



The Holy Rants (Jeremiah 14:1-15:21)

A. TimeLine & Cycles

This prophecy is probably written between the first and the second Babylonian invasion, 1st deportation - 605BC; 2nd deportation – 597BC; 3rd deportation – 586BC. The two cycles of Jeremiah's prayer and God's reply form the structure of this section. They consist of 2 cycles, each cycle with 5 themes - like our 2 hands with 5 fingers on each hand. It is easy to understand intellectually, but very difficult to digest emotionally.

B. Cycle 1 = 14:1-16 (Right Hand)

1R (14:1-6) – Judah's Problem: Severe Drought

In Israel, the direction of the wind determined the rainfall in the land. They needed the easterly wind from the Mediterranean Sea that would bring the rain clouds. Remember Elijah looked for the cloud from the sea? But the unusual weather pattern continued in Israel with only the dry easterly wind, resulting in multiple droughts in the land (5:22-25; 10:12-13).

(a) The young men could not draw water from the dried-up cistern and the farmers could not plough the hardened and cracked land. *There are reports of food shortage anticipated in the USA (c.f. Rev 6:5-6).* This is the pattern of judgment.

(b) The animals were deserting their cubs and even the wild donkeys known for hardiness were languishing. Jeremiah realised this was not natural. It was from the hand of God, like the drought in Elijah's days. (Elijah's prayer was based on Deut 28:23-24f and Lev 26:18-19.) What is God saying? *'Israel has forsaken the fountain of the living water, so they can't have any more rain.'* (2:13)

2R (14:7-9) – Jeremiah's Prayer

(a) Jeremiah prayed the prayer of identification and confession. *'O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do it for Your name's sake. For our backslidings are many, we have sinned against You.'* (14:7) This is an extremely powerful pattern of prayer, found among the prophets throughout the Bible such as Moses, Samuel, Daniel, etc. But that prayer didn't work for Jeremiah. It was a prayer of confession and for help and a cry to God to live up to His name, but God didn't respond. The heavens were still brass with no easterly wind.

(b) And Jeremiah was torn with mixed feelings when he saw the people's suffering, *'God, why are you doing this to us? I am confused! You are the Hope of Israel and the Saviour in the time of trouble. So why aren't you helping us? Please, don't be a stranger or like a traveler just passing through the land!'* (14:8-9)

(c) But God DID answer Jeremiah's prayer. It just was not the answer Jeremiah was looking for, and that was his problem. Sometimes when God answers our prayer with a 'no', we find ourselves in confusion. (C.f. 14:10)

3R (14:10-12) – God's Answer to Jeremiah

(a) Jeremiah prays 'we have sinned, it is us...', identifying with his people, but God responds with 'their sins, it is them...' (14:10-11). It is as if God is saying, *'Don't you talk to Me about My people, because they have become strangers to Me.'* God's mind was made up, *'because these people's heart loves to wander away from Me when things are good with them'* (14:10).

(b) *'So, do not pray for this people for their good (blessing)'* (14:11) They ran to God when they were in trouble, then away from Him after He solved their problems. What does this behaviour pattern reveal about their heart? It was not true repentance and return to the Lord, just a desire to return to the easy and comfortable life. Everybody wants God when disasters strike. But it is when things go well, we find out if our hearts are truly running after the Lord.

God says, *'I am weary with these people who only come to Me in trouble just to stray away from Me after I help them. I am not listening to them anymore.'* The following is very hard to receive from the Lord, *'Stop praying for them. It is too late. I have already given them over to the 'sword' (violence), 'famine' (food shortage), and 'pestilence' (disease).'*' (14:12) These three elements are emphasised seven times here.

4R (14:13-15) – Jeremiah’s Further Intercession

(a) Jeremiah doesn’t give up so easily, *‘Lord, perhaps these people are not totally responsible for their sins. There are so many prophets in Judah who prophesy only good. They prophesy only blessings and a bright future and declare God is pleased with them. So, how can You punish the people when they were so misled?’*

(b) God responds, *‘I know. These prophets concoct messages I did not give them and prophesy false visions. So, they will be the first ones to suffer the sword, famine, and pestilence along with the people who love to listen to them.’* Then He exposes the source of their prophecy: ‘false vision’; ‘divination’; ‘worthless thing’; ‘deceit of their heart’ (self-deception). Jeremiah talked about false prophets more than anybody else in the Bible.

God further declares, *‘I won’t excuse the people. They run after the false prophecies because they want to listen to them. But I will see to it that these false prophets will be punished first, then also their followers.’* This was very hard for Jeremiah to hear.

5R (14:16) – God’s Final Word

(a) God describes the terrible fate awaiting those who preach false words and those who love false words. They will be robbed of the dignity of a burial. Their bodies will be desecrated on the streets of Jerusalem with no one to bury them. Their corpses will decay in the open like animal carcasses. It is the ultimate indignity to be stripped of the dignity of dying.

