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Disaster Follows Disaster, The Whole Land Lies in Ruins 4: 19-31

Disaster follows disaster, the whole land lies in ruins DIG: What do we discover about the character of YHVH in this passage? Why has God brought the Babylonians to attack His people? Can Jerusalem be saved? How does Jeremiah feel when he learns his nation will be destroyed? What does his pain reveal about him? What excuse, if any, do the people have? Didn't they know any better, or did they know only too well what they were doing? If they were ignorant, would you say it is right to punish people for that? What vision does Jeremiah now have of life after the Babylonians invasion? To what does Yirmeyahu compare the aftermath? What are the three different responses to the invasion? What do they represent?

REFLECT: How do you feel when you hear that a wicked person has suffered? How does your response compare to Jeremiah's? If your feelings are different, why do you feel that way? How should you feel? Do you ever see people reacting to God's judgment in one of the ways described in 4:29-31? How should they have responded instead? Have you experienced God as Judge or Avenger? How did the experience affect you? How do you reconcile the pictures of YHVH as the loving parent with the LORD the avenging judge? Think of a place that has been devastated recently by war or disaster? Do you ever experience something like Jeremiah's concern and agony when you learn of people's suffering? Why or why not?

During the reign of Josiah

The images seen here all point to the stunning conclusion that death was coming to **Yerushalayim**. **Jeremiah** responded to the news by crying out in **anguish**. This was not something theoretical; **the prophet** lived through the sad years of Babylon's attacks and suffered right along with **the people**. By vocation **Yirmeyahu** was called upon to announce destruction and judgment, but by nature

he had a deep love for **his** own **people**. Therefore, **His** whole life was a painful paradox. Little wonder that at times **he** burst into tears.[63]

He knew that before long the whole nation would share **his agony**. **Oh, my anguish, my anguish** (the Hebrew literally reads: *my bowels, my bowels* because **the Jews** considered *the bowels* as the seat of the emotions)**! I writhe in pain. Oh, the agony of my heart! My heart pounds within me, I cannot keep silent. For I have heard the sound of the trumpet; I have heard the battle cry. Yirmeyahu** is overcome with emotion as **he** envisions the destruction to come. **The prophet** saw the invasion as though it were actually happening. **Jeremiah** laments: **Disaster follows disaster; the whole Land lies in ruins. In an instant my tents are destroyed, my shelter in a moment (4:19-20). He** felt alone and was swallowed up in the storm that **he** had prophesied would come upon **the Land** because of **Ha'Shem's** anger when **He** saw **the people** who had **no understanding** and were **skilled at doing evil (4:22-26)**. **Jeremiah** was not the cause of the storm as the word "called" implies (**to see link click Aj – The Call of Jeremiah**); rather it was **God's** anger at what **He** saw in **the people** that brought about the storm.

Yirmeyahu saw **the enemy flag**. It was closer than **he** and **his** contemporaries ever thought it would be. **How long must I see the battle standard and hear the sound of the shofar,** urging **the people** to their battle stations to confront the oncoming **enemy (4:21)? He** knows it means death. It is death as dramatic and personal as anyone could imagine. Basically, **he** says, "how much longer must **I** see these **visions**?" **God** does not give **him** a timetable, but **his visions** will continue for forty more years.

ADONAI now speaks. **He** does not answer the question directly but shows why the tragedy must occur. It is the same reason we have encountered before **(2:8)** and will encounter again **(9:3)**: **My people are fools; they do not know Me** beyond any superficial acquaintance**. They are senseless children; they have no understanding.** In an ironic reversal of **Proverbs 1:2-3 the people** were **skilled** (Hebrew: *hakamim*, or *wise*) **in doing evil,** but ignorant **on how to do good (4:22). The LORD** tells **His prophet**, "As long as these things are true, **you** will continue to see these **visions** of judgment." Ignorance of covenant would lead to invasion and destruction. Others may not know yet, but **Yirmeyahu** already had this knowledge tearing at **his** very soul, even as it must have torn at **YHVH**.[64]

A vision of total chaos: Suddenly the tone of the rhetoric escalates. As soon as

Jeremiah asks **God,** "How much longer must **I** see these **visions**," **God** gives **him** another one. The judgment that was to befall **Y'hudah** was seen as cosmic hyperbole. Similar examples of exaggeration in prophetic judgments include **Deuteronomy 28:25-46; Isaiah 3:3:8-26, 24:1-23, 33:9, 34:1-15; Jeremiah 15:8; Amos 8:9; Nahum 1:4-5; Habakkuk 1:6-9, 3:10-12;** and **Zechariah 2:4-5.** Another factor that comes into play here is the fact that prophecies of judgment were seen as a foreshadowing of the final eschatological future judgment that is to come. Each historical judgment was therefore understood to be symbolic of **the LORD's** righteous outworking of **His** justice.[65]

