Introduction

In this session of the book of Jeremiah we are going to be covering from Jeremiah chapter 4 verse 5 the unit that extends to Jeremiah chapter 6 verse 30. We are go to be looking at the topic of the coming invasion. As we are looking at this, the warnings of judgment that are going to come upon Judah because of their failures to repent, I want to remind us and just give us something to think about at the beginning of this. We are definitely seeing a relationship of cause and effect between what we studied in the last section and what Jeremiah is warning about in this section. Judah refuses to respond in a positive way to God’s offer of repentance and avoidance of judgment. Perhaps there is the possibility God will relent from judgment, these are the consequences that they are going to experience. I think in some ways it’s like the beginning part of the book of Judges you have a cause, Israel did not drive the Canninites out of the land as a result of that the consequence was that they began to worship their gods and the Lord subjected them to the series of judgments. We have the same thing going on here.

Sowing and Reaping

We are reminded of the spiritual principle of sowing and reaping. Whatsoever a man sows that will he also reap. Jeremiah is warning the people about the sins they have sowed; he is also showing them the consequences they are going to reap. Hosea said, “Israel has sown the wind, they have reaped the whirlwind.” So one of the principals about sin is that we not only receive back in kind what we have done, but the consequences of that sin intensify and magnify as they are not dealt with.

Let me remind us what was at the end of the last section of Jeremiah that we studied. There are these incredible recurring calls for Israel to rib to turn back
to God to return to him and we are left with this question. How are they going to respond? How are they going to react to this? And obviously our initial thought if we have never read the book before, if we didn’t know the history of Israel, or if we didn’t know the story of Jeremiah. Our response would be in light of this incredible offer they snatched it up, right? They returned to the Lord, they grabbed up his grace. How could they fail to respond to this offer so that they would miss the disaster that would come upon them?

**Judah’s Lack of Response**

But we saw at the end of the lesson that these calls to return are not going to be responded to in the right way, and again just reminding us how that’s going to work itself through the book of Jeremiah. Chapter 5 verse 3 says this, “They refused to take correction, they have made their faces harder then rock, they have refused to rib.” Chapter 8 verses 4 and 5, again when someone falls down you expect them to get up, when people go away on a trip and they turn away, you expect them to come back. So why is there this perpetual turning away, why hasn’t Israel returned? The Lord says, “Circumcise your hearts.” Chapter 6 verse 10 says, “They have uncircumcised ears.” And in chapter 9 verses 25 and 26 they have, “uncircumcised hearts” just like all the pagan nations around them. So they are not going to respond in a sense the Lord knows before he ever reaches out to his people what their response is going to be.

In Jeremiah chapter 7 verses 27 and 28, the Lord says, “so you shall still speak all of these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you.” The Lord’s giving them a legitimate opportunity to respond. But the Lord knows in light of their character, in light of Israel’s past history, what the response is going to be: but the offer is genuinely there.

I think this helps us to understand Isaiah. The Lord tells Isaiah to preach and by his preaching he is going to harden their hearts and make them blind and make them deaf. It’s not that God is purposely causing them not to believe in the
message, its simply he realizes that in light of their hearts the preaching of God’s word and the offer of grace is going to make them more resistant. One of the frightening things in the Old Testament is the idea that God often punishes unbelief with unbelief. As we refuse to respond to God there are layers of resistance or callousness that develop over the human heart. There’s a layer of callousness each time we say no to God; that ultimately makes it difficult for us to respond. In a sense, that’s what is going to happen through the preaching of the prophets. There’s a legitimate offer here; but the Lord says I know how they are going to respond. They are not going to listen. They are not going to pay attention. And, in fact, the preaching of the prophets is going to make their eyes more clouded and their ears more hard and not able to hear.

