenario. Here God's justice and judgment will be in view. Should God's warning be ignored, should the sin of the family continue then God would bring about an inglorious end to their line and the nation. On a personal level, the beautiful house of cedar that the king had built and which he had furnished lavishly on the backs of unpaid workmen, and of which he was exceptionally proud would become a ruin.



The king and rulers now face a stark choice. They had faced this choice over and over again. But the choice was again presented to them because of the grace and mercy of God. Doing justice would be rewarded. Rejection would be punished.

Verses 6-7. Gilead had been famous for its healing balm. It was prized by people all over the world. Lebanon was famous for its cedar trees for Lebanon was covered with magnificent trees of exceptionally high-quality world-famous cedar. They were high up what God would now turn it around and they would be made like a wasteland. Yes it would be destroyed and not fit for human habitation. The disciplining hand of God would make them into desert, a place that people avoided. God had appointed destroyers and they would come against Judah well-armed, and when they came, they would be organized. They would succeed in their plans to cut up the fine Houses built of high-quality cedar and loaded with luxuries. All the things that they so highly prized and for which they had robbed the poor and vulnerable people, all of their accumulated wealth and material possessions would be thrown into the fire and burned up. It would turn out that God wasted all their time and energies. Their injustice would not pay off.

God was making it clear that He would not fight the Babylonians for them, but instead God would fight against Judah, sending and preparing the attackers against Judah.

Verses 8-9. They would become a by-word to passers-by, who would immediately attribute the destruction of the nation and exile of the population to their infidelity and unfaithfulness to their God. The Davidic throne will cease, until the time of Messiah's return.

Note even the ungodly have a sense of God's justice and judgment, while some Christians are prepared to ignore these attributes as they continue sinful habits, thus inviting God's judgment.

Already the final chapter of *the house of the king of Judah* is being written. They are instructed not to mourn for the dead, likely Josiah, but to *weep sore* for the one soon to be exiled and who will in fact die in captivity. This would be King Jehoahaz who succeeded Josiah his father, 2 Kings 23:30. Within three months of his ascension to the throne, he was deposed by the king of Egypt and exiled to Egypt, where he died. He was the first ruler of Judah to die in exile.

It is worth noting one writer's comment on these verses:

They must weep sorely for Jehoahaz, who had gone into Egypt; not that there was any great loss of him to the public, as there was of his father, but that his case was much more deplorable. Josiah went to the grave in peace and honor, was prevented from seeing the evil to come in this world and removed to see the good to come in the other world; and therefore, Weep not for him, but for his unhappy son, who is likely to live and die in disgrace and misery, a wretched captive. Note, Dying saints may be justly envied, while living sinners are justly pitied. And so dismal perhaps the prospect of the times may be that tears even for a Josiah, even for a Jesus, must be restrained, that they may be reserved for ourselves and for our children, Luke 23: 28....

CONCLUSION

Jehoiakim and the rulers of Judah are scathingly rebuked to their face and their judgment pronounced. It is a judgment of *woe*. Jeremiah is blunt in his denunciation. He ties injustice to the love monarchs have for luxury and show. He calls for a 180° turn and an exhibition of godly sorrow.

He denounces the rulers for pride and vanity, for building or enlarging the palaces and this by defrauding his workmen and financing their project with ill-gotten gains. This at a time when the nation is practically under siege, no wonder the prophet accused him of ... *buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong*. This forced labor was done in disobedience to the Law given to Moses and recorded in Leviticus 19:13 and Deuteronomy 24:14-15. There is a suggestion that Jehoiakim was complicit with the Egyptians and somehow involved in his brother Shallum being deposed and exiled and his arranged ascension to the throne.



The pride of the King and rulers and their foolish arrogance and sin is shown in these pronouncements. Their palaces must boast the latest in architectural design, only the finest and most expensive finishes will do.

The warning is clear for us.

As we move away from God we become increasingly attracted and attached to the material and the lure and exercise of power.

No one begrudges royalty their right to ornate palaces and the like, but God who searches the heart knows Jehoiakim's building ambitions came from the pride of his heart and this was sin.

Given the geopolitical situation Judah was in, what with being a vassal state and God's clear, imminent judgment on the horizon, palatial splendor should have been the least of his concerns. One writer states: **'He has mistaken fine buildings as the mark of a true king'**.

Acceptable governance does not consist in the erection of splendid palaces, but in the administration of righteousness and justice.

Such is the effect of sin, however. Often those sinking in their estates will redouble their efforts to make a show and look most prosperous when God is bringing them down because of sin.

Note the proud heart remains defiant in the face of humbling circumstances, as man foolishly strive with his Maker. So it is with evil hearts, they focus on the wrong things.

Jeremiah had news for him and all those whose security and confidence lie outside of Jesus Christ. Those who think their present prosperity is some kind of lasting security are in for a rude awakening. Josiah was praised as a defender and champion of the poor and needy. Josiah enjoyed the comforts, but did not extort or oppress the populace, nor did he try to rival Solomon's building program. *His focus was on service and obedience to God, to leading the people of God back to God, which was in sharp contrast to those kings who came after him.*

Some profess to know God while their actions contradict their claim.