(b) We are dealing with historical facts, not fiction. All these things actually happened, and we must learn from history. Those who do not learn from history are condemned to relive it. If we do not study the word of God, we will have an unclear and unbalanced view of God. Marcion in the 1st century church taught that the God of the New Testament is different from the God of the Old Testament. He cut out the Old Testament from the Bible, then the book of Revelation, then the epistles, then even the gospels because the God of the Old Testament kept popping up into the New Testament!

God’s justice is indeed emphasized in the Old Testament, and His grace is emphasized in the New Testament. It is because we need to learn God’s justice to truly appreciate God’s grace. We need to hold on to both facets of God’s self-revelation in the Scriptures.

Now the first cycle of Jeremiah’s conversation with the Lord ends. And the next cycle will begin, but in greater depth and detail from both God and Jeremiah.

C. Cycle 2 = 14:17-15:21 (Left hand)

1L (14:17-18) – Judah’s Increasing Troubles - Sword, Famine, Captivity

Israel’s enemies begin to attack Judah, taking advantage of their weakened state. This is most likely describing the first Babylonian invasion. God tells Jeremiah to take up a ‘lament’ for Judah instead of ‘prayer’. Their troubles are deepening - from ‘drought’ to ‘violence (sword)’ to ‘famine (and disease)’ to ‘full-blown invasion’ and eventually to ‘exile’ in the foreign land (14:17-17).

2L (14:19-22) – Jeremiah’s Prayer

Terrorism and violence too begin, and bodies are now lying on the streets of Jerusalem (v18), and Jeremiah cries to God in deep pain.

(a) *‘Have you utterly rejected Judah? Has Your soul loathed Zion? Why have you stricken us so that there is no healing for us?’ (14:19) You are now acting worse than a ‘stranger’ would to us. You are now our smiter! Why? Jeremiah pleads with God again, taking the sins of Judah and the fathers as his own.*

(b) He then goes further (14:20-21), *‘Do not disgrace the throne of Your glory. Remember do not break Your covenant with us.’ What about Your name, Your reputation, Your glory? Jeremiah confesses that the dumb idols that they have adopted can never send rain, but only the God of Israel who is faithful to His covenant – only He can shower down the desperately needed rain. Jeremiah’s touching prayer ends with, ‘Therefore, we will wait for You, since You have made all these.’ (14:22)*

(c) Jeremiah appeals to God: (i) the tender Physician – ‘Heal us...’ (14:19); (ii) the forgiving God – ‘We have sinned against You’ (14:20); (iii) for the honour of God’s name – ‘Do not disgrace the throne of Your glory’; (iv) the Omnipotent Creator – ‘We will wait for You (who alone can send rain)’ (14:22);

3L (15:1-9) – God’s Answer to Jeremiah (9 verses)

We get a fuller picture of God’s raw emotions here.

(a) ‘Cast them out of my sight!’ (15:1) Jeremiah asks, ‘Where?’ God answers, ‘to death - to the sword, famine, captivity’ (15:2). God has appointed four forms of destruction - sword to slay, dogs to drag away, birds to devour, and exile in captivity (15:3).

(b) ‘I am weary of relenting.’ (15:6) or ‘I am tired of always giving you another chance. (LBT)’ Extraordinary words from the Lord! God is slow to anger, but there comes a point when even He gets tired of relenting and holding back judgment. Universalism teaches that God will always lead us heavenward, and one day we will all be in heaven. So, ‘hell’ becomes purgatory, a ‘corrective detention centre.’ This is not what Jesus taught.

(c) ‘Even if Moses or Samuel stood before Me, My mind would not be favourable toward these people. Cast them out of My sight and let them go forth.’ (15:1) More surprising and humbling words come from the Lord! Moses and Samuel were great Hebrew prophets. Their intercession successfully averted God’s judgement over Israel. Moses did it four times (Ex 32:11-14; Num 14:13-24; Deut 9:18-20, 25-29). Samuel did it twice (1 Sam 7:5-9; 12:19-25). Each time they prayed, God heard their prayer and changed His mind.

Jeremiah followed the example of Moses and Samuel and interceded for his people in the prayer of ‘identification’, ‘confession’, ‘appeal to God’s gracious nature’, and ‘for God’s name and glory’ – everything he could think of. But this time God’s mind did not change.

(d) Why wouldn’t God hear? Was it because Jeremiah did not get the nation’s co-operation as a lone voice that largely went ignored? Perhaps. But the fact was, God’s decision to judge Israel was already sealed years back in the past. The nation’s fate was sealed when Manasseh the son of Hezekiah killed babies as sacrificial offerings for demon gods (c.f. 2 Kings 21:10-16; 23:26; 24:3) That was around the time Jeremiah was born. Manasseh introduced astrology, spiritism, human sacrifice, and shed much innocent blood on the streets of Jerusalem. He seduced Israel to sin more than the pagan nations God drove out before them. God tells them, ‘You have gone backward!’ (15:6) Can you imagine how Jeremiah felt when he found out that the fate of his nation had already been sealed even before he was called to preach?