Really, what is happening to Israel and to Judah in this process is very much like what happened to pharaoh during the time of the plagues. The Lord at the beginning of that process tells Moses, I am going to harden Pharaoh’s heart and I’m going to gain glory for myself by delivering my people out of bondage. But when we see the actual working out of the hardening of the heart in the plagues that God sends to Egypt in the beginning the Pharaoh hardens his own heart. In the last series of plagues, and in response to that, God’s judicial decree, his sentence, his punishment on the Pharaoh is that the Lord hardens his heart and makes him unable to respond. He gives him essentially what the Pharaoh wants and Romans chapter 1 reminds us that God does this with the entire human race. We reject God, we turn away from knowledge and so the Lord gives them over to their sinful thoughts and their sinful desires. That whole process is laid out for us. So the prophets are giving the people a legitimate opportunity to respond; but Judah is not going to respond in the right way. They are not going to come back to God. So the message in chapters 4-6 is overwhelmingly a message of judgment.

In our last session we also talked about the genres of prophetic speech and I think it’s important for us to study these and to understand them. As we are going through the book of Jeremiah I do not want to just prepare a fish dinner for you, in
some ways I like for you to be able to fish through the prophets for yourselves. So part of that involves understanding the genres throughout the prophets. We have the genre of a judgment speech and in Jeremiah chapter 5, I would like us to work through, what does a judgment speech contain?

**Isaiah 5: Judgment—Accusation and Announcement**

It helps at times to see examples of this in other prophetic books as well, and so I would like to look at a judgment speech in Isaiah chapter 5 verses 8-25, The two key elements in a judgment speech are accusation and announcement, and often between the accusation and the announcement we will have the word *laken,* “therefore.” Here’s the accusation, the indictment, these are the crimes that Israel has committed, the announcement this is the specific judgment, therefore in light of this, this is what God is planning to do. We have a series of judgment series that are put together as a unit in Isaiah 5, 8-25. I just want us to observe how these two elements interact with each other. This judgment speech in the form of a Woe Oracle, which remember, is calling for the death of the people if they do not change their ways. But Isaiah chapter 5 verse 8 says this, “Woe to those who join house to house and field to field, until there is no more room and you are made to dwell alone in the mist of the land”, There’s the accusation, they have ripped off the property of their neighbors and their fellow Israelites.

Verse 9, “The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing: ‘Surely many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath and a homer of seed only an ephah.’” There’s the announcement. The Lord is going to take these beautiful houses away. They’ve ripped people off to get them, the punishment fits the crime. They’re not going to enjoy the houses that they’ve taken.

Verse eleven: “Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening as wine inflames them! They have lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine at their feasts, but they do not regard the deeds of the Lord, or see the work of his hands.” There’s the accusation.
They’re consumed with pleasure and they drink wine by the bowlfuls. They rise up early to drink it. They’re inflamed with the wine. They loved the music and the celebrations and the parties, but have no regard for God.

“Therefore,” verse twelve, here’s the announcement, “my people shall go into exile for lack of knowledge; their honored shall men go hungry, their multitude is parched with thirst. Therefore Sheol has enlarged its appetite and opened its mouth beyond measure, and the nobility of Jerusalem and her multitude will go down…” We have a long and extended announcement of judgment here and again the punishment fits the crime. They’re consumed with pleasure. They’re consumed with food and drink. Therefore the Lord is going to cause them to starve in exile.

And in the same way that they’ve gobbled down food and wine, it says in verse fourteen, “Sheol has enlarged its appetite and it’s opened its mouth beyond measure and is going to swallow them up.” This is a devastating announcement.

Verse eighteen, we’re back to accusation: “Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sin as with carts of rope, and who say: ‘Let him be quick, let him speed his work that we may see it; let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near, and let it come, that we may know it!’” They’re proud of their sin and they’re dragging it around with a cart and they’re defying God. Its as if they are saying, “Lord if you’re going to judge us, hurry up and do it! If what they’re saying is accurate, bring it on!”

