

## REpent OF INJUSTICE

Lesson Scripture: Jeremiah 22

Focus Scripture: Jeremiah 22:1-10

*Key Verse: Act with justice and righteousness. Jeremiah 22:3b (NRSV)*

### JEREMIAH 22:1-10 (NRSV)

1 Thus says the Lord: Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word,

2 and say: Hear the word of the Lord, O King of Judah sitting on the throne of David—you, and your servants, and your people who enter these gates.

3 Thus says the Lord: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place.

4 For if you will indeed obey this word, then through the gates of this house shall enter kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their servants, and their people.

5 But if you will not heed these words, I swear by myself, says the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation.

6 For thus says the Lord concerning the house of the king of Judah; You are like Gilead to me, like the summit of Lebanon; but I swear that I will make you a desert, an uninhabited city.

7 I will prepare destroyers against you, all with their weapons; they shall cut down your choicest cedars and cast them into the fire.

8 And many nations will pass by this city, and all of them will say one to another, “Why has the Lord dealt in this way with that great city?”

9 And they will answer, “Because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord their God, and worshiped other gods and served them.”

### JEREMIAH 22:1-10 (KJV)

1 Thus saith the Lord; Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word,

2 And say, Hear the word of the Lord, O king of Judah, that sittest upon the throne of David, thou, and thy servants, and thy people that enter in by these gates:

3 Thus saith the Lord; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.

4 For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people.

5 But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation.

6 For thus saith the Lord unto the king's house of Judah; Thou art Gilead unto me, and the head of Lebanon: yet surely I will make thee a wilderness, and cities which are not inhabited.

7 And I will prepare destroyers against thee, every one with his weapons: and they shall cut down thy choice cedars, and cast them into the fire.

8 And many nations shall pass by this city, and they shall say every man to his neighbour, Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this great city?

9 Then they shall answer, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them.

10 Do not weep for him who is dead, nor bemoan him; weep rather for him who goes away, for he shall return no more to see his native land.

10 Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.

**VOCABULARY**

- **Paradox** – Seemingly contradicting conditions.

**INTRODUCTION**

This scripture passage is very easy to follow. It falls naturally into four sections. In verses 1-5 God made a simple call to the house of David to change course, repent, and return to the Lord. In the next two verses (6 and 7), God warned about the pending judgment. Verses 8 and 9 look at the extent of the pending destruction, and how people would react to it.



God always leaves it up to us to exercise our free will.

It would be a great devastation that would get global attention. Finally, in verses 10 to 12, we see messages about Josiah's sons. Note that Josiah had been a good king. You will also want to note that the events Jeremiah saw in chapter 22 have a striking parallel in the New Testament. It was similar to the spiritual desolation which Jesus saw and commented on in Matthew 23:37-39. These passages

show how God in acts of pure love tried to steer people from paths of destruction.

As it was then, so it is today. God always leaves it up to us to exercise our free will. We get a chance to choose right and live; or choose evil and suffer. Therefore,

we must pay attention to the messages God may send to us through God's faithful servants among us. The Lord does not send spooky spirits to warn us. The messages come through humans just like us. What does the adage say? To be forewarned is to be forearmed!

**TELLING THE BIBLE STORY**

If you read Jeremiah 22 casually, all you will see are judgments, gloom, and doom. On a closer reading, however, you will see an amazing story of God's fairness, love, and mercy. For in this chapter, God tells King Jehoiakim what he must do to ensure that his family (children of King David) continues as the rulers of the nation. Out of the special love

God had for that family, and in respect of the Lord's promise to King David, God forewarned the king of the dangers of being disobedient to God's rules of justice. It was therefore an act of love that God sent the prophet Jeremiah to talk prophetically to the king. And the message was simple: rule justly. In plain words, the king, his government, and the ruling class must not rob, defraud, or oppress poor and helpless people. Note that in that group of poor and helpless persons, God included foreigners. These were people from other nations who were in the country for one reason or another. The shedding of innocent blood was also addressed in the warning (verse 3).

In verses 4-5 God took the position which God takes about all divine commandments. God leaves it up to the individual to make a choice. Obedience brings blessings; disobedience brings disasters. Yes, the king and his family were special people in God's sight. Yet, God was going to tear them down and ruin them, if they chose to disobey God. God was serious about this matter! God

showed how serious God was when he swore by himself. This is one of those rare events in scripture where we find God swearing by his own honor. You can read Jeremiah 49:13 and 51:14 to see other instances of such an oath. Also note that in scripture there is no stronger affirmation.

So the warning in the passage was a stern warning. Still, it was a warning born

out of divine love. And it was not a complex message. If the king and his family decided to disobey God, they would come crashing down from privileged to pitiful. The fall would be so dramatic and the destruction so devastating it would make world news. People who see or hear about it would wonder how God could be so

mean to a royal family. Eventually, they would understand the fall was a result of rebellion and disobedience. People who reject God can expect to feel the pain of God's rejection.

