

## Double Conspiracy (Jeremiah 10:1 - 12:6)

There are four sections to this passage. Sections ONE (10:1-18) and THREE (11:1-17) show Jeremiah in public, preaching his heart out. Sections TWO (10:19-25) and FOUR (11:18-12:6) show Jeremiah in private, agonising in prayer. There is a sharp contrast between the public and private lives of Jeremiah. Was Jeremiah a two-faced preacher? When he was preaching in public, he was so certain, dogmatic, strong, and convicting. But in private we see Jeremiah in doubt, unsure, vulnerable, and tender. Can we understand this duality in the man of God?



### A. Two Public Sermons (10:1-18 and 11:1-17)

The overarching theme of Jeremiah's messages here is God's sovereignty. Yahweh is the Creator of heaven and earth, the Almighty. The nations of the world had a single relationship with God. He is their Creator. But Israel had a double relationship with God. He is their Creator and their 'lover God in a covenant relationship.' God made a covenant contract with one particular nation out of all the earth, Israel. The gentiles rejected God as their Creator by worshipping idols. But Israel's rejection of God was double when they broke their covenant and went after other 'gods'. They rejected Him as their 'creator God' as well as their 'lover God'.

**1. 10:1-18 - THE CREATOR GOD** made man, but man rejected God and created 'god of his own making.' Idol is not just made of wood and stone, but anything we use to fill the 'God-shaped' void in our hearts. We make 'gods of our own imagination'. Judah turned to 'astrology' (horoscope) to fill their void (10:2). After 2600 years we are not so different. Jeremiah had a scathing satire against the idols.

- a. Your idol is not alive, but dead (10:3-9) 'like a helpless scarecrow in the garden of cucumbers.' (v5 RSV). It can't even stand up! You have to nail it to the wall with a hammer to hold it up (v4). Isn't your 'god' supposed to hold you up? You have to dress it up with gold, silver, and colourful clothes to make it look good. But they are the works of men (10:8-10). They are so obviously lesser than you because you made it with your own hands. (c.f. Is 40:18-20; 41:6-7; 44:9-20; 46:5-7)

How foolish to bow down to what their hands have made! Don't fear them, but fear God the King of the nations whose hands have made the heavens and the earth! 'There is none like You,' says Jeremiah twice (10:6-7). The everlasting gospel tells us to fear God the Creator and worship Him (C.f. Rev 14:6)

- b. Your idol is not enduring, it will perish (10:10-14). How long will your idol last? Not very long. Any 'god' made by man's hands will perish with its maker, or when this earth passes away. But Yahweh God is eternal. You need to ask when you serve these idols, 'Will your gods help you when your time comes to die? Will he be there to carry you into eternity from this life?'

Which God do you trust? The dead god you made with your own hands? Or the living God who made you and flung the stars in their place? He knows each star by name. He is the only One who can carry your soul to His eternal dwelling in heaven when your life on earth ends. God not only created this world with His power and wisdom (10:12), He also maintains the earth's ecology - oceans, cloud, lightning, rain, jet-streams, and winds of the earth (v13). Nations tremble when He gets angry (10:10).

- c. Your idol is worthless, and it makes its worshippers worthless (10:14-16). It doesn't have any breath, voice, or feelings because the whole thing is a lie (v14-15). Yahweh is the living God, whose breath goes out to all the earth, which is His Spirit. 'The Portion of Jacob is not like them' (10:16). God is Israel's inheritance. It means when I die, I get all of God as 'my inheritance.' God is my portion forever (Ps 73:25-26).

'Worship' comes from the word 'worth-ship'. It is an act of giving yourself to the One who is worthy of receiving your utmost. How do I know I am not worshipping an idol, only dressed up better than the idols of ancient Israel? Some worship houses and cars, some worship their work, some worship money, and some worship personal comfort, etc. What gives you 'your worth' is your God.

