

Jeremiah 1:15 - 19

Fear

The First Oracle

¹⁵ "I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms,"

declares the LORD.

The Judgment

*"Their kings will come and set up their thrones
In the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem;
They will come against all her surrounding walls
And against all the towns of Judah.
¹⁶ I will pronounce my judgments on my people
Because of their wickedness in forsaking me,
In burning incense to other gods
And in worshiping what their hands have made.*

Instructions to Jeremiah

¹⁷ *"Get yourself ready!
Stand up and say to them
Whatever I command you.
Do not be terrified by them,
Or I will terrify you before them.
¹⁸ Today I have made you a fortified city,
An iron pillar and a bronze wall
To stand against the whole land
Against the kings of Judah, its officials,
Its priests and the people of the land.
¹⁹ They will fight against you but will not overcome you,
For I am with you and will rescue you,"*

declares the LORD.



The oracle in verses 15 to 19 opens as a further explanation of the second vision that Jeremiah saw: "a boiling pot, tilting away from the north." The LORD explains briefly at first, "From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land," but goes further explain the meaning of the vision for the inhabitants of Judah and its implications for Jeremiah. The oracle that follows (15 – 19) is introduced by the LORD's pending summons to "all the peoples of the northern kingdoms." These are to be the human instruments of His judgment against Judah for their threefold sin: forsaking the LORD, burning incense to other gods, and worshiping what their hands have made. (verse 16c – d).

The oracle that Jeremiah reports is in two parts: the first foretelling the judgment that the LORD plans for Judah and its inhabitants and the second instructions for Jeremiah who is to convey this message. The instructions to Jeremiah contain a command (17 a – c) , a warning (17d – e) and a promise (18 – 19).

Judgment: The introductory explanation of the second vision moves seamlessly into a more detailed account of what the LORD intends to do. The remainder of verse 15 focusses not on the siege of the walled city of Jerusalem, but on the immediate consequences of its defeat. The reference to "*the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem*" is associated with the place of judgment. Sitting in the gate was synonymous with a king exercising judgment. It reflects ancient custom of using the open area behind the main gate of walled cities as a place where the village elders would sit and to be available to adjudicate petty arguments a kind of elder-based wisdom/judgment.¹ In later times the king or princes would sit in

¹ We find such an example in the story of Ruth the Moabitess and Boaz. Ruth 4:1 – 2, 8 - 9 "Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there. When the kinsman-redeemer he had mentioned came along, Boaz said, 'Come over here, my friend, and sit down.' So,

the gate to order punishments.² When a city was taken captive, the spoiling of the city would be supervised by the king on his throne. The spoils would pass under his purview and out the city gate. The idols of the city would also be brought out to 'witness' the loss of their treasures and as a humiliation to their powerlessness before the gods of the conquering king. There is an irony in this. The only visible objects of veneration the people of Jerusalem had were their idols (Baal, Astaroth). There was no image of the LORD!³ This ironic turn of events highlights that it is not the kings who sit on their thrones who are executing judgment but the LORD, Himself, who pronounces His judgments "on my people, because of their wickedness in forsaking me, in burning incense to other gods and in worshipping what their hands have made" (16). Their idols would be destroyed before their eyes and they themselves slain or delivered into captivity in a foreign land.

Instructions: The last part of the oracle is directed to Jeremiah. It is also in two parts with complementary introductions: "For your part, you shall gird up your loins" (17a) ... For my part, see, I have made you today, into a fortified city ...".⁴ While verses 17 a-c reiterate the LORD's command to Jeremiah in verse 7b "You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you," verses 17 d-e reiterate the LORD's command to Jeremiah in verse 8a "Do not be afraid of them." Jeremiah must make a choice: to fear the LORD or to fear men. Not only is Jeremiah commanded what to say and to whom to speak, but he is commanded as to the tone of his speaking. Jeremiah is being called to spiritual combat with the powerful rulers of Judah. For the LORD's part, He has made Jeremiah "a fortified city" with bronze walls and an iron column. What a contrast to the city of Jerusalem which will be overcome with panic when the forces from the North surround them! Jeremiah is not to panic as Jerusalem will in the heat of battle. If he does, then he will become like Jerusalem. If he chooses to believe the word of the LORD given to him as a chosen prophet, then all will be as the LORD has promised. He will "*stand against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you.*" He will be a picture of what Jerusalem will not be. He will stand against Judah but Judah will not stand against Babylon. Verse 19b explains this mystery by reiterating the LORD's promise to Jeremiah in verse 8b "*For I am with you and will rescue you.*"

Fear plays an important role in this chapter. The choice is the same: fear the LORD, not men. The fear of the LORD should bring repentance on Judah's part and obedience on Jeremiah's. Jeremiah is not to fear the people he addresses and Jerusalem is not to fear the "peoples of the northern kingdoms." Both are to rest in faith on what the LORD has said: the charge and promise given to Jeremiah, and the terrible consequences foretold if Judah continues in sin.⁵ Faith in the LORD's word (promise or prophesy) together with fear of the LORD can bring repentance on Judah's part and obedience on Jeremiah's part. Jeremiah's situation is like ours, as Jesus makes clear. "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."⁶

he went over and sat down. Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, 'Sit here,' and they did so. ... So, the kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, 'Buy it yourself.' And he removed his sandal. Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, 'Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon.'"

² Joab encouraged David to exercise his kingly authority after Absalom's rebellion, "Now go out and encourage your men. I swear by the LORD that if you don't go out, not a man will be left with you by nightfall. This will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come upon you from your youth till now." So the king got up and took his seat in the gateway. When the men were told, "The king is sitting in the gateway," they all came before him. Meanwhile, the Israelites had fled to their homes." (2 Samuel 19:7-8)

³ "... a recent study suggests a more substantial connection after all. It was the policy of Assyria to despoil the images of deities in conquered realms; thus, Sargon's Letter to the Gods reads, "Respecting the god Haldia, in whom Urartu trusted, I gave orders to take him out. I, as victor, placed him in front of his town gate." The chief deity of Urartu, thus seated at the gate, publicly oversaw the carrying-off of his treasures.?! Verse 16 is thus ironic in two ways: the foe from the north would of course expect to bring the image of Yahweh out to the gate of the city to be humiliated (compare Isaiah's depiction of the casual assumption of Assyria about the images of Samaria and Jerusalem, Isaiah. 10:10-11), whereas in the case of Yahweh there is no image to bring out. And further Yahweh will not sit mute and humiliated; to the contrary, it is he who is directing the foe from the north to victory over Jerusalem ("I am going to call all the tribes of the north," Page 41 William L. Holladay Jeremiah Vol 1 Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible Copyright by Fortress Press, Philadelphia.1986 Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number 85-45498, ISBN 0-8006-6017-X

⁴ Holladay's translation Page 22 – 25 *ibid.*

⁵ Jeremiah, more than other prophets, makes clear that not all prophesy was absolutely determined. See Jeremiah 18:1 - 11

⁶ Matthew 10:27 - 28