The prophet saw a **vision** of **the earth, and it was formless and empty; and of the heavens, and their light was gone. I looked at the mountains, and they were quaking; all the hills were swaying. I looked, and there were no people; every bird in the sky had flown away. I looked, and the fruitful Land was a desert; all its towns lay in ruins** at the presence of **YHVH,** and from the face of **His fierce anger (4:23-26).** Order seemed to return to confusion. The earth wasn't destroyed, but **just as the earth was formed out of chaos, Judah will return to chaos . . . the inevitable result of sin. Ha'Shem's** patience had finally been exhausted.

The explanation of the vision: Lest these impassioned words be dismissed as poetic imagery lacking any real substance, they are reinforced by a final word from **YHVH Himself**. **This is what ADONAI** says: **The whole Land will be ruined, though I will not destroy it completely. Therefore the heavens and the earth will mourn because I have spoken and will not relent** (see **Cw – At the Potter's House**)**, I have decided and will not turn back (shuwb)**. It is surely no accident that a word like **shuwb**, which points to **Y'hudah's** only hope appears in this place of hopelessness **(4:27-28;** also see **Hosea 4:3).**[66] **Judah will be punished, but a remnant will remain, a view held by other prophets also.**

The Fulfillment of the vision: The destruction of **Judah** by **the** invading **army** was how **God** intended to fulfill this prophecy. **The LORD of heaven's** angelic **armies** describes the three different responses to **the** invading **army**. These actions are not what **the LORD** was telling **the Israelites** to do, He wanted them to surrender to **the Babylonians**, it's describing what **they** did as Nebuchadnezzar approached. **He** uses three different metaphors.

First, **some** of **the Israelites** would try to escape by running away. **At the sound of horsemen and archers, every** small, indefensible **town** on the way to **Jerusalem takes to flight.** This refers to **archers** in chariots. **The Babylonians** did have cavalry units (evidently composed of specially trained tribal people), but the difficulties faced by a man on a **horse** while using a bow and arrow made it easier to shoot from a chariot. Mesopotamian bas-reliefs show a span of two or three horses drawing the war-chariot; one man held the reigns of **the horses** while the other was a **bowman**. **Some** of the Jews would try to **go into the thickets; some climb up among the rocks** that were often used as shelters during Palestine's stormy history**.** The net result, however, was that **all** of **the** smaller **towns** were **deserted** with **no one living in them (4:29).**

Secondly, **some** try to make **themselves** attractive to the enemy. The picture of **Isra'el** as a prostitute (see **At – Unfaithful Isra'el**) is shown as **she** attempts to save **herself** by dressing up to save **herself** at the last minute **(Ezekiel 23:40)**. **What are you doing, you whose destruction is certain? Why dress yourself in scarlet and put on jewels of gold? Why highlight, or paint your eyes with makeup?** It was a silver-white metallic paint that was mixed with some red and black coloring. Women applied it on the outside of **the eyes** to make **the eyes** look bigger and give **the eyes** an unnatural shinning brilliance. **This was a common practice in the near east during biblical times** (some things never change). But it was all for nothing: **You adorn yourself in vain. Completely unimpressed by the seductive charms of Tziyon's inhabitants, her attackers did not stop their brutal treatment of the Jews in any way. Your lovers despise you; they want to kill you (4:30). Those whom Isra'el courted (Babylon and Egypt) were going to be her cold-hearted enemies.**

Thirdly, the metaphor is again dramatically shifted. Out of the resolve of **YHVH**, the army still approaches. Suddenly **Judah** is not an alluring prostitute, but is cast in a new role as a helpless, exposed woman in labor. **I hear** the **cry** of pain, **like that**

of a woman in labor, the groans of a woman giving birth to her first child. The prophet listens more carefully. **It is the daughter of Jerusalem gasping for breath,** stretching out **her** hands as **she** sinks exhausted to the ground**, crying out, "Help! I'm being murdered" (4:31 NLT).** Finally – but alas much too late – are **her** eyes opened to the realities of **her** own foolishness: **her lovers** (Hebrew: *hogebim*) were in truth **her murderers** (Hebrew: *horegim*).

Jerusalem was under judgment, about to be done in. **She** may not know it yet, but **the City** is as shameful as a prostitute, as helpless as a woman in labor, exposed and endangered now because the betrayed husband has had enough and will tolerate it no more. Death must come. No one stands with **the Sacred City** to grieve . . . or to rescue.[67]