The first time 'worship' is mentioned is in Genesis 22 when Abraham surrendered his son, Isaac, to God on the altar. In effect, God was saying to Abraham, 'Isaac is not your god, Abraham. He cannot

come first in your life.' The only way for God's people to return to Him, is to come back to God as true worshippers!

2. **11:1-17 – CONSPIRACY 1** *'Israel, you were not only created by God, but you were also married to God with a covenant.'* (11:1-5) C.f. Curses were pronounced at Mt Ebal, *'Cursed is the one who makes a carved or moulded image, an abomination to the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets it up in secret.'* And all the people shall answer and say, 'Amen', etc. (Deut 27:15-26)
- God says a conspiracy against Him has been uncovered. Israel took four steps in breaking her covenant with God. (1) You became 'disinterested' in the covenant relationship, stopped paying Him attention (11:6-8); (2) You became 'disobedient' (11:9-10), disengaged from God; (3) You became 'degenerate,' running after other gods (11:9-10); (4) You became 'disowned' by God (11:11-13).
  - The regression of the covenant relationship took place this way: (1) Israel the wife stopped paying attention to the Lord, her husband - the first step of a marriage breaking down. (2) The wife began living her own life apart from her husband. They had separate lives. (3) The wife found other men more interesting, and she began flirting with other men. At this point, the covenant is broken. (4) One evening she comes back home smelling of overpowering perfume and says, 'Hello darling,' but her husband doesn't want her back. This was Jeremiah's message, 'Israel, this is what you did to God.'
  - Israel ran back to God when she was in trouble, smelling of perfume - the incense she has offered to Baal. 'Baal' means 'my husband.' It also means 'shame'. God's heart has turned away (11:12). He tells Jeremiah, *'Jeremiah, don't pray for her. I will not listen to her when she cries out to Me because of her trouble.'* (11:14) God asks, *'What has My beloved to do in My house, having done lewd deeds with many?'* (11:15). In other words, 'What is my wife doing in my house after sleeping around with other men?' Can you feel the bitter pain in God's heart? It is utter foolishness to bow down to the 'gods of our own making' instead of to the Creator God who made us and heavens and the earth. But it is more horrifying when God's Beloved turns away from Him and betrays Him with other 'lovers'. That is why God is far more severe with Israel than with any other nation on earth. The green olive tree is a picture of prosperity and blessing, but it was about to be destroyed (11:16).

## B. Two Private Prayers (10:19-25; 11:18-12:6)

- 10:19-25 – JEREMIAH'S 1<sup>st</sup> PRAYER** shows how he felt deep inside, torn between his love for God and his love for Israel. He felt God's deep pain at Israel's betrayal. At the same time, he was distressed for his nation who faced the divine judgement. Jeremiah wept for his people and prayed for them. But now he sees the time for weeping was over. It is time to pack their bags for the long journey into exile (10:17-18).
  - Jeremiah mourned, *'My children have gone from me and they are no more.'* (10:20) Jeremiah was not allowed to marry, so he didn't have children of his own. So, the people of Judah have become his 'children' and he carried them in his heart. *'Woe is me for my hurt! My wound is severe Truly this is an infirmity, and I must bear it.'* (10:19)
  - Jeremiah pleads with God not to be so severe with Israel lest He brings them to utter destruction, *'...lest you bring me to nothing.'* (10:24) He identified deeply with Judah. Jeremiah pleads, *'O LORD, I know the ways of man is not in himself. It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.'* (10:23) He even suggests God might want to redirect the worst of His anger to the gentiles who do not know God at all, but be softer on Judah, His covenant people! (10:25)
- 11:18 - 12:6 – JEREMIAH'S 2<sup>nd</sup> PRAYER & CONSPIRACY 2**

Jeremiah discovers yet another conspiracy planned by the people of Judah. This time it is not against God, but against Jeremiah! Those for whom Jeremiah wept and prayed for, were plotting to kill him. He could not bear of thought of Judah being judged by God. But Jeremiah was so hated by them that they were actually planning to kill him. That chilling revelation must have shaken Jeremiah.

