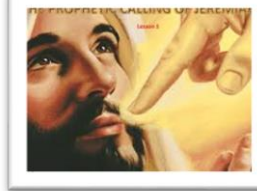


# The Collapse of National Heritage (Jeremiah 12:7-13:27)



1. This section of Jeremiah is dated around 597BC. Jehoiachin was only eighteen when he became king. He did evil in the sight of the Lord and his rule collapsed in just three months. He was taken as a prisoner to Babylon in the same year of 597BC. (C.f. 2 King 24:8, 12)
2. Jeremiah's message here comprises of four sections. They change from poetry to prose, then back to poetry: Poetry (12:7-13) → Prose (12:14-17) → Prose (13:1-14) → Poetry (13:15-27) When Jeremiah bursts into poetry, God's emotion is conveyed. When he speaks in prose, God's thoughts are communicated.
3. Clarifying terms: (a) 'linen sash' (13:1) - 'ezor', lit. 'thigh-length undershirt', i.e. undergarment. (b) 'nebel' - largest earthenware for storing wine. 'Every bottle shall be filled with wine...' (13:12) (c) 'your heels made bare' (13:22) - lit. 'ravished (exposed) limbs'

## A. Chapter 12

1. Two keywords in Chapter 12 (12:7-17) are found in, 'My heritage has become a desolate wilderness.' (12:10) (a) 'Desolation' (12:10b-11) – *The people are gone, and the land is lying waste.* Desolation describes the condition of Judah. (b) 'My heritage' (12:7-9) – God feels an acute sense of loss. Israel was God's personal heritage, chosen for Himself - the people, the land, and the temple.

As we delve into the chapter, the focus is on the land, the land God gave to Abraham. It is only 50 miles wide and 150 miles long, but it was a 'microcosm' of the world, located at the juncture where the three major continents meet. It has a sample of every fauna and animal life from all three continents. It has the desert, rainforest, hills, mountains and deep valleys. The land has it all from the snow-capped Mt Hermon to the lowest depth of the earth crust in Jericho and the Dead Sea. When God brought Israel out of Egypt to possess the promised land, it was occupied by the Canaanites and filled with all kinds of vices. The archaeologists have discovered jars with human babies inside, and the evidence of rampant venereal disease. The Canaanites forfeited the right to live in the land, and God gave that beautiful piece of real estate to Israel. It was to be kept in God's family for generations to come. God says 'MY HERITAGE' three times. Tragically, God's heritage which was carefully cultivated for centuries to be kept within the family forever, became polluted just as badly as when the Canaanites lived in the land.

2. God's emotional dilemma of 'love-hate relationship' (12:7-9) God says of Israel, '*the beloved of My soul*' and at the same time, '*I have hated it.*' There is no hatred as strong as deep intense love that was betrayed. The following three images depict how God saw Judah: (1) '*You are like a lion in the forest crying out against Me. Therefore, I have hated it.*' (12:8) (2) '*You are like a speckled vulture and all other vultures hate you too.*' (12:9) (3) '*I see the 'rulers/shepherds' have destroyed My vineyard.*' (12:10 c.f. Luke 20:9-16)

God saw Israel as a quality vineyard being groomed by His family. Grooming a quality vineyard is a time-consuming process. It takes years of loving care to grow the highest quality grapes. Some vineyards that produce the best quality wine have hundreds of years of family tradition behind them. But the shepherds whom God assigned to care for Israel – God's vineyard, walked all over the vine and desecrated it. '*They have trodden My portion underfoot; they have made My pleasant portion a desolate wilderness.*' (12:10). This is how God felt.

