

6. THE COVENANT BROKEN

JEREMIAH 11:1-17

¹The word that came to Jeremiah from YHWH: ²Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ³You shall say to them, Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel: Cursed be anyone who does not heed the words of this covenant, ⁴which I commanded your ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron-smelter, saying, Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you. So shall you be my people, and I will be your God, ⁵that I may fulfil the oath that I swore to your ancestors, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as at this day. Then I answered, "So be it, YHWH."

⁶And YHWH said to me: Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: Hear the words of this covenant and do them. ⁷For I solemnly warned your ancestors when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. ⁸Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of an evil will. So I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not.

⁹And YHWH said to me: Conspiracy exists among the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁰They have turned back to the iniquities of their ancestors of old, who refused to heed my words; they have gone after other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken the covenant that I made with their ancestors.

Debate concerning the authorship of this prose section (11:1-14) continues. I offer you the conclusions of McKane:

The intention of verses 1-14 is to represent that the prophet Jeremiah was actively engaged on behalf of the Deuteronomic measures of Josiah's reform and that he subscribed to a theology of prophecy which coincided with the Deuteronomic-Deuteronomistic one. The problem is then to explain why he was a prophet of doom. The reconciliation is achieved by representing that he was forbidden by Yahweh to intercede. But the passage has probably been built up in a quite unsystematic way by successive supplementations over an unknown period of time. Thus by its very nature it will defeat all attempts to date it or to explain its conceptual texture in terms of a particular period. It is not earlier than the exile (cf. v. 8), but otherwise its literary history cannot be recovered in detail.

The Deuteronomy School is portraying Jeremiah as a preacher of the Covenant and a spokesman of the Law.

In verses 1-5 YHWH is portrayed as speaking to Jeremiah who concedes that the people have deserved the 'curse' (verse 3) included in the covenant (see Deuteronomy 27:15-26). They have not listened or obeyed, and so have forfeited any right to YHWH's blessing.

Verses 6-8 recalls the essential elements of the sins of their ancestors and the consequent punishment.

In verses 9-10 Jeremiah accuses his contemporaries of the same infidelity to the covenant.

They refuse to listen to God. Now God refuses to listen to them (verse 11). They will discover that the gods to whom they have turned will be of no help when disaster strikes. There are echoes of verses 11-13 in 2:27-28 and 14:8.

It was expected that a prophet's intercession would be successful. That is part of why YHWH raised them up. Jeremiah was a special case. His role was to announce doom, and he was forbidden to intercede (see also 7:16; 14:11-12; 15:1).

The tragedy of Judah's fate is highlighted by the term 'beloved' (compare 12:7). The beloved has become a harlot (see chapter 2); the wife has been divorced (see chapter 3). Once again we are told that cult is unacceptable from people who obstinately reject YHWH's will and refuse to change.

The people are responsible for what will happen to them. They have been unfaithful to YHWH. They have placed themselves outside the protection of his blessing. Having abandoned YHWH they have no defence against the imminent conflagration.

¹¹Therefore, thus says YHWH, assuredly I am going to bring disaster upon them that they cannot escape; though they cry out to me, I will not listen to them. ¹²Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the gods to whom they make offerings, but they will never save them in the time of their trouble. ¹³For your gods have become as many as your towns, O Judah; and as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars you have set up to shame, altars to make offerings to Baal.

¹⁴As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble.

**¹⁵What right has my beloved
in my house?
She has done vile deeds?
Can vows and sacrificial flesh
avert your doom?
Can you then exult?**

**¹⁶YHWH once called you, "A green olive tree, fair with goodly fruit";
but with the roar of a great tempest
he will set fire to it,
and its branches will be consumed.**

¹⁷YHWH of hosts, who planted you, has pronounced evil against you, because of the evil that the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done, provoking me to anger by making offerings to Baal.