Verse 20, before we get to the announcement, there’s more accusation, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light, and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” Verse 21 is another accusation: “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!” Verse 22: “Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right!”
So depending on what the prophet wants to emphasize, he may give a very brief accusation in a long announcement, or, in this case, what he’s doing with these various repetitions of the word “woe,” he’s piling up the accusations. “This is all the evil that Israel has done, look at how guilty they are.”

Finally, the hammer drops in verse 24, “Therefore, laken, as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will be as rottenness…” Verse 25, laken, “Therefore, the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people, and he stretched out his hand against them…” Verse 26, “He will raise a signal for nations far away, and whistle for them from the ends of the earth; and behold, quickly and speedily they come! None is weary, none stumbles, none slumbers or sleeps, not a waistband is loose, not a sandal strap is broken; their arrows are sharp, all their bows are bent, their horse’s hooves are like flint…” and they are going to devastate and consume Israel. The people of Judah said “Look, the Lord’s going to judge us, bring it on! Let it happen speedily.” The Lord says the army of Assyria is going to come speedily, they’re not even going to have a broken sandal strap as they come to attack you. My people are heroes at drinking wine, they’re on the Olympic drinking team. They are about go to battle with the Marines, who are heroes in warfare and are valiant in battle. Who’s going to win- the frat party or the Marines? There’s this beautiful judgment speech, accusation and announcement. In these accusations and announcements the reality is the punishment fits the crime.

**Jeremiah 5 as a Judgment Speech**

Now we see exactly the same thing in Jeremiah chapter five and I’d like us to look at this passage as a judgment speech, where, just like in Isaiah chapter five, there’s a mixing and mingling of accusation and announcement. When the prophets use these genres, they are not handed a form by their schoolteacher who say, “You must follow the genre of prophetic judgment speech, it must be this word, it must have fifty percent accusation and fifty percent announcement.” They take these things and creatively use the genres as very effective spokesmen of
But here’s Jeremiah chapter five as a prophetic judgment speech. We begin in verses one to five with an extended accusation against the people. Here’s what the Lord says to the prophet, “Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her. Though they say, ‘As the Lord lives,’ [which is what the Lord had told them to do back in chapter four, they responded to him in repentance] yet they swear falsely. O Lord, do not your eyes look for truth? You have struck them down, but they felt no anguish; you have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent.” What’s the accusation? The Lord’s given them this opportunity to return and repent, but instead of taking correction, they’ve made their faces harder.

They’re not going to respond to God, so that’s why judgment has come. So the prophet goes on to say, “Well I thought these were only the poor people, they have no sense,” it says. “I was talking to the poor and uneducated people, if I go talk to the people that are educated, people that are the movers and shakers in society, the affluent people, and the people that know what’s going on, they’re going to respond. It’s the poor people who don’t know the way of the Lord or the justice of their Lord, I will go to the great and I will speak to them, for they know the way of the Lord, the justice of their God.” But they all alike had broken their
yoke, they had burst their bonds. “I thought this was a problem with the uneducated, if we talk to the people with the Ph.D.’s and influence, they’ll respond.” No, they don’t respond either.

Rhetorically, what we have going on here, is the Lord is looking for one righteous person. He’s combing the streets of Jerusalem for one person that he can spare from judgment and the prophet’s having a hard time finding even that. There’s a very similar passage in Ezekiel chapter 9. If we go back to the book of Genesis, we are reminded of Abraham negotiating with God about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, remember it starts out with if there are 50 people and righteous ones in Sodom, and Abraham ultimately negotiates God down to where if there are ten righteous people in the city, God will not destroy it. Well, if Abraham had been negotiating for Jerusalem, he would have to have gone all the way down to one. In a sense, that’s what the rhetoric is saying here.

**Announcements and Accusations**

As a result of that pervasive wickedness in the city, the accusation in verses 1 to 5 turns into announcement in verse 6. It says there ‘therefore [laken], a lion from the forest shall strike them down, a wolf from the desert shall devastate them. A leopard is watching their cities; and everyone who goes out of them will be torn to pieces.” You’re going to be invaded by a wild animal that will attack them and bring them down. That’s the very brief but very effective and powerful summary of what he is telling him what is going to happen.