3. The Principle of National Heritage

a) It can be lost quickly. It takes centuries to build a rich spiritual, cultural, political, and legal heritage of a nation, but it can be lost in one generation. Much of Europe's rich spiritual heritage is all but gone. As the epicentre of Christianity Europe has built the advanced system of law, financial markets, art, science and spiritual traditions. It was the bastion of human freedom. But much of that rich heritage is now gone. When a nation God loves insists on walking away from Him, all the great heritage that took centuries to build up, can be lost in just a few decades.

b) It can be redistributed. This is what Paul said Mars Hill, the epicentre of the culture and learning in his days: *'God has made from one blood every nation of the earth having allotted to them period of time in history and their proper boundaries that they may seek after God and that they might grope and find Him.'* (Acts 17:26-27)

This is the universal principle that applies to every nation on earth. What if they don't seek God and look for Him in the time and space allotted to them? Judgment comes and God will redraw the national boundaries. What God did to Israel He does to every nation. God allots time and boundary to each people group so that they can seek God. If they fail to seek God, but continue to pollute the land, then God redraws the national boundaries. Every inch of this earth belongs to God absolutely, and it is ours only by 'inheritance'. *'The earth is the LORD's and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.'* (Ps 24:1-2) In Jeremiah 13 God warns the nations how this takes place.

4. God's Word to the Surrounding Nations (12:14-17) Now Jeremiah turns to prose. We *sing* about our own nation but *talk* about other nations! (C.f. foretaste of Jer. 46-51) *Right now, you seem to be blessed by your share of grabbing from Israel, but you too will be plucked out by the same Babylonians (v14).* However, the following is the extraordinary word, *'if you will learn from Israel's downfall and turn to Israel's God to serve Him instead of Baal, then God would plant you and give you your own heritage in the midst of My people.'* Ruth the Moabitess is one such example. (C.f. 48:47 – Moab; 49:6 – Ammon; Amos 9:11 – Edom c.f. Acts 15:16-17). Jeremiah reminds them God can plant them or pluck them out just as easily as He did to Israel. This is the ultimate destiny of all nations: *If they do not obey, God will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation (v17).*

Jeremiah is now fulfilling the call he has received at the age of seventeen. He was to be God's prophet to the nations, but the task must have been very difficult for Jeremiah (C.f. 10:25).

## B. Chapter 13 – Five Warnings (C.f. 2 King 24:8-12)

The keyword in chapter 13 is 'pride.' (13:9, 15, 18) Instead of being grateful to God, the nation of Judah has become proud of their heritage, as if they have built it up with their own strength. This is the wrong type of 'nationalistic spirit.' Here we see the first of Jeremiah's prophetic acts. (16:1-4; 18:1-12; 19:1-2, 10-11; 27:1-28:17; 32:1-15; 43:8-13; 51:59-64. C.f. Isa 20:2-6; Ezek 4:1-13; 5:1-4)

1. Warning 1 – the Ruined Undergarment (13:1-11) - Jeremiah was told to do something unusual. He was to wear an undergarment ('ezor' - thigh-length undershirts) for a long time without washing it - 'do not dip it in water' (13:1). When it was long past needing a wash, he was to take it to the muddy waters of Euphrates ('Perathah' c.f. 46:2, 6; 51:63), and bury it under the rocks, probably in Carchemish 500 miles away in Babylon. Then after many days, the Lord spoke to him again, to go back to Babylon and dig up his old undergarment. It took a journey of 2,000 miles in total! Jeremiah simply obeyed. When he dug out the undergarments, it was totally ruined, 'good for nothing.' (13:7) Then God spoke, *'This is what My Heritage is like. I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.'* (13:9) How does God know they are proud? They refused to hear God's word! It is the reoccurring theme (13:10). *'The whole land is made desolate because no one takes it to heart.'* (12:11)
- a) This was an acted-out parable - a prophetic act or 'prophecy in action'. How many of us would like a prophet to bring his dirty underwear to the church and tell the congregation, 'This is your church'? A well-known prophetic lady brought a word from the Lord for John Wimber. But instead of speaking she just sobbed her heart out. When John finally asked her for the word she said, 'That was it.'
- b) What was God's message to Israel? *'For as the sash clings to the waist of a man, so I have caused the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to cling to Me,' says the LORD, 'that they may become My people, for renown, for praise, and for glory, but they would not hear.'* (13:11)

*Israel, I have created you to cling to Me closely, just like this linen sash, but you would not. Therefore, now you will be taken captive to Babylon and be buried there for 70 years until your pride becomes totally ruined. Had Israel clung to 'God who alone is holy', she would have been clean, beautiful - the jewel of the earth.*

2. Warning 2 – the Full Wine Barrels (13:12-14) (*'nebel'* – bottle, or the largest earthenware for storing wine. C.f. Isa 22:24; 30:14; Lam 4:2). Jeremiah was to tell the people of Judah to fill the 'wine barrels' with wine. They assumed it meant having a good time! *'Every bottle shall be filled with wine!'* was probably the ancient 'Cheers!' at a drinking party (13:12). Then Jeremiah turns around and prophesied, 'This wine is not for partying. It is the wine of God's wrath on you. You will be drunken with madness - the king, the priests and the prophets, even the people on the streets.'

