

Handout: Jeremiah Lesson 6

In Jeremiah 9:12-13, in answer to Jeremiah's three questions in 9:11, Yahweh gives three reasons why He has ordained destruction and exile for the citizens of Judah and Jerusalem:

1. The people abandoned the Law of His covenant.
2. They rebelled against Him through a desire to forge their own destinies.
3. They adopted the worship of the Baals (false gods).

Baal means "owner" and by extension "lord" or "master" in the Northwest Semitic languages spoken in the Levant. A concubine called the man who owned her "my baal," but a married woman called her husband "my man" (see Hos 2:18/16). Baal was the honorific title for the god of storms (rain), and fertility who became the principal god in the Canaanite pantheon. Every pagan city that worshipped Baal had its own concept of the false god and expressed devotion to Baal in various forms of worship since there was no central religious authority.

The title "Yahweh Sabaoth," "Yahweh of the Hosts (angelic army)" is used more frequently as Jeremiah's oracles continue (9:6, 14, 16; 10:16). "Sabaoth" is the transliteration of the Hebrew word *tsebhah*, meaning "hosts," "armies." It designates Yahweh as commander of the armies of the angelic host who controls the destiny of Heaven and earth and the defender of His faithful covenant people against all enemies and also Yahweh who brings judgment as in verses 14-15.

9:14 *So Yahweh Sabaoth, the God of Israel, says this, "Now I shall give this people wormwood to eat and poisoned water to drink."*

Yahweh's concluding oracle in this section moves from indictment (verses 12-13) to judgment (verse 14-15). The Hebrew word translated "wormwood" is *la'anan* (*Strong's Concordance*, H3939), and comes from the Hebrew root meaning "to curse." In Scripture, the words wormwood and poisoned water are metaphors for bitterness, affliction, suffering, and death (i.e., see Lam 3:15, 19; Rev 8:10-11), and always occurs in connection with judgment and the result of sin. Wormwood is mentioned ten times in nine verses in the Bible (Dt 29:18; Prov 5:4; Jer 9:15; 23:15; Lam 3:15, 19; Amos 5:7; 6:12 in the Hebrew as *la'anan* and in Rev 8:11 twice in the Greek, *apsinthos*).

Notice the progression of the mourning in 9:9-21:

1. First, Jeremiah weeps and mourns (Jer 9:9-10).
2. Then, the women are told they should prepare to lead the mourning (Jer 9:16-18).
3. Finally, the entire city of Jerusalem is heard chanting dirges led by Jerusalem's women and their daughters (Jer 9:19-21).

In 9:22-23, Jeremiah says the only boasting one should make is of understanding and knowledge of Yahweh. Verse 22 defines "knowledge of Yahweh" as the sum of true religion. Religion is not a feeling, emotion, or a series of meaningless actions. True religion is the moral virtue by which a person is disposed to render God worship and righteous service as an expression of a love relationship that comes from an intimate knowledge and understanding of God in the context of *hesed*, covenant love.

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Chapter 10 is divided into two parts: the first part is a hymn that contrasts meaningless idols with the majesty of the living God who created the heavens and the earth in verses 2-16. The second part is a call for judgment against those who stand in opposition to God in verses 17-25.

Chapter 10:1-16 is a hymn that switches back and forth between the condemnation of foreign idols and Yahweh the One True God in verses 2-16:

Verses 2-5 foreign idols
Verses 6-7 Yahweh, King of the nations
Verses 8-9 foreign idols
Verse 10 Yahweh the true God, the living God, and everlasting King
Verse 11 foreign gods
Verses 12-13 Yahweh God who has sovereignty over Creation
Verses 14-15 foreign idols
Verse 16 Yahweh, heritage of Jacob, maker of everything

Two themes are the focus of Chapter 10:1-16:

1. the nothingness of false gods (10:1-5)
2. the uniqueness of Yahweh the Creator (10:6-16)

Jeremiah 10:1-16 recalls the same themes preached in Isaiah 40:12-31.

Notice the repetition of the heavens and the earth that provide a link to the parts of the oracle in 10:2-13:

- heavens/earth in verses 2 and 10
- heavens/earth/earth/heavens in verse 11
- earth/heavens/heaven/earth in verses 12-13

10:18 *For Yahweh says this, “Now I shall throw out the inhabitants of the country, this time, and bring distress on them, so that they may find me!”*

Verse 18 proclaims the redemptive purpose of the people’s suffering. The theme of redemptive suffering appears frequently in the writings of prophets, beginning with Moses in Deuteronomy 4:29-31 (see Rom 8:16-17; CCC 307, 618, 1460, 1508).

10:25 is Jeremiah’s call for divine judgment. God judges nations because:

1. They do not acknowledge Yahweh (Jer 10:25).
2. They harm His covenant people (Jer 10:25).
3. They are wicked (Jer 25:31).
4. They believe they control their destiny in their excessive pride (Jer 50:31-32).
5. They worship pagan gods (Jer 50:38; 51:47, 52).

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