The Broken Covenant
Jeremiah 11:1-23

Introduction

In chapters 11-15 Jeremiah will give his fourth, fifth and sixth sermons. The sermons will cover the subjects of broken promises, a linen belt, Judah’s sin and suffering.

This fourth sermon covers the past covenant (1-8) and the present covenant (vv.9-13); a command (don’t weep or pray) and a conspiracy against Jeremiah (vv.18-23).

Paul the Apostle wrote in 2 Corinthians 1:20; “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God”.

Swear an oath. Make a promise.

What happens when an oath or a promise is broken?

Failure to keep promises divide families and business and nations!

A copy of the law was discovered and recovered when King Josiah began to remodel the Temple (see 2 Kings 22:8-20). Right after than Josiah summoned the leaders and the citizens of Jerusalem to a public worship service. The King himself read the book of the Law; The Word of God; the Book of the Covenant to the people. After the reading King Josiah renewed the Covenant. Josiah committed to follow the Lord and obey His commandments will all his heart. The King then called on the people to do the same! The people responded to the challenge by dedicating themselves to keep the Covenant of God’s Holy Word. They promised to obey the Lord and keep His commandments (see 2 Kings 23:1-3).

But it did not take long for the people to break their promise. So God speaks to Jeremiah to review the contract and the covenant with the people of Judah and Jerusalem (vv.1-4).

The Past Covenant (vv.1-8)

Jeremiah 11:1 (NKJV)
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11 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying,

Jeremiah 11:2 “Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem;

The covenant is a reference to the promises made and kept by God to Israel. The Covenant is restated in verses 3-5; and the blessings and curses are found in Deuteronomy 27:27 through chapter 28:68.
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The passage is a picture of Israel entering the land (chapter 27); Israel possessing and enjoying the land (chapter 28:1-14); and Israel being taken off the land (chapter 28:15-29:29). God warned the people the very disease and pestilence and plagues that had been visited on Egypt would be visited on them; another evidence of the wrath of God would be the with-holding of the former and latter rains (chapter 28:23-24); their enemies would defeat them; they would be scattered like blind slaves; their rich land flowing with milk and honey would be turned into a wilderness.

The people of Israel would be plucked off the land; scattered among the nations where there would be “no ease” (what a perfect picture of the state of the Jew in the world today). What other nation has suffered more than Israel?

God redeemed them--and they were responsible to Him. Moses warned that even one person could defile the whole nation (Deut. 29:18-19).

Jeremiah 11:3 and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel: “Cursed is the man who does not obey the words of this covenant

There were profound blessings for keeping the covenant. There were severe penalties for breaking the covenant.

The person who broke the law and disobeyed the commandments would be cursed and suffer God’s judgment.

The Lord was looking for a people who would pray, obey, seek His face, enter into unbroken fellowship; and fulfill His purposes.

The Lord extended two promises; the people would experience a personal relationship with the true and living God; and they would be given a marvelous hope; a land which flowed with milk and honey.

The Lord commands Jeremiah to pronounce a solemn curse on those who fail to obey the commands.

Deuteronomy 27:26; 26 ‘Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law.’ “And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’”

Jeremiah 11:4 which I commanded your fathers in the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and do according to all that I command you; so shall you be My people, and I will be your God,’
The iron furnace is a metaphor for the hardship and pain and slavery in Egypt. In Deuteronomy 4:20-24 we read; “20 But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be His people, an inheritance, as you are this day. 21 Furthermore the Lord was angry with me for your sakes, and swore that I would not cross over the Jordan, and that I would not enter the good land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance. 22 But I must die in this land, I must not cross over the Jordan; but you shall cross over and possess that good land. 23 Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the Lord your God has forbidden you. 24 For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

Life apart from God and Christ is “an iron furnace”.

The literal Hebrew in (chapter 11:4) reads; “listen to my voice and do them; according to all that I command you”.

Jeremiah 11:5 that I may establish the oath which I have sworn to your fathers, to give them ‘a land flowing with milk and honey,’ as it is this day.’ ”

And I answered and said, “So be it, Lord.”

The Land flowing with milk and honey was a metaphor for that place of peace and provision. For the Jewish people it was the Land. For Christians our “land” is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our place is in Him. Ultimately the place flowing with milk and honey becomes a symbol or a metaphor for Heaven.

