

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for March 20: God demands obedience from his people_30705

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God demands obedience from his people

Jeremiah 7

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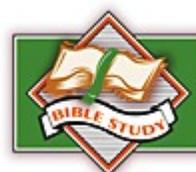
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The Temple Sermon in Jeremiah 7 invokes a number of critical themes for the entire book. In some sense, the claim in chapter 1 that God will set Jeremiah against the entire land—the kings, princes and priests—becomes fully evident in chapter 7 as Jeremiah positions himself at the gate of the temple to announce the hard word of judgment to “all you people of Judah” (v. 2).

The site of salvation and joy will become the site of judgment and destruction—and Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, must station himself “and proclaim there this word” (v. 2).

Avoid misplaced trust (7:1-4)

The challenge issued by Jeremiah in verse 4-“Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord’-could be construed as an attack on the temple itself. In reality, the statement reflects a challenge to more than a temple-it was a challenge to an entire mode of thinking in ancient Israel often referred to as Zion theology.



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The tenets of Zion theology are found throughout the Old Testament, and appear as foundational to much of the literature associated with the pre-exilic period. Central to this theology is the proclamation that God is the Great King (Psalm 48:2). But a critical corollary to this is that the Great King has chosen Jerusalem (also known as Zion) to be his dwelling place (Psalm 78:6-7; Isaiah 8:18). And as the location of God's presence on earth, the city of Jerusalem was to enjoy specific benefits.

Among the specific benefits, the Israelites believed God's choice of Jerusalem had significant implications for the security of Zion. Because the Lord was in Jerusalem, the city was inviolable-it could not fall into the hands of the enemies. This theology served Israel well nearly a century

earlier when Jerusalem was under siege at the hands of Sennacherib and the Assyrians.

Nearly at the point of surrender, King Hezekiah consulted with Isaiah. Isaiah announced the word of God to him: "I will defend this city and save it for my sake and for the sake of David my servant" (Isaiah 36:35). Jerusalem was preserved because its king was in her midst.

Thus, by announcing the destruction of the temple, Jeremiah does more than theologically offend those within the temple complex; he in effect commits treason. He challenges the very security of the city—asserting the Great King no longer would preserve this city from the onslaught of the Babylonians. Jeremiah's act of bold faith (announcing the word of judgment) is perceived by those in the community as a traitorous act, putting him at once against "all you people in Judah" (v. 2).

To be clear, the system of belief had not changed—but the people had. The remaining portion of the sermon critiques the inhabitants of Jerusalem, claiming they must "reform your ways and your actions."

Reforming their ways and actions (vv. 5-11)

In verse 5-7, Jeremiah offers an extended conditional statement that begins "if you will really amend your ways and actions," and continues to list a number of actions. They are to deal with each other honestly, as well as care for the alien, the widow and the orphan. They should not shed innocent blood, nor follow other gods. In essence, Jeremiah issues a summary of the law in Deuteronomy (see 10:18-19; 24:17-22; 27:19)—coupled together are the themes of social justice and obedient devotion.

This same theme appears again in verses 8 through 10. Jeremiah appears to draw from the Ten Commandments, addressing such issues as stealing,

murder, adultery, perjury and following other gods. And as in the former case (vv. 5-7), the prophet begins with laws related to proper treatment of others (social justice) and concludes with an indictment related to their devotion.

In this sermon, Jeremiah refuses to separate their attitude toward God from their attitude toward their neighbor. The sin of the people is not merely the repetition of the phrase “this is the temple of the Lord;” rather, it is the failure of the people to discern and share with God his vision of the moral life called for in the law—a life marked by justice and devotion. The “deceptive words” (*sheqer*) mentioned in verses 3 and 8 refer specifically to the words mentioned in verse 4, but more broadly, refer to the life of deception and falsehood lived out among the people.

Perhaps Israel thought God was unaware of their deception and falsehood apart from the temple complex proper. Yet God announces in verse 11 that the temple has become as a “den of robbers,” a lair for criminals. Rather than being a place where the just and devoted would come to worship the God of their faith, the temple had become a place where the unjust and the unfaithful would attempt to hide.

But in ominous fashion, God announces in verse 11, “I have been watching.” The Hebrew is even more emphatic and reads, “But I, behold, even I have been watching.” The same God who promised Jeremiah he would watch over the fulfillment of his word in Jeremiah 1 is the same watchful God who has observed the disobedience of his people. And it is the watchful God who will cast his people out of his sight (v 15).

Discussion questions

- ◆ Reciting “the temple of the Lord” is not a common occurrence for modern-day Christians. Do they have other mantras or actions they do more from habit and tradition than faith? Do these things have value?

◆ How cognizant are most people of God's view of their actions? If it was a constant thought in your mind, would you act differently?

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