**Accusation**

We go back to accusation in verse seven. “‘How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken me. You have sworn by those who are no gods. When I fed them to the full they committed adultery, and they trooped to the houses of whores. They were well fed lusty stallions, each neighing for his neighbor’s wife. Shall I not punish them for these things?’ declares the Lord.” There’s the accusation again, and it brings us right back to the imagery of chapter 2 and the indictment the Lord gave there. Israel is a prostitute. I fed them; I blessed them;
and instead of honoring me at the temple, they trooped off to the house of the
whores and worshiped their false gods. Chapter 2, “They are like wild donkeys in
heat.” Here they are like well-fed lusty stallions like an animal that can’t control
his lust. I think both in terms of personal morality and worship for God they have
been unable to constrain themselves.

The announcement then becomes, “shall I not punish them for these things.
Go up through her vine rows and destroy, but make not a full end. Strip away her
branches for they are not the Lord’s; for the house of Israel and Judah have been
utterly treacherous to me. They have spoken falsely of the Lord.” So there’s the
announcement. The Lord is going to strip them like a vineyard and yet says and in
spite of the fact I’m bringing this devastating judgment I will not make a full end
to them.

We’re back to accusation in verse 12, “They have spoken falsely of the
word of the Lord and they have said, ‘he will do nothing, no disaster will come
upon us nor shall we see it sword or famine. The prophets will become wind. The
word is not in them. Thus shall it be done to them.’” We don’t believe these
warnings of judgment.

Verse 14, here’s the announcement, “therefore [laken] thus says the Lord,
the God of hosts, ‘because you have spoken this word, behold I am making my
words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood and the fire shall consume them.
Behold, I am bringing against you a nation from afar,’ declares the Lord, ‘and it is
an enduring nation and ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know
nor can you understand what they say,’” and again it is very much like Isaiah 5. I
am bringing this powerful vicious army, the Marines are about to attack. You
know the champions at war and at battle are going to attack the frat house, and the
Lord is going to bring devastating judgment. They will not be able to stand against
them. I am drawn in this passage where we go back to an accusation and
announcement.

I am drawn into the passage in verse 14 where it says, “the word of the
Lord in Jeremiah’s mouth becomes like a fire.” I mean do we have any understanding of the power of the word of God? I mean we see all these devastating things that are going to happen. A city, and a nation are about to be destroyed, and enemy army is about to wreak absolute destruction on this place but ultimately it’s not the army, it’s the power of the word of God.

Annie Dillard once said that if we really understood the power that we were evoking when we came to worship on Sunday we would be wearing combat helmets instead of bonnets to worship because God and his word is an absolute fire. As we preach and teach the word of God, the word of the Lord has incredible power. It breaks stone, and rock, it overcomes human hearts. Spurgeon said something to the affect that we as individuals and as preachers do not have the power to give life to a housefly. How do we think we can regenerate sinners? It’s the word of God that does that. The reverse effect of that is that the word of the Lord is also a fire that has the power to bring destruction, and as we are faithful to God, God uses his word to build up and to plant or to breakdown and to destroy but either way God is accomplishing his purposes. The word of God is doing his work and it’s a fire in the prophet’s mouth. Remember what the Lord has said to Jeremiah in chapter 1: “I am going to put my words in your mouth and then you will tear down, overthrow, uproot, and destroy or you will build and plant.” In a sense, Jeremiah’s actually doing these things it looks like what a king would do, it looks like ultimately what God would do. But that’s God working through the power of his to accomplish his purposes.