- To his horror, those who plotted against his life were his own people from Anathoth! They wanted to wipe out Jeremiah's message and his name from the face of the earth. Jeremiah couldn't understand

such a hatred from his own family and friends he grew up with. How did Jeremiah find out? God uncovered their plan and told Jeremiah. It shocked Jeremiah, *'I am like a docile lamb led to slaughter.'* (11:19) He felt like a little lamb who thought he was part of the family who raised him, only to find out to his horror that he was a sacrificial lamb intended for slaughter. The very personal nature of the betrayal and conspiracy makes Jeremiah cry out to God to deal with them (11:20).

God's answers Jeremiah, *'Don't worry Jeremiah, I will punish them and their children when My judgment comes on the nation.'* (11:21-23) In other words, 'Leave them to Me, Jeremiah. You just get on with your job. Vengeance is Mine I will repay.'

- b. Jeremiah's painful struggle with doubts (12:1-2) Jeremiah was confused, *'Lord, you said you will judge them, but these fat cats are just getting richer. What is going on?'* When Jeremiah was preaching in public, he was full of convicting power. Yet when he was praying in private, he struggled with questions and doubts. *'How long, O Lord?'* (C.f. Ps. 73; Job; c.f. Rev 6:10) *'Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter and prepare them for the day of slaughter'* (12:3-4). Thank God the Bible is so honest, showing us that a man of calibre like Jeremiah also struggled. We need to take our struggles, questions and doubts to God. God can handle all of them.

- c. God doesn't answer Jeremiah's doubts. Jeremiah asked, 'God, how can they prosper?' But God asked, 'Jeremiah, how can you stand?'

*'If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, in which you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the floodplain of the Jordan?'* (12:5)

*Jeremiah, if you struggle with the footmen, how can you stand up against the horsemen that are coming? If you get shaken by these things, how long will you last? I am looking to you to finish your calling and deliver My message to them. You need to get on with your job of preaching My Words because you have much bigger battles ahead of you. I have given you these smaller battles so that you will be able to stand up for the bigger battles ahead.*

God is being both tender and tough for Jeremiah so he could pull himself up and get prepared for what was truly important. God doesn't always give us the answer we are looking for. 'Jeremiah, your own family, brothers and sisters, are conspiring against you. You need to fortify your heart for the bigger battles ahead.'

This was how God dealt with Job too. *'Job, were you there when I laid the foundations of the earth? Do you know...?'* The answer Job received was - the Lord is God, and He knows how to run His universe, and He knows how to run Job's life. Only God can answer these questions when you are afflicted with doubts in your personal prayer. Jeremiah had to learn to trust the Lord through the confusion and the shock of family betrayal, and get ready for greater battles ahead of him.

- d. Why was it that in public Jeremiah could say to Judah, *'God's judgment is coming upon you,'* but in private he was asking the Lord, *'God, why aren't you doing anything?'*

The answer is, in public the word of the Lord was on his lips. In private the word of man was on his lips. I.e. in public he spoke to men for God. In private he spoke to God for men.

If you think this is a contradiction, then remember Jesus prophesied, *'Tell that fox [Herod] today and tomorrow, I heal, and on the third day I will complete the work of the cross.'* Yet in the garden of Gethsemane He prayed, *'Father, please take this cup away if possible...nevertheless not my will but yours be done.'* On the cross He cried out, *'My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?'*

We do not need to regard this as a contradiction or weakness. Men and women of God need to be bold when we speak for God. But we can also take our questions, doubts, uncertainties, the torn emotions to God honestly in prayer. He may not answer all your questions. But we will know that God is God and there is none like Him. And He knows what He is doing. So, we can go on and continue to stand and speak for Him. Amen.