

I Will Take Away Their Harvest, There Will Be No Grapes on the Vine

8: 4-17

DIG: Why is God amazed by the people of Zion? What negative action do they cling to? How are even the birds smarter than they? Who managed to turn the Torah into falsehood? What had they done to deceive the people? What were their motives? How will Ha'Shem punish them? Is 8:13 a physical threat, a reflection of their spiritual condition, or both? How would you describe the people's feelings about the coming invasion? What was the cry of the people in the face of the LORD's judgment?

REFLECT: God's chosen were stubborn people at times. What are some of the ways you've been stubborn in your relationships that causes that stubbornness? What are some steps you can take to overcome a tendency to be stubborn toward Him? What "social sins" prevail today, as in Jeremiah's day? What other parallels do you see between the people and the leadership of Judah and those of your country? How do you respond to them? What biblical principles do people reject today? How do you respond to this rejection? Upon what human institutions do people pin their hopes for "peace now?" What might Jeremiah say to them today?

609 BC during the three-month reign of Jehoahaz
This near historical prophecy would be fulfilled in 586 BC

Judah's life consisted of turning away (**shuwb**) from ADONAI, who is the only One who can give life. Jeremiah's analysis leads to the thin hope that Y'hudah may turn back (**shuwb**) to life and avoid the destruction already decreed by Ha'Shem (see my commentary on **Jonah Ax- The Ninevites Believed in God**). Turning away is not only disobedient, but unnatural, violating the true character of the Israelites. The LORD asked a series of questions exposing the stubbornness of His people.

Continuing to turn away: [Jeremiah] said to them, "This is what ADONAI says," When people fall down, do they not get up? When someone turns away (**shuwb**), do they not return (**shuwb**)? The point is that Y'hudah's turning away was unnatural because one naturally gets up after falling. One naturally returns home after going out for the day. But not so with Judah, her turning is continuous. Why then have these people turned away (**shuwb**)? Why is Jerusalem continually guilty of apostasy (from **shuwb**)? They cling to their deceit; they refuse to return (**shuwb**) (8:4-5). She continued to turn away with brazenness and in her stubbornness refused to return to the lighted path of the Torah.

The metaphor of fickleness as an unnatural act is explored by comparing the actions of the people of Judah with other creatures of God (Isaiah 1:2-3). I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. None of them repent of their wickedness (Hebrew: *ra*), saying: What have I done? Everyone turns (*shuwb*) to his or her own way like a horse charging into battle (8:6). As a horse rushes headlong into battle, not thinking that it will lead to its destruction, so do the Israelites rush thoughtlessly on their course of destruction, sinning and turning away from the LORD. As ADONAI and Jeremiah observe the situation, they see no repentance. The people of Judah hurl themselves headlong over the cliff to destruction.

Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of the migration. Instinctively migratory birds know the times of their coming and going; which are the natural laws of their species; yet the people of God, though being able to reason, do not know the decrees of ADONAI that are the natural law of their existence. But My people do not know (Hebrew: *yada*) the requirements of the LORD (8:7). The verb to know carries a deeper significance than that of intellectual knowledge. There is something of personal commitment at the emotional and volitional level as well. But even nature observes natural law, but Judah does not. That which should have been natural had become unnatural. Then Jeremiah becomes more specific.

The rejection of the Torah: Judah felt superior in her wisdom to other nations because she had the Torah. Here Jeremiah elaborates on the last part of verse 7, that the people did not know the requirements of the LORD, meaning they had rejected the Torah. Despite this, however, they objected, saying, "How can you say that! We are wise, ADONAI's Torah is with us." But the truth was that the lying pen of the scribes has turned the Torah into a lie (8:8 CJB). The school of the scribes in that day went through the Torah and interpreted it to their own liking, permitting that which was forbidden and forbidding that which was permitted. They wrote things that were false as though it came from Torah itself, and were teaching it to the people. The Levites were not faithful in teaching the Scriptures and were some of Jeremiah's worst enemies.

The contrast is now sharply drawn. Therefore, in reality, those who claim to be wise are put to shame. They are alarmed and feel entrapped because, snared by their foolishness, they have actually rejected the word of ADONAI. So they ask rhetorically: What kind of wisdom is this you have (8:9 CJB)? No "wisdom" can be truly wise when its source rejects the Word of God. And because they had disobeyed and rejected Torah as it was passed down to them and accepted the false interpretation made by the Scribes, their wives will be passed to other men and their fields to new owners. There were four reasons why they would suffer in this manner: From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit.

The leaders were treating the nation's sin lightly . . . they would dress the wound of My people as though it were not serious when in fact it was terminal. Their **false prophecies** led to false security. "Peace, peace," they say, when there is no peace. After being **caught practicing idolatry**, are they ashamed of their detestable conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush because their consciences had been seared as with a hot iron (First Timothy 4:2). So this was the reason for their judgment. They will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when they are punished, says the LORD (8:10-12).

The horror of the coming doom: I will take away their harvest, declares ADONAI. There will be such utter destruction that there will be no grapes on the vine. There will be no figs on the tree, and their leaves will wither. What I have given them will be taken from them (8:13). In 2:21 Jeremiah described Isra'el as a choice vine that turned into a corrupt, wild vine. In 6:9 the remnant of Y'hudah is described as being picked over again and again as when a harvester checks each vine several times to pick the grapes that were missed. Now here in 8:13 this vine is completely fruitless. In the last analysis, the material blessings that Ha'Shem had given her as reflected in the Torah for obedience will be removed because of her disobedience. **This passage, starting with this verse and continuing to 9:23, is the Haftarah on the ninth of Av** (see Gc - **The Destruction of Solomon's Temple on Tisha B'Av in 586 BC**).

Here Jeremiah quotes what the people will say when the Babylonians are at the gate of Jerusalem. Why are we sitting here? Gather together! Let us flee to the fortified cities and perish there! For the LORD our God has doomed us to perish and given us poisoned water to drink, because we have sinned against Him. By the time they realized this - judgment would already be at their door. The promises of false prophets proved to be false indeed. We hoped for peace but no good has come, for a time of healing but there is only terror because the Babylonians would fill the Land (8:14-15).

In his **near historical prophecy**, Jeremiah sees the invasion begin in earnest. The snorting of the enemy's horses is heard from Dan; at the neighing of their stallions the whole Land trembles. Dan is the furthest point in the northern kingdom of Isra'el. She is always invaded from the north because of the geography. Still no specific nation is mentioned at this point, although the readers of Jeremiah were all too aware it had been Babylon. The judgment was inescapable. They have come to devour the Land and everything in it, the City and all who live there. See, I will send venomous snakes among you, **descriptive of the invading army**, vipers that cannot be charmed, and they will bite you, declares ADONAI (8:16-17).