

Jeremiah 4:11-18

11 At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem: A hot wind comes from me out of the bare heights in the desert toward my poor people, not to winnow or cleanse 12 a wind too strong for that. Now it is I who speak in judgment against them. 13 Look! He comes up like clouds, his chariots like the whirlwind; his horses are swifter than eagles — woe to us, for we are ruined! 14 O Jerusalem, wash your heart clean of wickedness so that you may be saved. How long shall your evil schemes lodge within you? 15 For a voice declares from Dan and proclaims disaster from Mount Ephraim.

16 Tell the nations, "Here they are!" Proclaim against Jerusalem, "Besiegers come from a distant land; they shout against the cities of Judah. 17 They have closed in around her like watchers of a field, because she has rebelled against me, says the LORD. 18 Your ways and your doings have brought this upon you. This is your doom; how bitter it is! It has reached your very heart."

Today is September 11th and we remember the terrorist attack on the United States. However, what we faced is nothing compared to what the Hebrew people faced during the Exile. When I first became a pastor, I met with the regional minister and confessed that I was not ready due to inadequate knowledge of the Old Testament. He told me that is a very common concern among new pastors and that we learn and develop biblical knowledge as we go. So, I began serving as a pastor at a church that had a Wednesday evening Bible study and my job was to teach that class. At the time, I knew Genesis and Exodus pretty well but I did not know about the Exile. Since Jesus quoted Jeremiah more than any other prophet, I decided I would start teaching the book of Jeremiah. As I began teaching the Old Testament I gained tremendous knowledge. By far the best way to learn is to teach. I not only learned about Jeremiah, I learned more about Old Testament prophecy, and the Exile. I also learned how prophecy surrounds the darkest days of the nation and how the Old Testament connects to Jesus. The main thing I learned from prophecy and the main thing that I learned from Jesus is that you have to get right with God. It is not only necessary for the individual to get right with God but it is also necessary for the nation. What was true during antiquity is true today. People who disregard God have the same fate as the people of the Old Testament. "A hot wind comes" means that there is trouble is on the horizon; a hot wind comes for them and for all people who disregard God.

Today is another hard lesson from Jeremiah. The prophet had very few friends mainly because his message was unpopular. Jeremiah was primarily a prophet of doom. His task was to announce the destruction of the kingdom. God even commanded Jeremiah not to marry or have children because the impending divine judgment would sweep away the next generation. Jeremiah was fearless in the service of God and the words that he delivered were words given to him by God. Conflict surrounded Jeremiah almost from the very beginning because he lashed out against the sins of the people, especially their idolatry. He warned the people to submit and not to rebel. This is God's will! It is God's will for us to submit and not rebel. God is concerned about the nation, the individual people, and their accountability. Jeremiah had only one resource; only one

tool that he could use to get the word across, and that was his mouth, his tongue, the spoken word.

Jeremiah gave the top officials a warning that they hated to hear. They also hated him for it and refused to change and repent. His message was that the Babylonians will destroy Judah just as the Assyrians destroyed Israel. Any alliance that they form with other kings will not help them. The only thing that will help them is alliance with God and obedience to God. Jeremiah stood alone against the crowd and several times he was arrested, thrown into prison, and nearly killed. God's message is not always comforting and encouraging. People who disregard God have the same reason to fear as the people of Judah did.

I often wonder why the people did not listen to the prophets. Here today, in the 21st century we can look back into the Bible and it is easy to see that people should obey. When there are different opinions and distorted information, people get confused, the truth gets clouded, and people do not know what to believe. There were a lot of false prophets because people believe what they want to believe and listen to what they want to hear. So, the false prophets preached a popular message instead of preaching the word of God. Jeremiah is known to be a true prophet because his word came true - some of it during his lifetime. A true prophet always matches the word of God. Not only does it come true but it also correlates with the other true prophets. A hot wind comes when people turn their backs on God because God detests wickedness, evil schemes and demands repentance and humility. True repentance is revealed by a change of heart and is followed by righteous action. God requires devotion, worship, the truth and care for other people, especially the needy.