So the judgment speech in chapter 5 the interplay between accusation and announcement, as you are studying the prophet’s note how these judgments speeches work. If you are preaching a message or teaching a lesson on Jeremiah 5, diving into these different sections helps you to know how to divide your message, and provides the outline for you. This is one of the benefits paying attention to genre. The accusation is that the Lord is about to bring an invading army and that’s what chapters 4-6 are all about.
Images of Invasion

Going along again with genre, I want us to turn our focus back again to another device that the prophets use again: the images, the figures of speech and the word pictures, that an invading army is coming. Now the prophet could have simply given, here are the troop sizes, here’s the numbers and here’s the strategic places they are going to invade with, here’s the time of invasion; but the prophet doesn’t really do that. The prophet doesn’t give us a military report; he does not give a CNN update. What he does instead is he paints vivid pictures of what it is going to be like when this army invades Judah.

As we mentioned in previous videos the name of the nation, and the identity of the army at this point in the book is not even specified. We don’t know who it is. We wonder in the early days of Jeremiah ministry, did Jeremiah himself even know who this was going to be? Maybe there were other possibilities, but Jeremiah is going to paint a vivid picture through various word images. Look at the strength of this army. What is it going to be like when this army comes?

The first image that is provided in this section of Jeremiah is that the enemy army is compared to a ravaging predator. Chapter 4:7, “A lion has gone up from his thicket and a destroyer of nations has gone from his place. To make your land a waste and your cities will be ruined.” Judah is about to have a lion raging and roaring against them. Chapter 5:6 employs the same image. “Therefore a lion from the forest will strike them down; a wolf from the desert shall devastate them. A leopard is watching their cities; everyone who goes out of them shall be torn in pieces, because their transgressions are many, their apostasies are great.” Can you imagine the picture of a lion being let loose in your neighborhood? That’s what God is threatening to bring against the people of Judah.

In chapter 4:11-13, another image is used another picture is given of what the army will be like. And the army there is going to be like a hot, east, Sirocco wind that blows into the land of Judah with gale force. Sometimes when these winds came in with that kind of power, they destroyed houses or they destroyed
crops. At the very least they brought great inconvenience. I’ve seen images and pictures from Jerusalem of these windstorms when the sand and the particles just filled the sky and basically almost blot out the sun. That’s what this enemy army is going to be like.

Chapter 4:11 says “At that time it will be said to these people and to Jerusalem ‘A hot wind from the bare heights in the desert toward the daughter of my people, not to winnow or to cleanse them, a wind too full for this comes for me. Now it is I who speak in judgment upon them.’” So it’s picturing one of these winds that I think during the months of May and June can blow in from the desert from the East. Instead of the calm winds that blow in from sea on the west and that’s going to bring devastation. During the time of the year when the people are harvesting grain, they would go up to the winnowing floors on the top of the hill and the wind would help them to winnow the grain because it will blow away the chaff and the grain would fall on the floor. They then were able to gather together. This wind is going to blow away both the chaff and the grain. This is a wind that is designed to devastate and to destroy. The army in verse 13 “comes up like clouds; his chariots like the whirlwind; his horses are swifter than eagles--woe to us, for we are ruined.” So you can imagine this devastating wind blowing through the land.

Another picture of the judgment and of the invading army chapter 4:23-26 and maybe this is perhaps in this section the most extreme portrayal of what this invading army is going to do because we are going to hear the echo of another Scripture passage in Jeremiah 4:23. The prophet says, “I looked on the earth, and behold, it was without form and void; and I looked to the heavens, and they had no light. I looked on the mountains, and behold, they were quaking, and all of the mountains and the hills moved to and fro. I looked, and behold, there was no man, and all the birds of the air had fled. I looked, and behold, the fruitful land was a desert, and all the cities were laid in ruins before the LORD, and before his fierce anger.” If I were to give a quiz now and ask what biblical passage did you
think about. I think most of us know the answer “I looked on the earth, and behold, it was without form and void;” it was tohu vevohu exactly the same expression that is used in Genesis 1:2 to talk about the unformed earth before the days when God began creating and shaping. When Babylon invades Judah, it is going to be like the undoing the creation itself.