It is the picture of *'social disorder'*, people crashing against each other in 'drunken brawls', even fathers and sons divided against each other (13:13-14 c.f. Rom 1:28ff). *Is this what is happening on the streets of America? The USA is tearing apart, and on its way to becoming the 'Disunited States of America.'* We call this senseless and insane. Bible calls it the 'spirit of stupor' and of 'madness'.

3. Warning 3 – the Descending Darkness (13:15-17) Jeremiah makes the last plea for the people unwilling to hear the word of the Lord, *'Hear and give ear: Do not be proud, for the LORD has spoken.'* (v15) But Israel would simply puff up in her nationalistic pride. Jeremiah seems to see the picture of Israel trying to come down from the mountain top, but the sun is already setting and there isn't much time left. She is now lost and searching for light. But God sends 'dense darkness', and now she must now pass through the *'shadow of death'* (v16). Jeremiah weeps again bitterly over his people (v17).

In 2001 after 911, two politicians in the USA declared with nationalistic spirit, *'The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with hewn stones. The sycamores are cut down, but we will replace them with cedars.'* (Isa 9:10) After 19 years have passed in 2020 Jonathan Cahn did a prophetic act of breaking a jar in DC.

We need to pray that the people of the USA will heed the warning from the Lord.

4. Warning 4 – to the King and Queen Mother (13:18-21 c.f. 2 Kings 24:8, 12) God tells Jeremiah to tell King Jehoiachin and Queen Mother Nehoshta, *'Humbles yourselves; sit down, for your rule shall collapse, the crown of your glory...'* (13:18) *You'd better come off that throne and humble yourselves because soon there will be no more people to reign over.* Their national demise would start with southern cities shutting down (13:19), followed by the rest of the country. It will end in deportation. King Jehoiachin was only eighteen. He reigned only for three months before he was taken captive to Babylon in 597BC.

Jehoiachin could have heeded Jeremiah's warning and humbled himself and sought the Lord, but he did evil in the sight of the Lord by going after Baal. Jeremiah asks, *'Where is the flock that was given to you? Your beautiful sheep?'* The pride of the nation would be gone. The king, the queen, the priests, the prophets were all 'drunk with madness', and could not see the nation's downfall happening right before their eyes.

5. Warning 5 – Exposure, Uncovering of Secrets (13:22-27) *'God will lift up the skirt over your face and expose your nakedness.'* (13:22, 26) God will expose 'the dirt' starting from the 'royal court' down to their cabinet. The dirty laundry that has been swept under for so long, will begin to come out in public view.

In those days both men and women wore skirts, so the word applies to the king, the queen, the priests, the prophets, etc. In every culture, it brings great shame to have one's nakedness exposed. Judah will ask, *'Why have these things come upon Me?'* (v22) God will answer, *'It is because of your iniquity and you have trusted in 'falsehood' (cover-up), therefore, I will uncover your skirts over your face that you shame may appear.'* (13:22-25)

God is saying to Judah, let's get down to the truth of who you are on the inside. Let's lift off that cloak and expose what you are like inside. *'I see all sorts of lewd harlotry, abomination, and cover-ups.'* (13:26-27). Jeremiah's final cry was, *'Woe to you Jerusalem. Will you still not be made clean?'* *How long will it take for you to be made clean? 'Can the leopard change its spots?'* (13:23) *Who can remove the spots from you?*

We need to come to God and say, 'Lord, I cannot change my spots. Only You can. I need You to change my heart. I need You to cleanse me.' Only God who made us make us clean. This is the only hope for every nation. We will see this in Jeremiah 31.

Tremendous exposure is ahead of us among God's people and in the nations before the Lord returns.