

Explore the Bible: God Judges

May 26, 2023

• *The Explore the Bible lesson for June 11 focuses on Jeremiah 2:1-13.*

Some of my hardest moments in ministry have been responding to parents distraught over a child who has rebelled or wandered away from the faith after leaving home. The parents feel like failures, are disillusioned and wonder where they went wrong. They have leaned heavily into Proverbs 22:6, “Raise up a child...” and wonder why that did not occur in their case.

In times like this, they did not need me to explain that the passage in question was a proverb and therefore, just an expression of how things generally work out. They needed to know that they were not alone and that God himself deals with the same issue—at least, as much as an all-knowing God can have anything akin to disillusionment.

As Jeremiah transitions from his call to delivering his message to Israel, the prophet vividly portrays God’s frustration towards Israel surrounding the disconnect between his investment in them and their disobedience. He builds a legal case against the people, identifying the multiple ways they have wasted the relationship and resources he has provided them. His goal is not simply to judge Israel, however, but to open their eyes to their foolishness so that they might return to him.

Remembered? (Jeremiah 2:1-3)

God begins his appraisal of Israel’s status by talking about remembering who they were at the start of their relationship. The word for remember is rich in biblical theology. While here God is obviously talking about recollecting an earlier era, the use of the term would undoubtedly draw the Israelite mind to its use in covenantal terms.

Throughout Scripture, God refers to remembering his covenant (cf. Exodus 2:24, Ezekiel 16:60; Luke 1:72). The idea in such passages is not that God forgot their covenant and then recalled it. Rather, it is that he is moving on his promises, enacting them for the benefit of the people. The word's usage here would have both reminded Israel of the long-term relationship they had with him and that the relationship is imbedded in a covenant with both blessings and expectations in it.

As an outgrowth of this covenant, God gave Israel the special status of being first fruits. Like much of the covenant, this status was both a blessing and a responsibility. The blessing aspect is expressed in the fact that God punished whoever attacked (that is, "ate") Israel. The responsibility portion grows out of the fact that being first suggests there will be others who follow. Israel's call always had been to be a light to the nations.

In what ways have you seen God act on his covenant with you since coming to Christ? What are some realities where God both blessed you and called you to service since coming to Christ?

Forgotten? (Jeremiah 2:4-8)

The frustration in God's words is palpable as we move into the segment of the oracle in which he outlines what Israel has become. He asks the question reminiscent of the parental pathos mentioned above, "What did I do wrong?"

In God's case, of course, the intention was not to communicate failure, but to heighten the case against Israel's sin. Since God's ways are always perfect, asking the questions points the responsibility even more clearly at Israel's sins. Still, there is imbedded in the expression an implicit sorrow at the way things have gone.

The essence of the decline seems to be in Israel's failure to recognize

where their benefits came from. The cessation of asking after the Lord reflects a people who have reached a point of entitlement concerning their situation. When people lose a sense of where they have come from, it becomes easier to settle for something else, something less. The distance we can go from God when we forget he is our source is seemingly unlimited when one considers the depth of depravity witnessed among humanity throughout history.

What are you doing to stay close to God and be reminded of his blessings? What steps would you lead someone through who you see beginning to forget where his or her blessings come from?

Exchanged? (Jeremiah 2:9-13)

The trial comes to a climax with the official charges. Israel is doing things you would not even find done among the pagans. Nobody abandons their god for another, and yet that is exactly what Israel has done. The glory that led them through the wilderness, that inhabited the tabernacle and the temple and that had broken out against their enemy had been exchanged by something man-made. The living water, always present, always nourishing was replaced by water stored in a location that could not sustain or provide for Israel for long.

Though not explicitly stated in this passage, the mention of glory and living water are invitations to return to what they once had. The fact that God is speaking at all is an indication that he has not given up. The images that he uses are also images that can transfer locations, just as they did in the wilderness. This will be important as Israel moves toward the judgment of exile that lay ahead in Jeremiah. When they get into that wilderness, perhaps they will remember the previous wilderness experience.

What realities in your life have you replaced God with, even in small ways? What aspects of your relationship with God have moved with you through

the various parts of your life?

Timothy Pierce, Ph.D., is associate professor of Christian Studies at East Texas Baptist University.