We see in times in the book of Jeremiah where the Lord is going to basically going to undo salvation history. The Lord had taken Israel out of Egypt at the end of Jeremiah’s life the Lord is going to take them back to Egypt but here is something much more serious than that, the Lord is actually going to undo creation itself. Going back to an earlier statement that we made from the Brent Sandy’s book, Plowshares and Pruning Hooks, we see the extremes of God’s anger and God’s love in the prophets. In a sense what’s happening here is that the Babylonian invasion through the use of prophetic hyperbole is if as God is going to undo the earth itself.

And then in the verse that follows, there are further echoes of Genesis 1. The things that God created in Genesis 1, man verse 25, the birds of the air verse 25, the animals, the light all of those things that God creates they all disappear. So imagine an undone devastated barren land, that’s what it’s going to be like when the army comes through. Verse 28, “For this the earth shall mourn, and the heavens above be dark; for I have spoken; I have purposed; I will not relent; I will not turn back.” So they refused to turn to God and so God would not turn back to them. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, in verse 28 it’s the earth and the heavens that experience the effect of this devastating judgment. Then, finally, in a verse we’ve already read an actual portrayal of the army itself is what all these images are about. “I am bringing against you,” chapter 5:15 “a nation from afar, O house of Israel, declares the LORD. It is an enduring nation; it is an ancient nation, it is a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say.” And here’s more imagery “Their quiver is like an open tomb; they are all mighty warriors.” There’s going to be a funeral in Israel. “They
shall eat up your harvest and your food; they shall eat up your sons and your daughters.” This army is going to totally consume you. If I’m thinking about this, the army alone is devastating enough. But something I also hear in these passages is that this imagery is ultimately pointing us to the fact that God himself is going to be the attacker.

When the prophets says that the army that’s coming against Israel or against Judah is a roaring lion, we are reminded in the book of Amos the very first verse “the Lord roars from Zion” and he is coming against his own people in judgment. They are not simply facing a Babylonian lion. They are ready to face God himself. And remember, Amos says, “Prepare to meet your God;” that’s what Judah is about to have the opportunity to do. When it speaks of the army as a hot gale force wind, and of the coming on chariots, and of the wings, and the chaff, we are reminded that God is often portrayed in the psalms and in other places in the Old Testament as the God who is “the rider of the clouds,” who rides across the sky in his cloud chariot. He wages war, and when he comes down to earth, the earth melts and is consumed by his presence. Judah has something much more serious to think about than simply the Babylonian army. God, in his storm chariot, the rider of the clouds, is coming down to fight against Israel.

One of the other images that is used portraying the army that will attack them is in 5:17. It mentions eating up the harvest and consuming their food. I think a portrayal there is given of a locust swarm that would often go through the Middle East and bring absolute devastation and destruction. In fact, if you keep your eyes of the news, you’ll often read of ways that locust swarms today present tremendous problems for people in this part of the world. In Afghanistan, in 2002, they were dealing with the swarm of hundreds of millions of locusts that ultimately affected 4 million people. It was such a severe problem that in order to get rid of these locusts, the people of Afghanistan (10,000 of them) were involved in this. They built trenches, they chased the locusts into the trenches with pieces of plastic and whatever they had, and then ultimately buried them and covered them
up. In 1988, one of the worst locust swarms in history ended up affecting 11 million square miles and 55 countries. Typically a major locust swarm would include clouds of locusts that could extend from a 100 to 150 square miles. This particular one had locust swarms with clouds of 400 square miles, and essentially, involved 50 million locusts that were able to eat 100 tons of food every night. That’s what Judah is about to experience, the armies of Babylon; and God, as the roaring Lion behind all of this, as the rider of the clouds coming in the storm that was going to attack Judah.