(e) Why then preach at all?! Because while God has shut the door to the nation to be redeemed as a whole, it was still open to the individuals. God promised Jeremiah He would protect and deliver him individually and personally, but not the whole nation. Now only individuals who repent and return to the Lord could be saved. The call of the New Testament is the same. The gospel requires each individual to respond to God in repentance and faith.

(f) Jeremiah’s prophetic picture ends with a woman (Jerusalem) who bore seven sons (c.f. 1 Sam 2:5) collapsing in shock and breathing her last breath. The sun has gone down while it is still day, and her children (the people of Jerusalem) are delivered to the sword. (15:9 c.f. Luke 23:28-31)

4L (15:10-18) – Jeremiah’s Final Intercession (9 verses)

Jeremiah rants bitterly here. He probably was thinking, *‘The fate of Jerusalem was decided well before I was even called to preach? God, how can You be so cruel? You put me in the lost battle and wound me?’*

(a) Jeremiah laments for himself: *‘Woe is me, my mother, that you have borne me, a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth!’ (15:10)* *Everybody hates Me. I am not a moneylender, yet everybody hates me like a plague. I sit alone and I eat alone.* Elijah too felt this way – *‘I am the only one left.’* Jeremiah was in such deep pain that he wishes he were never born. Jeremiah laments, *‘The only thing I love is Your word. I devour it. It’s the only thing that delights my heart. I can’t enjoy parties or socialise with people. All day I sit alone because of You. But I feel You are so far away, like a brook that fails when I need it the most. Lord, where are you?’* Here is a man in deep pain, who feels he was deserted by people and by God. Is Jeremiah in

depression? If Jeremiah doesn't come through this, his ministry would be finished, and we would not hear from him again.

(b) A sudden glimmer of hope breaks in at this point. God tells Jeremiah, *'Surely it will be well with your remnant. Surely I will cause the enemy to intercede with you in the time of adversity and in the time of affliction... And I will make you cross over with your enemies into a land which you do not know...'* (15:11-14)

(i) God repeats His promise of personal protection to Jeremiah (15:11). Remember Jeremiah's enemies were his own relatives (c.f. 15:15)? God will not fail Jeremiah when he needs Him the most. (ii) God receives Jeremiah's intercession on the behalf of the remnant. Though this unrepentant generation will be judged, God's promise will continue through the remnant. God tells Jeremiah, *'your remnant'* (15:11). It is so personal. They are the fruit of Jeremiah's prayer and intercession.

(c) Jeremiah's mini-autobiography here has great poetic beauty. *'Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.'* (15:16)

Q1: How do you feel as you study Jeremiah? Although difficult, challenging and even disturbing, do you find it a delight in a strange way? (c.f. Rev 10:10-11; Ezek 2:8-3:3). Jeremiah's peers mingled and socialised in parties, but Jeremiah from his youth had to learn to sit and eat alone because he was deeply feeling God's holy indignation because God's hand was upon him.

Q2: Does Jeremiah describe your life in some ways? The prophetic mantle brings a level of separation from the crowd, especially during the years of one's preparation. There is a greater degree of God's claim on His chosen vessels. When you delve deeper into God's word and presence, your joys and delights become so different from others around you that it separates you from the partying crowd. Sometimes you wonder, *'What is wrong with me? Why am I so different?'* At times you can feel 'lonely', but it is a part of the prophetic burden on your life. It means God wants you to learn to stand apart from the crowd and stand with God and His heart and His priorities. Jeremiah had to fight to trust God, that He will not fail him in the hour of his need. (15:18)

5L (15:19-21) – God's Final Word

(a) *'If you return to Me, then I will bring you back; You shall stand before Me; If you take out the precious from the vile, you shall be as My mouth. Let them return to you but you must not return to them.'* (15:19) In other words, *'Jeremiah, you got into depression because you began to look at the wicked people and see from their point of view rather than learning to stay by God's side and see through God's eyes.'* The book of Revelation finishes with the nations angry at God because He judges the wicked nations and establishes His kingdom (C.f. Rev 11:17-18) Will we, God's people, learn to stand with God and His justice?

(b) God calls Jeremiah again with the words of his initial calling as a seventeen-year-old youth. God repeats His promise from 1:8, 18, and assures Jeremiah that He is not a failing stream. God's stream will not dry up and be waterless when Jeremiah is thirsting and needs to drink from God's stream. *'For I am with you to save you and to deliver you,' says the Lord.* (15:20)

With this encouragement, Jeremiah stands up on his feet, and God and Jeremiah became the majority in the battles ahead.