### **SANKOFA**

Sometimes the things we read in the Bible can seem so remote from the world



**Obedience  
brings blessings;  
disobedience brings  
disasters.**

in which we now live. If we are diligent, we can find remarkable modern-day similarities. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire) we can see a perfect illustration of a leader who fell from splendor and extravagance. He had to flee into exile where he died, away from the splendid palaces he had built. Those luxurious palaces which were once wonders of the world, are now wonders of ruin. Here is a summary of the story in the online *Guardian* (guardian.com) by David Smith in Gbadolite, February 10, 2015. In that article, the writer highlighted the rise and fall of President Mobutu. In that country, one of the poorest in the world, once stood a network of truly opulent presidential palaces. Some estimates put the cost of these palaces at over \$400 million, in a country full of desperately poor people.

In 1997 Mobutu was forced to flee into Morocco, leaving behind the extravagant lifestyle and palaces. He died in that country of prostate cancer. In the article, the writer referred to Mobutu as “the looter-in-chief.” After he fled his country, the palaces were looted and stripped

of all their valuables and furnishings. Today, what was once a wonder of the world, attracting planet-wide admiration, is nothing but a “pathetic and pitiful shell, a mockery of Mobutu’s insane opulence.” A local resident is quoted as saying, “We are not happy how much Mobutu spent while local people were suffering, although he brought us gifts and clothes and money.”

Our brothers and sisters in Africa have seen both the blessings and curses that leaders brought on countries by their obedience or disobedience to the laws of justice.

If you read the above article with an eye on Jeremiah 22, focus on verses 13-16. Which parts of that passage would you apply to what was revealed in the story? Our brothers and sisters in Africa have seen both the blessings and curses that leaders brought on countries by their obedience or disobedience to the laws of justice.

### CASE STUDY

Is it reasonable to expect to see a just government on this earth? Yes, it is. The eight-year administration of President Barack Obama gave a glimpse of what that government would look like. Of course, not everyone was happy with President Obama’s administration. Some

of us, with good justification, still question the wisdom of a few positions taken on certain social and moral issues. Be that as it may, the administration had a public face of decency and fairness.

For eight years we saw or heard of no scandals or embarrassing, shady dealings. There was definitely a move to ensure fairness and equality for all people. As far as we know, the courts were given the freedom to make rulings. Some of these judgments went against the government. And, that is a feature we see when the courts are allowed the freedom to act justly. Also, we can note how that administration fought to put medical care services within the reach of all citizens. That was commendable. Now, look again at verses 13-16 of Jeremiah 22 and answer this same question. Which part of that passage can you apply to what you have heard about President Obama's administration?

### LIFE APPLICATION

Today's scripture focuses on the quality of government of the kings from

King David's family line. This raises for us a very engaging question: to what extent can we expect justice through secular political processes? There is no clear answer to this. Yet consider it, really consider it. Sometimes, it seems we have to choose from people, all of whom have serious moral and spiritual deficiencies. In other words, the choice may be between the bad and the worst. And, the choices we make will determine how we

participate in political elections and referenda in our country.

Verses 13-14 show clearly that God keeps a record of how we think about and get money and material possessions. If we get them by robbing or defrauding people in any form, it is to our discredit. So, to what extent do you

consider thoughts like these when making decisions about money matters? This consideration extends to where we choose to work, and or the clients we serve. To what extent are we guilty of defrauding people, if we facilitate people and businesses that defraud people? Take time to ponder these matters.

Jeremiah 22:15 stands in harmony

Verses 13-14 show clearly that God keeps a record of how we think about and get money and material possessions.

with Jesus' teaching in Luke 12, especially verse 15. As Christians we are compelled to follow these teachings. Therefore, check if you judge people by what they own and/or how they appear. If you were to spot an honest light within your heart, what would it say about this matter? Lastly, consider this. The collective actions of the individuals in a nation give the nation its flavor and reputation. Therefore, we have double responsibility when it comes to the level of justice in our nation. First, we must ensure that we do all we can to follow God's principle of justice. Second, we must try to influence others to adopt these principles as well. What are you doing with this second responsibility? Something to think about!

## QUESTIONS

1. In what ways do you see God's love displayed in acts of divine punishment?
2. What events, if any, can you identify as acts of divine punishment in modern history?
3. Why is it necessary for God to punish all acts of injustice and idolatry, including our own acts of injustice?

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

To meet God's standards of Justice, we must first surrender to Christ and get the help of the Holy Spirit. To remind us of this, end with the hymn, "All to Jesus I Surrender" (AME Church Hymnal #251).

**Prayer:** Help us, dear Father, to raise our behavior to your standard of justice. Amen.

## HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

May 18-May 24

<b>Monday</b>	Deuteronomy 24:17-22 (Justice for Aliens, Orphans, and Widows)
<b>Tuesday</b>	Deuteronomy 17:18-20 (God Requires Godly Rule by Kings)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Psalms 15 (Who May Enter God's Holy Presence?)
<b>Thursday</b>	Jeremiah 22:11-19 (God's Justice for the Unjust King)
<b>Friday</b>	Jeremiah 22:20-23 (The City Suffers for Its Disobedience)
<b>Saturday</b>	Jeremiah 22:24-30 (Injustice Ends the Line of David)
<b>Sunday</b>	Jeremiah 22:1-10 (Repent of Misdeeds and Unjust Actions)