**Day of the Lord**

The Lord is using this army to accomplish his purposes. Now there’s also another very important theological concept in the prophets that I want to mention that’s related to these ideas of judgment. When the prophets speak of armies that are going to come to implement God’s judgment on the people, it is often described as the “Day of the Lord.” It’s just a common prophetic expression. In Jeremiah 4:9, we don’t have the term “Day of the Lord,” but in verse 9 it says, “In that day, declares the Lord, courage will fail both king and officials.” So I believe that, as he is describing this devastating judgment, what Jeremiah is doing is that he is portraying this within Israel’s prophetic tradition as the “Day of the Lord.”

When the prophet uses that term, they used it in a way that’s a little bit different than sometimes we think about it in a New Testament perspective. When we hear the “Day of the Lord” we are immediately drawn to the tribulation or the judgment of the last days, and the eschatological judgments that God is going to bring in preparation for his kingdom. The prophets used the term, “Day of the Lord” in a slightly different way. They used the term, “Day of the Lord” to refer both to the judgment that is going to happen in the end times, but also, and probably more often, they used that to refer to the judgment that is going to happen in the near future. Sometimes, for example, as I travel to Virginia to go see beautiful places where we have mountains, you often see two mountain peaks in the distance. They look like they are right together, but as you drive closer or go to
the other side and get a different perspective you come to understand there’s a wide gap between them. So I think sometimes, when the prophets see the coming day of the Lord, they see both the near judgment that’s going to happen in the near future and they, at times, see the distant judgment that is going to happen in the end days of the Great Tribulation. Sometimes it is very difficult as we read the prophets to distinguish the difference between the two, but this expression “Day of the Lord” seems to be related to the idea that God has a day where he, as a warrior, is going to come down and judge his enemies.

Often, in the chronicles of ancient Near Eastern kings or in the records they wrote about their accomplishments, one of the things that is amazing about politicians in the ancient Near East, is that occasionally they lied, fabricated, and exaggerated. I know it is hard to imagine it doesn’t ever happen now, but sometimes they would exaggerate their accomplishments by saying something to the effect of, “I not only defeated my enemy, but I defeated them in a single day.” There’s a passage in some of the Egyptian chronicles that will involve the king moving his troops from places where they obviously couldn’t have traveled to in a single day, but he says, “In one day, I defeated the enemy.” In one of the battles that the Israelites are involved in, “I defeated the Israelites before noon. I took care of them before lunch time.” So the prophetic message is reminds me of trash-talking. God literally will defeat his enemies in a single day, with his power and wrath to do it. “The Day” may refer to an extended period, but it’s as if God gets in his chariot, rides to the earth, the earth melts in his presence, and God simply, by his presence, overwhelms his enemies. The Assyrian kings would often say, “By the power of my splendor I defeated my enemy.” The Lord literally will be able to do that. Now what the prophets wanted the people of Israel to see is that the day of the Lord was the time when God would defeat His enemies.

The element that was difficult for Israel to understand however was that they were the ones who now had become God’s enemies. God had become a free agent; he switched uniforms and now, instead of the holy war traditions where
God would fight for Israel, Israel had become the enemy of God; that is what Jeremiah is alluding to. In that day, the day of the Lord, it’s not going to be the time when God fights for Israel, it’s going to be the time when God fights against Israel. In Amos 5:18-19, Amos (one of the prophetic predecessors to Jeremiah) has already established this idea of turning upside down Israel’s holy war traditions and putting that in the context of the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord now becomes the time when the Lord is going to come down and fight against the people of Israel.

Here’s what Amos says about the coming day of the Lord. Verse 18, “woe to you”, And remember what we hear when we hear the word "Woe" or “Woe” it’s a death sentence. “Woe to you who desire the day of the lord.” Why would you desire the day of the Lord, “it is a day of darkness and not a day of light.” Here’s what’s going on in Israel, they were beginning to be oppressed by the Assyrians and later the Babylonians. The prophet says, based on your holy war traditions, and maybe some of their false prophets of peace, they’re longing for the day of the Lord. We want God to come down and defeat our enemies and to deliver us. They were looking forward to the day of the Lord, the way my kids looked forward to Christmas when they were little children. But Amos said, here’s what you’ve got to understand, the day of the Lord is not going to be a day of light and deliverance for Israel; it is going to be a day of darkness.