Knowing God, whether in the times of Jeremiah, or at the present does not consist merely of having heard of him, or having read his word, or having been associated with God-fearing people. It is the kind of knowledge that is exhibited in a pious and godly life, and in the strict obedience to God's commandments.

Josiah's just actions flowed from a heart inclined to God and it is those good works that flow from a heart surrendered to God that meets His approval and are rewarded. God's favor was clearly on Josiah. He was clearly not like the others whose sole purpose was the pursuit of wickedness.

Note people actually cheat themselves who think they can enrich themselves by robbing God, however well disguised their schemes, God sees them. One writer comments in part on this verse:

He is here charged with extortion and oppression, violence and injustice. He *built his house by unrighteousness, with money unjustly got and materials which were not honestly come by, and perhaps upon ground obtained as Ahab obtained Naboth's vineyard. And, because he went beyond what he could afford, he defrauded his workmen of their wages, which is one of the sins that cries in the ears of the Lord of hosts, Jam. 5:4.* God takes notice of the wrong done by the greatest of men to their poor servants and labourers, and will repay those, in justice, that will not in justice pay those whom they employ, but use their neighbour's service without wages. Observe, The greatest of men must look upon the meanest as their neighbours, and be just to them accordingly, and love them as themselves. Jehoiakim was oppressive, not only in his buildings, but in the administration of his government. He did not do justice, made no conscience of shedding innocent blood, when it was to serve the purposes of his ambition, avarice, and revenge. He was all for *oppression and violence*, not to threaten it only, but to do it; and, when he was set upon any act of injustice, nothing should stop him, but he would go through with it...That which aggravated all his sins was that he was the son of a good father, who had left him a good example, if he would but have followed it (v.15,16:



It would seem that in the final accounting if we had Godly parents but chose the way of Satan in our lives, rather than that righteous influence mitigating our judgment it will only serve to aggravate the judgment.

No detail of Jehoiakim's death and burial is recorded, 2 Kings 24:6; 2 Chronicles 36:6; however the standard description of the death of the kings of Judah, '*He slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David.*' is omitted in the description of his death, which suggest the circumstances of his death and burial was different from the usual. There was no royal funeral ceremonies or clear lamentation like that for Josiah, nobody missed him. Jeremiah shockingly predicted he would have a donkey's burial, that is, no burial, his body unceremoniously dumped outside the city, to avoid this body polluting the city further.

Here is one writer's account of the likely circumstances that accompanied Jehoiakim's death:

It is believed that the fulfillment of this prophecy came as the Babylonian invaders approached Jerusalem. "The pro-Babylonian party within the city organized an assassination of Jehoiachin in a palace revolt. Under pressure of the siege, the assassins merely dragged the body of Jehoiachim, as they would have dragged a dead animal out of the city and disposed of it "beyond the gates."

Still whatever the prophet said we can confidently expect it to have been fulfilled.

So what can we say? Can Disobedience be the standard practice of your life? Today's lesson and other Scriptures show that there is a point beyond which no repentance is possible, the nation of Judah being a case in point. Despite continuous warnings and with destruction on their doorstep, they still would not heed the word of God.

Keeping in mind these were people of the Covenant, the question can reasonably be asked, how could they be so callous and indifferent to the word of God? What we can see, is that even among believers, when we find our own constructions of the spiritual life more attractive and appealing than that set forth in Scripture, then it's almost impossible to have people abandon their prideful and carnal pursuits for the true word of God. Such is the nature of habitual sin.

What is even more striking is that Jehoiakim had the example of Josiah to follow and as for us we are certainly not short on good examples either. Neither Jehoiakim nor us have to pursue unrighteousness, oppression and disobedience.

Others have lived and enjoyed life without turning from God. Many others have followed the *old* (good) ways without failure. We should remember that we have a great cloud of witnesses (Heb:12:1) who have gone ahead of us. We do not have to die dishonorable deaths; we can faithfully and successfully follow the ways of God.

Injustice, oppression and exploitation of the poor and disadvantaged are sure marks of an idolatrous society and one on the sure path to destruction.

A just society must of necessity involve a certain kind of behavior from rulers. It behooves us as members of whatever society to which we may belong, to live lives in accordance with the commandments of God and so demonstrate love, mercy, and justice in our lives, since God demands a just society.

Remember therefore the spiritual issues involved in repenting of injustice. In giving advice on what godly leadership looks like and what we should look for in the godly leader one writer lists these:

1. Dedication to righteousness. Jeremiah 22:3
2. A commitment to do what is right. Remember David and Daniel.
3. Having an attitude of servitude. Jeremiah 22: 13-17.
4. Seeing power as an opportunity to be faithful.
5. Having a desire for justice. Jeremiah 22:3



6. Remembering that justice is really a matter of loving God with all that we are and loving our neighbor as ourselves. Matt 22:37-40.
7. Having a spirit of sacrifice. Note and study carefully Judges 9 and the Parable of the Trees.
8. Godly leaders show recognition that survival and success are not the primary goals of leadership and power.
9. A passion for prayer. Note the example of Nehemiah in 1:1-4.
10. Prayer is the first order of business.