“So be it” was the response of the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 27:26. In our culture we sign our names on a contract; or in a wedding ceremony we make vows that are heard by our family and guests. Someone might ask, “Is that your signature?” Or did you make that promise?

Jeremiah 11:6 Then the Lord said to me, “Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying: ‘Hear the words of this covenant and do them.

Jeremiah is told to “proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah (that is the original covenant);

Hear the words of this covenant and do them.

Hear--believe--obey!

Jeremiah was also sent to remind them of Judah’s tragic refusal to listen and obey.

Down through the centuries God had sent messenger after messenger to remind the people and warn the people. The people were reminded to obey Him (vv.7-8); disobedience was not an option; but few people heeded the warning.
Most had disobeyed and embraced their own selfish desires. They lived lives of selfish indulgence, greedy pleasure, false man made worship; and unrighteous lives.

Jeremiah 11:7 For I earnestly exhorted your fathers in the day I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, until this day, rising early and exhorting, saying, “Obey My voice.”

Jeremiah 11:8 Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone followed the dictates of his evil heart; therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but which they have not done.’”

The terms of the Covenant had not changed since its inception. The promises and obligations were the same! God’s promises remained unchanged. The people’s resistance and rebellion remained unchanged.

“But everyone followed the dictates of his evil heart”

In the eyes of many the sad and tragic circumstances are simply due to common mishaps of human life, innocent mistakes, bad leadership.

Ours cannot be simply an intellectual acknowledgement of God. We must learn to love Him and trust Him. When our hearts are not committed to the Lord we will not follow Him or trust Him or obey Him.

The Present Covenant (vv.9-13)

Jeremiah 11:9 And the Lord said to me, “A conspiracy has been found among the men of Judah and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

The conspiracy consisted in the hard-hearted refusal to listen and obey the Lord. The reference is to the “deliberate resisting of God’s appeals for repentance and insistence upon trusting their own “peace” message and idols” (See John MacArthur’s note in MacArthur Study Bible p.1079).

The word translated conspiracy is qesher; a noun which means to bind or “to join together” (like a rope or a braid) and so conspiracy. Note only have the people sinned; the people have joined together; united to sin!

Jeremiah 11:10 They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers who refused to hear My words, and they have gone after other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers.”
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Jeremiah uses the language of revolution. The violation of the covenant included a return to the sins of their forefathers, a refusal to hear God’s Words and service to false gods.

The iniquities of their forefathers is described in Numbers 25:1-3 and specifically in Hosea 9:10;

“I found Israel Like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers As the Firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season. But they went to Baal Peor, And separated themselves to that shame; they became an abomination like the thing they loved!”

Jeremiah 11:11 Therefore thus says the Lord: “Behold, I will surely bring calamity on them which they will not be able to escape; and though they cry out to Me, I will not listen to them.

The rebellion and the disobedience will prompt an inescapable judgment. Judah and Jerusalem will not be able to pray there way out of the situation.

“I will not listen to them.” The Talmud reads; “The gates of tears are never shut”--but the reference is to sincere, true, genuine repentance. Jeremiah pictures Ephraim crying out for relief, but not repentance. The people are in pain--sin brings pain; but not necessarily repentance.

Some people cry out because they have lost husband, wife, family, job, the accumulation of a life-time of working; but they do not want to turn from their sin and turn to the Savior.

This seems to be the reason the prayers remain unheard!

Jeremiah 11:12 Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the gods to whom they offer incense, but they will not save them at all in the time of their trouble.

The people will turn to their many idols for comfort and security but find no comfort or security.

“to whom they offer incense” is in the present participle which implies--that even as they are crying out the Hebrew God for comfort and relief--they continue to offer prayers and worship to the false gods.

Jeremiah 11:13 For according to the number of your cities were your gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem you have set up altars to that shameful thing, altars to burn incense to Baal.

Idol worship was rampant.

One night in Bangkok and the world's your oyster
The bars are temples but the pearls ain’t free
You'll find a god in every golden cloister
And if you're lucky then the god’s a she
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I can feel an angel sliding up to me

False deities in every city and on every street.

*Jeremiah 11:14* “So do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them; for I will not hear them in the time that they cry out to Me because of their trouble.

The prayers offered in rebellion can bring no answer.

The evil and rebellion and disobedience had reached a very advanced stage.