Verse 19 in Amos 5: “it’s going to be as if a man fled from a lion.” We’ve already seen that analogy being used in Jeremiah. “And a bear met him, or he went into a house and leaned his hand against the wall and a serpent bit him.” Here’s what the day of the Lord is going to be like for Israel. It’s not a day when God comes down to defeat your enemies. It’s a day when God comes down to defeat you. You’re not going to get away from the judgment. You’re going to be like some who is running away from a lion and you think you’ve got a few steps on him, and you run head-on into a bear. Or maybe somehow, you take a right turn and you get away from the lion and the bear and you go into the house and you
lean with your hand against the wall. You think, “Wow, I avoided that” and a snake comes out of the wall and bites you. You will not avoid the day of God.

In verse 20, “Is not the day of Lord, darkness and not light, in gloom with no brightness in it.” Amos was Jeremiah predecessor; he had established this idea that the day of the Lord was going to be a time of judgment. So the prophets in Jeremiah’s day were saying that the day of the Lord is coming again. Zephaniah is one of Jeremiah’s contemporaries. The day of the Lord is coming and it’s going to be a time of devastation for the people of Israel. Here’s how he describes it. “Be silent before the Lord God, for the day of the Lord is near. The Lord has prepared a sacrifice,” the city of Jerusalem is going to be offered up like sacrifice. Verse 8, “and on the day of that sacrifice, I will punish the officials and the kings sons, and all who array themselves in foreign attire. On that day, I will punish everyone who leaps over the threshold; and those who fill their masters’ house with violence and fraud. On that day declares the Lord, a cry will be hear from the Fish Gate.”

Verse 12, “At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men. I’m going to find every evildoer and punish them. The great day of the Lord is near; it is near and hastening fast.” Jeremiah, chapter 4, verse 9, “In that day, declares the Lord; courage shall fail, both king and officials.” Now you see in all of this, there is ultimately a message for us as well. Remember the day of the Lord is near, and the day of the Lord is far. Every judgment that God has brought in history is a reminder that ultimately there is a final judgment in that last day of the Lord.

Isaiah, when he talks about the day of the Lord in chapter two, it is a judgment where God will bring down the pride of all of humanity. Every people, every nation, every individual will face the judgment of God.

Sowing and Reaping

What the prophets would say is that the judgments that we warned the people about, the coming of the Assyrians, the coming of the Babylonians, every one of them is a reminder of the principle that we discussed at the beginning of
this section. It is the principle of sowing and reaping. If you look at history and think that we can avoid the judgment of God, you are missing the obvious point. Every day of the Lord little “D” in past history, is a reminder of the great day of the Lord, the future time. The Bible says we need to live in light of that and with an awareness of that.

**New Testament Day of the Lord**

I want to conclude this section by reading a New Testament passage from second Peter, chapter 3, verses 10-13 reminding us to live in light of the day of the Lord that is far from the perspective of the prophets. But the day of the Lord that is getting closer every day. Peter says this, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.”

Remember Jeremiah had talked about the undoing of creation. The Babylonian invasion would be like that. This will not be like that, this will be that. Verse 11, here’s the punch line. “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of the Lord, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

I believe that we are living in times like the days of Noah. People are eating and drinking and saying, “Where’s the promise of his coming?” The Lord says, if you want to be reminded of what reality is, look at the past. Every judgment of God in the past, has been a reminder of the day of accounting that is coming in the future. Because of that, as God’s people, we live in light of that. We live in light of the reality of judgment that will fall on those that do not know God. But, we also live in light of the reality of the blessing and salvation. There will come a time when the day of the Lord will be a day of salvation for God’s people. The prophet
spoke of the day of the Lord as something that is near and far. That’s why their message is something that still matter to us today.

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