People will say; “but I prayed”. We can pray but if our prayers are to continue in sin, continue to resist and reject God, continue to trust our own wisdom rather than God’s truth, we cannot expect answers to prayers.

*Jeremiah 11:15* “What has My beloved to do in My house, Having done lewd deeds with many? And the holy flesh has passed from you. When you do evil, then you rejoice.

The Lord continues to use the endearment; “My beloved” or My darling.

The lewd deeds may have included the popular forms of worship in the ancient world. This was a blatant disobedience of true worship and violation of the first three commandments.

The holy flesh seems to be a reference to false forms of sacrifice. Perhaps the offering of animals to the strange or the foreign god for the purpose of personal consumption.

*Jeremiah 11:16* The Lord called your name, Green Olive Tree, Lovely and of Good Fruit. With the noise of a great tumult He has kindled fire on it, And its branches are broken.

In the Old Testament Israel is called “a vine” or a grape-vine (chapter 2:21) and now Israel is spoken of as a green olive tree. The Olive Tree was a source of life (food and oil). Olive trees were meant to produce fruit; but the dry barren tree was only useful for judgment.

It is very difficult to burn green trees. It takes intense heat. Ephraim is represented as ripe for judgment.

*Jeremiah 11:17* “For the Lord of hosts, who planted you, has pronounced doom against you for the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have done against themselves to provoke Me to anger in offering incense to Baal. ”

Look carefully at the words God uses in verses 14-17 to describe Judah’s future; “trouble”, “doom”, “tempest” “fire” and “evil”.

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Don’t miss the statement; “who planted you”. The Lord planted the tree. The Lord punishes those whom he plants. They are being punished because of their idolatry.

God is provoked to anger.

Henry Ward Beecher wrote; “A man who does not know how to be angry does not know how to be good. And a man that does not know how to be shaken to his heart’s core with indignation over things evil is either a fungus or a wicked man”.

Jesus in John’s Gospel (chapter 2:15-16) “So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, ‘Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!’

Winston Churchill used to say; “A man is as big as the things that make him angry.”

Even the Greek philosopher Aristotle; tutor to Alexander the Great said, “Anybody can become angry--that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, and to the right degree, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way--that is not within everybody’s power and is not easy.”

Is it within your power to be angry for all the right reasons?

The People’s Conspiracy (vv.18-23)

Jeremiah 11:18 Now the Lord gave me knowledge of it, and I know it; for You showed me their doings.

Jeremiah receives a supernatural “heads-up” a plot to kill Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 11:19 But I was like a docile lamb brought to the slaughter; and I did not know that they had devised schemes against me, saying, “Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be remembered no more.”

Jeremiah 11:20 But, O Lord of hosts, You who judge righteously, Testing the mind and the heart, Let me see Your vengeance on them, For to You I have revealed my cause.

Jeremiah 11:21 “Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the men of Anathoth who seek your life, saying, ‘Do not prophesy in the name of the Lord, lest you die by our hand’—

Jeremiah 11:22 therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Behold, I will punish them. The young men shall die by the sword, their sons and their daughters shall die by famine;
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Jeremiah 11:23 and there shall be no remnant of them, for I will bring catastrophe on the men of Anathoth, even the year of their punishment. ’ “

Jeremiah had been warned that he would face resistance, rejection, strong opposition, grave danger, and threats against his life. (It may be this message was given during the reign of Jehoiakim). Jeremiah could expect no cooperation from Judah’s leaders. The conspiracy seems to be from the citizens (relatives) from Jeremiah’s home town of Anathoth. Jesus and Jeremiah faced opposition from unexpected people in unexpected places (Zechariah 13:6). The words; “I was like a lamb or an ox brought to the slaughter” (11:19) sound very familiar!

Conclusion

The wages of sin remain death. God’s will cannot be resisted without horrible consequences. God told the prophet Jeremiah that even if Moses and Samuel were to stand and intercede for the people of Judah His divine decree would remain the same (chapter 15:1).

In chapter 12 Jeremiah will ask the question “Why do the wicked prosper? (vv.1-11). The prophet Habakkuk will use almost the same words (Hab. 1:1-4; 13). This is a repeated question that comes up for everyone in every generation. The answer lies in part that the prosperity of the wicked is only for a season; a brief period of human existence; while the triumph of the righteous will last for all eternity. In the meantime, Jeremiah will have some experiences that are very disconcerting and frustrating.
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